GOVERNANCE WATCH

MEDIA MONITORING REPORT

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Governance
Monitoring
Centre Nepal

Centre for Social Change
सामाजिक परिवर्तन केन्द्र
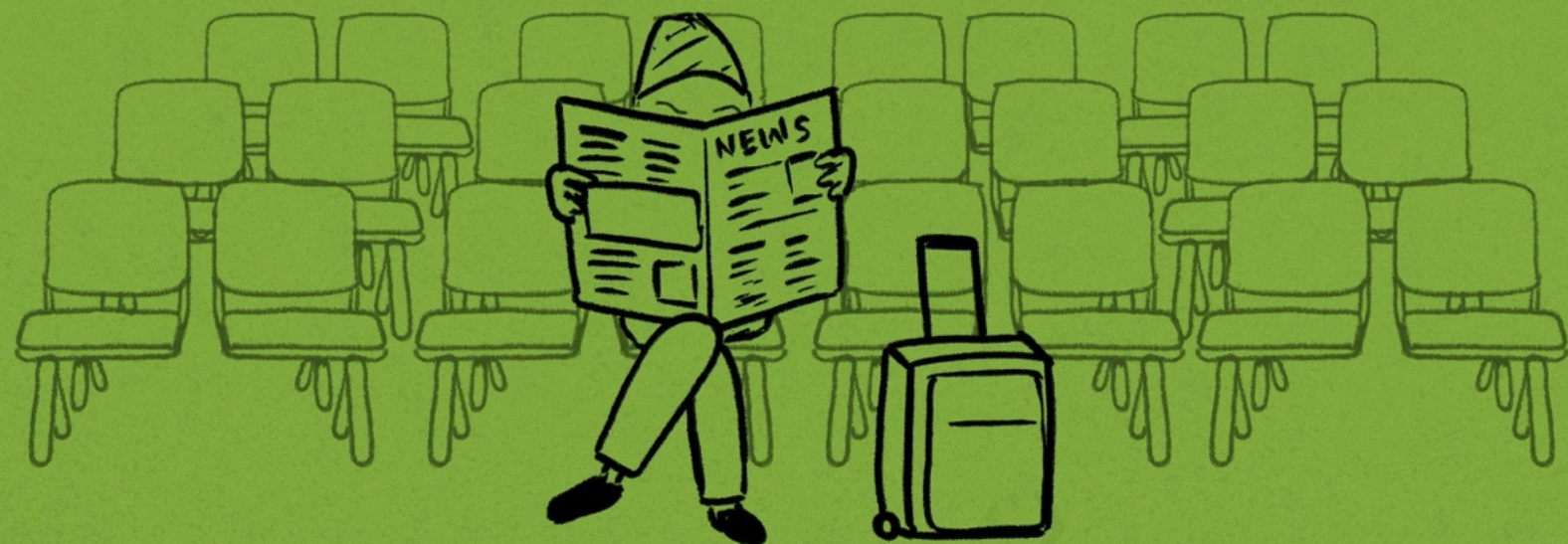
Governance Monitoring Centre Nepal
Media Monitoring Report

Governance Monitoring Centre Nepal (GMC Nepal) is a research initiative led by Kathmandu-based NGO Centre for Social Change (CSC). Using a variety of investigative methods and the latest in qualitative & quantitative research tools, GMC Nepal is dedicated to strengthening the newly established federal democracy and empower its citizens through up-to-date information relating to the status of governance related conflicts and peace in Nepal.

While the first phase of this initiative successfully looked into the governance aspects of the Health, Education, and Migration sectors in Nepal, GMC Nepal Phase-II takes a closer look at the four major mutually non-exclusive arenas of governance conflicts in the Nepali federal context:

a. Natural Resource Conflicts
b. Development Conflicts
c. Ethnocultural Conflicts
d. Political Conflicts

The **'Governance Watch'**, a bi-monthly periodic report represents GMC Nepal's attempt to decipher major conflicts occurring within and beyond the federal structures and systems of Nepal. Through vigilant media monitoring mechanisms, this report analyzes the changing dynamics of governance conflicts and elements associated with them, recognizing a crucial role of media in reflecting where latest developments and interests are focused. Here is how the methods have defined the major governance areas selected by this report including major indicators and types of events:

Governance areas	Definition
Natural resource governance	Norms, institutions and processes that determine how power and responsibilities over natural resources and climate are exercised, how decisions are taken, and how citizens (including women, men, youth, Indigenous peoples and local communities) participate in and benefit from the management of natural resources.
Development governance	Governance of social and infrastructure development through appropriate procedures comprising policy formulation, program design, budgetary allocation, and administrative reforms parallel to annual targets and/or short-term, mid-term and long-term goals and objectives set for social and economic development.
Ethnocultural governance	Accountability of authorities and government institutions to ensure rights, opportunities and security of all citizens, especially of historically marginalized and minority groups without imposing violence or discrimination on anyone based on their identity, culture, gender, region, language and ethnicity.
Political governance	Practices of federalism among different tiers/organs of governments and between the government and people.

Major Indicators

The media monitoring methods adopted have assessed the following major indicators to understand the four areas of governance and governance related conflicts while attempting to highlight major gaps and challenges existent within the federal governance system. Understanding effectiveness in formation as well as implementation of the indicators is the major focus of this report to derive governance related conflicts and also, relevant opportunities. Following is how the methods have defined the indicators:

Indicators	Definition
Legal and policy frameworks	Enforcement of laws and regulations, policies and procedures enacted by the legislative bodies in accordance with broader governance and societal reform.
Government bodies and mechanisms	Institutional arrangements of government bodies and autonomous bodies under federal structure and their interaction.
Roles and responsibilities	Power relations and functions of government bodies (both executing and implementing agencies) along with civil society, international bodies, media for fully functional of federal structure, better governance and rule of law.
Conflict resolution/ transformation	Existing mechanisms and provisions dedicated to resolving conflicts, providing access to justice and ensuring participation and representation of marginalized communities and indigenous people.

Event Types

The methods adopted for this study have segregated the recorded news and events recognizing influence or adoption of violence or nonviolence in strategies as display of resistance, attack or protest. Also, corruption or Commission for Abuse of Authority Investigation (CIAA)-related cases are separately categorized as they majorly signify legal actions or decisions, rather than being an event that is violent or nonviolent in nature. Also, to avoid data duplication, these cases are distinctly recorded.

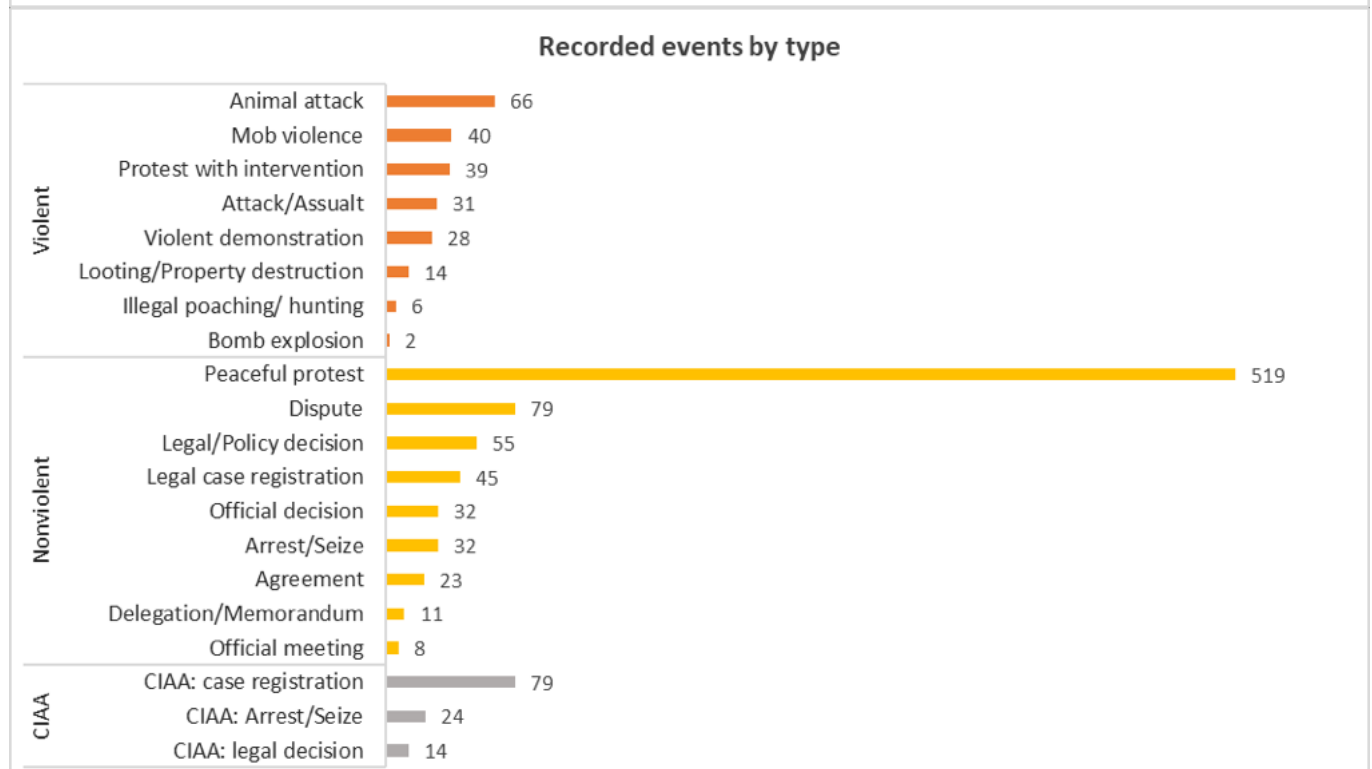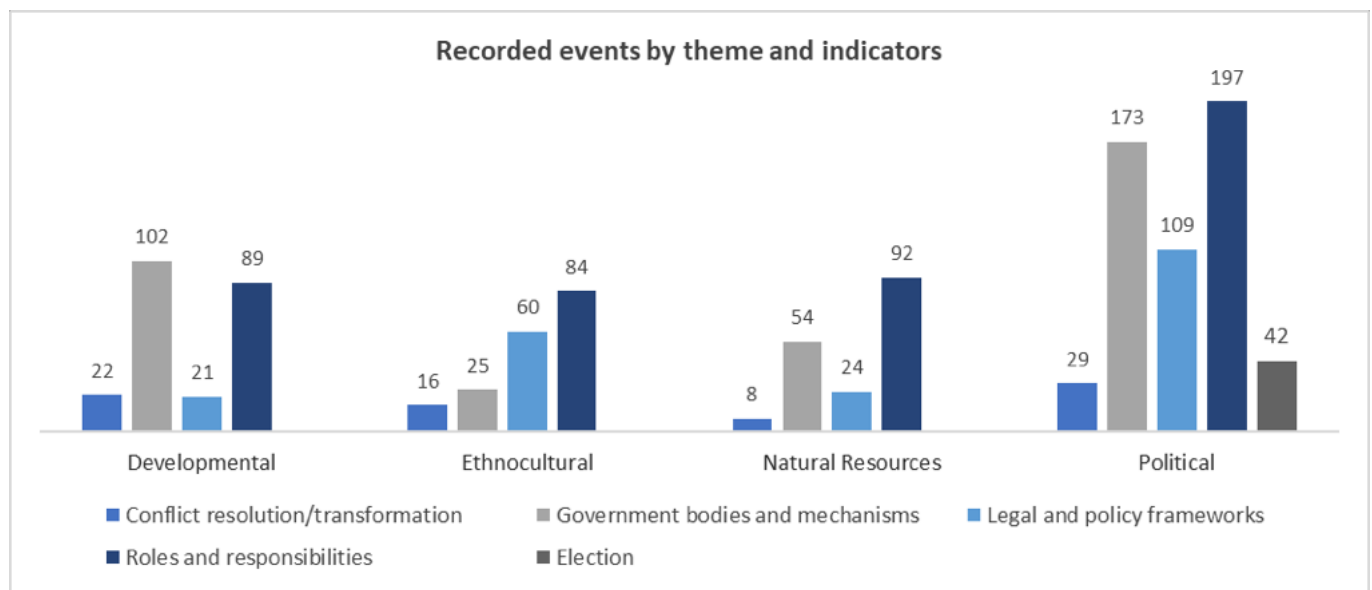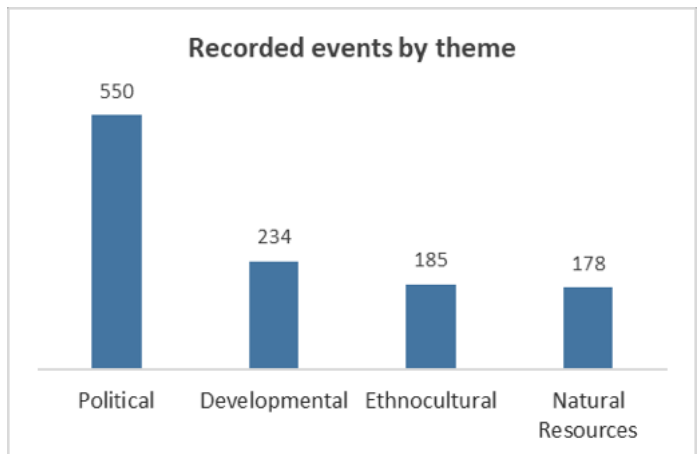| Event Categories	Definition
Nonviolent events	Governance conflicts where actors display resistance, disagreements, demands, etc. without using physical force or causing harm or damage.
Violent events	Governance conflicts where actors use physical force/ arms or cause harm or damage to display resistance, disagreements, demands, etc.
Commission for Abuse of Authority Investigation (CIAA)- relevant events	Corruption or CIAA related cases are recorded as separate category of events. Such cases are mostly legal concerns that are important determinants of governance conflicts as they display unrest among actors and triggers of such

Media Outlets Monitored:

The Kathmandu Post/ Kantipur Daily/ Annapurna Post/ Online Khabar/ SetoPati.

A Cumulative Snapshot of Recorded News and Events
Media Coverage: June 2022 - September 2023

Starting from month of June 2022 to September 2023, in the past 16 months, a total of 1147 events have been recorded under this media monitoring initiative under GMC Nepal. Below is a numeric snapshot of the observations so far.

Event Type	No. of events recorded
Violent	226
Nonviolent	804
CIAA	117
Total Recorded Events	1147

Recorded events by theme

Recorded events by theme and indicators

- Conflict resolution/transformation
- Government bodies and mechanisms
- Legal and policy frameworks
- Roles and responsibilities
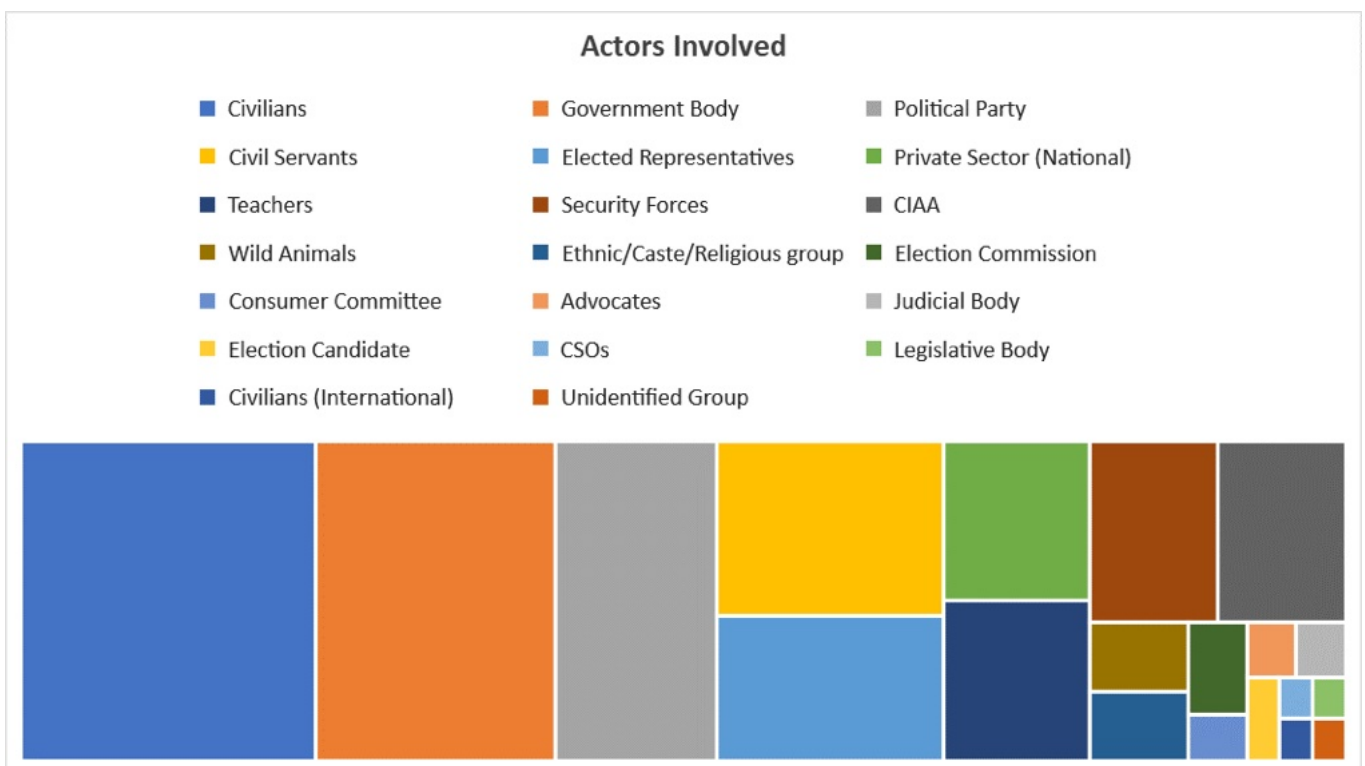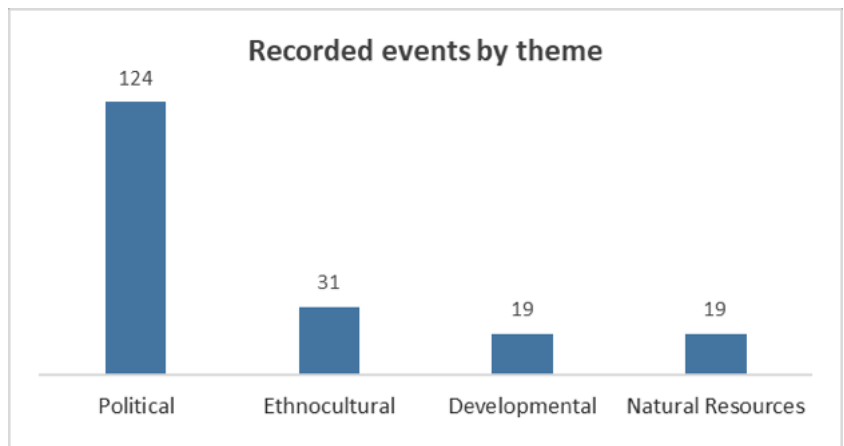- Election

Recorded events by type

Access previous reports at: Governance Watch Series Archives - GMC Nepal

Overview of Recorded Events
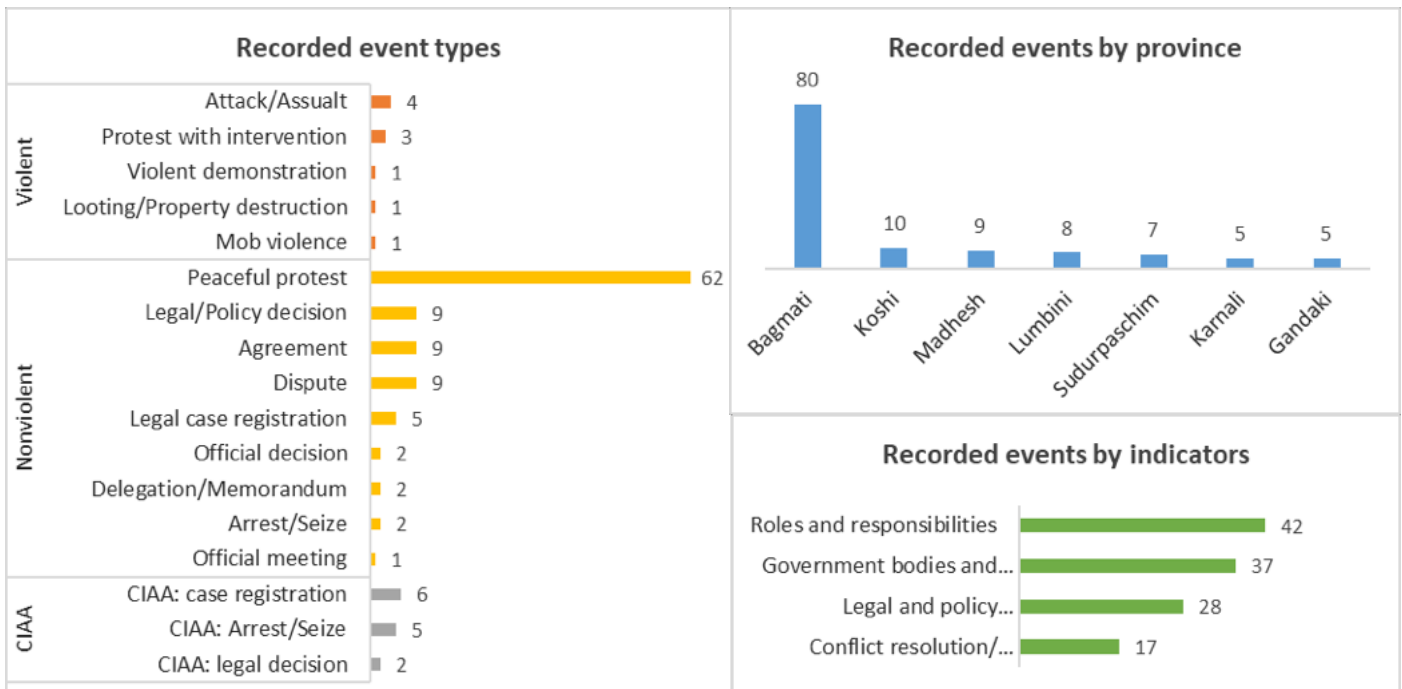## Media Coverage: August 2023 - September 2023

This 6th issue of 'Governance Watch', covers 193 news and events related to governance conflicts in the areas of natural resources, development, ethnocultural and political governance. The majority of these governance conflicts, i.e., 154 cases were nonviolent in nature. Although in comparison to 154 recorded nonviolent events, 21 violent occurrences may give the impression that violence in governance conflicts are rare, but these events are detrimental to human security and peaceful governance. These events thus must be considered to be able to timely address the current civil unrest and peacefully resolve governance issues arising in the four governance areas. In contrast to the previous issue of 'Governance Watch', the Commission for Abuse of Authority Investigation (CIAA) related cases are reportedly lower in number, suggesting decline in reports of illicit and corrupt activities by political and government actors. However, this indication alone is not sufficient to conclude that corruption related activities have declined in Nepal. Further analysis of cases and events from multiple sources are important to corroborate this finding. Lastly, records under this reporting period shows civilians, government and political parties as the three major actors involved in governance conflicts in the four areas of study. Detailed breakdown of these observations are provided in upcoming sections. Meanwhile, graphical representation of this summary is presented as below:

Type of Events	No. of events
Violent	21
Nonviolent	154
CIAA	18
Total Recorded Events	193

Recorded events by theme

Political 124; Ethnocultural 31; Developmental 19; Natural Resources 19

Actors Involved

Civilians · Government Body · Political Party · Civil Servants · Elected Representatives · Private Sector (National) · Teachers · Security Forces · CIAA · Wild Animals · Ethnic/Caste/Religious group · Election Commission · Consumer Committee · Advocates · Judicial Body · Election Candidate · CSOs · Legislative Body · Civilians (International) · Unidentified Group

Political Governance Conflicts
Media Coverage: August 2023 - September 2023

Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on political conflicts (August-September 2023)
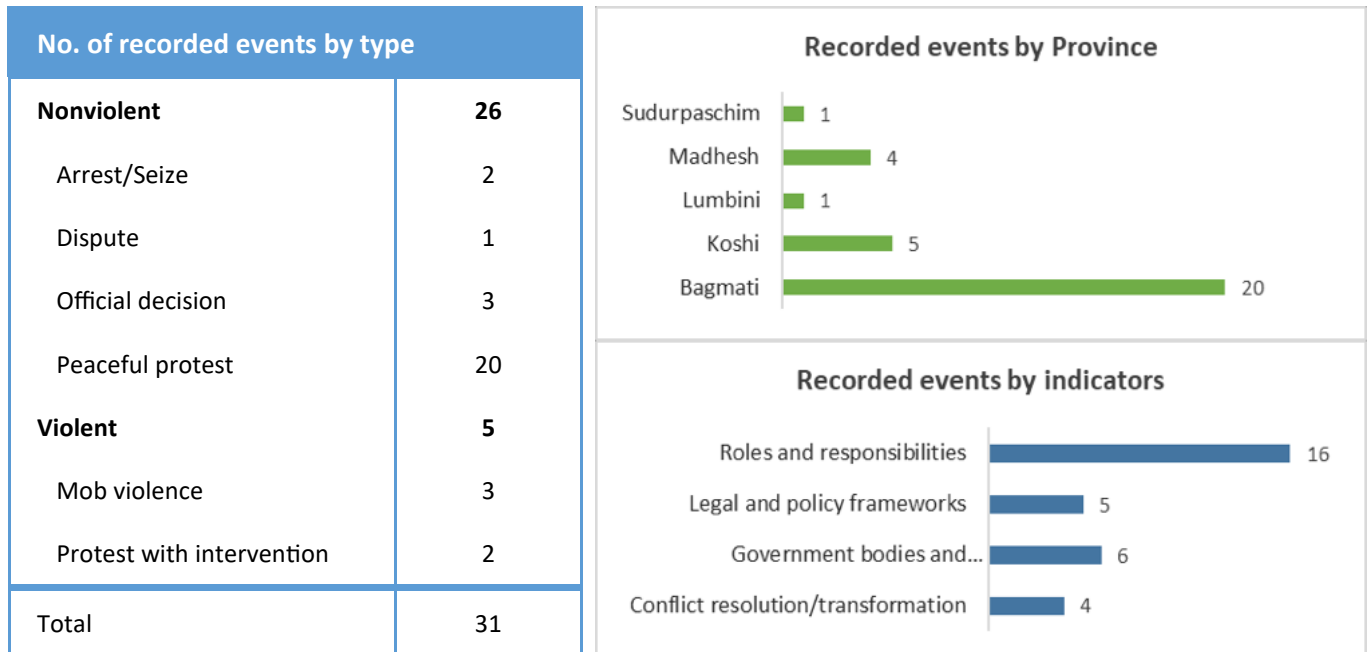
Summary of Recorded Events

The majority of the events recorded during August and September 2023 were nonviolent (81.5% of total recorded events) in nature and Bagmati province observed the highest number of political events. Over this period, Nepal grappled with a series of political conflicts and governance challenges within its federal structure. These issues illuminated the persistent tensions and disputes that have characterized the nation since the adoption of its federal system in 2015. One of the most notable developments during this period was the widespread protests by teachers and relief teachers against the Education Bill. These educators voiced concerns about their rights and working conditions, demanding amendments to the legislation. After days of protests and disruptions in the education sector, a temporary agreement was finally reached with the government. Simultaneously, the mistreatment of doctors and healthcare workers emerged as a significant problem, revealing serious concerns about workplace safety and security in medical facilities. The protests by doctors across the country highlighted their growing frustration with the lack of protection and the challenging working environment in hospitals. The government was forced to engage in discussions with the protesting doctors, emphasizing the pressing need for a safer and more secure environment for healthcare professionals. Nepal also witnessed a spate of corruption cases during this period, some involving government officials and influential individuals. This raised questions about the continued negative overlap between politics and governance in Nepal's federal system.

Local governance challenges added another layer to the ongoing complexities. Disputes over the release of revenue-sharing funds by the federal government to rural municipalities highlighted the financial strains faced by local authorities. This situation exemplified the intricate relationship between federal and local governance structures in Nepal. Amid these challenges, various protests and demonstrations, including those led by activist E and footpath traders, sought alternative solutions and rights for street vendors. These activities shed light on the tensions and issues surrounding informal sectors and urban governance in Nepal.

Ethnocultural Governance Conflicts
Media Coverage: August 2023 - September 2023

No. of recorded events by type	
Nonviolent	**26**
Arrest/Seize	2
Dispute	1
Official decision	3
Peaceful protest	20
Violent	**5**
Mob violence	3
Protest with intervention	2
Total	31

Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on ethnocultural governance related conflicts (August-September 2023)
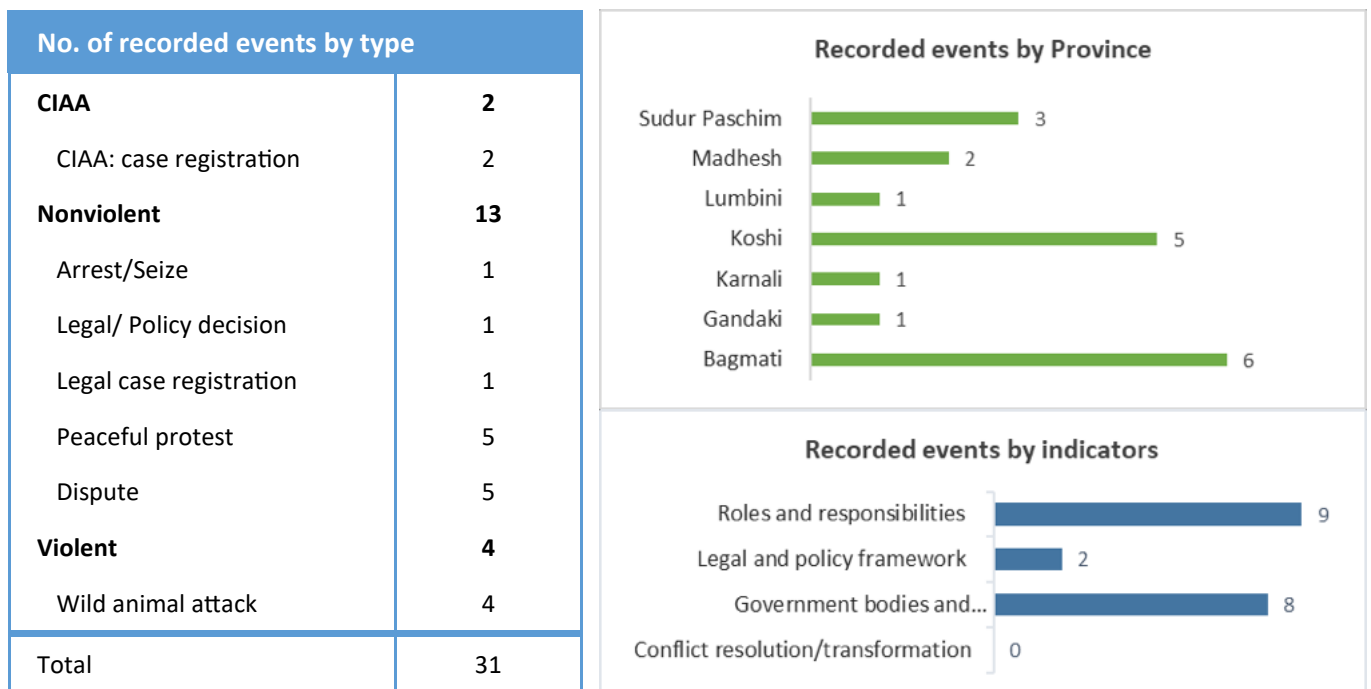
Summary of Recorded Events

In August and September 2023, a total of 31 events related to ethnocultural governance conflicts were documented, encompassing 26 nonviolent and 5 violent incidents. During this period, the primary governance concerns in the context of ethnocultural issues centered around public security and justice, particularly for women. One particularly distressing case that garnered significant attention is that of Aarti Shah, whose lifeless body was discovered in her own home on May 21. In response to this tragic event, Aarti Shah's grieving family and relatives have organized multiple rallies since June 16, 2023, resounding an appeal for justice. They assert that Aarti was a victim of foul play, alleging that her death was linked to dowry demands. Another noteworthy case demanding justice for women is that of Aarti Rawal Giri, the wife of Justice Bhuwan Giri who has been on a hunger strike for two months, voicing concerns about her case against her husband, particularly his release on bail. She is advocating for the cancellation of government services for suspended judges (her husband), an expedited investigation into her cases, and the pursuit of appropriate legal action.

Additionally, incidents of exclusion and caste-based discrimination were observed in the past two months. Lumbini Province, for instance, passed the Civil Servants Bill, which reduced the disability reservation quota, triggering a hunger strike by the National Federation of Persons with Disabilities Nepal. Another concerning case pertains to the Education Bill, where the Tharu community's reservation quota was subsumed under the Madhesi category, prompting concerns about the government's intentions to diminish Tharu quotas. Furthermore, community clashes leading to curfews were observed in Malangwa and Dharan districts. The conflict in Malangwa transpired during a religious festival involving Lord Ganesh's idol immersion. Though no clashes were reported in Dharan, curfews were implemented as a precautionary measure.

Natural Resources Governance Conflicts
Media Coverage: August 2023 - September 2023

No. of recorded events by type	
CIAA	**2**
CIAA: case registration	2
Nonviolent	**13**
Arrest/Seize	1
Legal/ Policy decision	1
Legal case registration	1
Peaceful protest	5
Dispute	5
Violent	**4**
Wild animal attack	4
Total	31

Recorded events by Province

- Sudur Paschim: 3
- Madhesh: 2
- Lumbini: 1
- Koshi: 5
- Karnali: 1
- Gandaki: 1
- Bagmati: 6

Recorded events by indicators

- Roles and responsibilities: 9
- Legal and policy framework: 2
- Government bodies and…: 8
- Conflict resolution/transformation: 0

Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on natural resources related conflicts (August-September 2023)
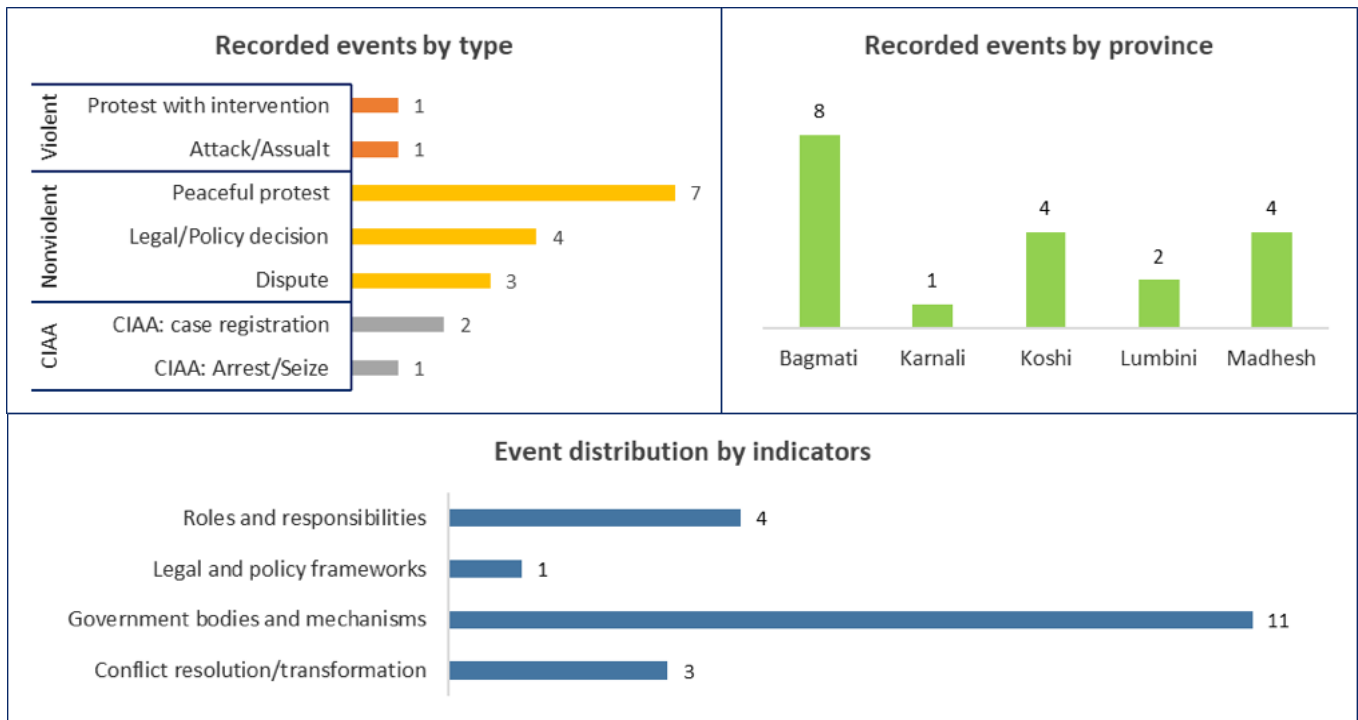
Summary of Recorded Events

In During the period of August and September 2023, a total of 19 news and events were recorded that were relevant to Natural resource governance conflicts. Although the majority of these conflicts were nonviolent in nature, four occurrences of violent human-wildlife conflicts were consistent with the news and events from previous recording periods, especially wild animal attacks, resulting in severe injuries and loss of lives. At the same time, death of wild elephants under unnatural circumstances were also recorded as a repeated occurrence in Kanchanpur district. Recurring of such conflicts highlight a major gap in effective and timely response from government authorities in favor of both wild animals and humans. As also indicated by the observation of indicators, strong implementation of effective roles and responsibilities that clearly emphasize the distinct roles of local, provincial and national tiers continue to be the need of the current times.

Furthermore, this reporting period shows records of public demonstrations led by almost 200 individuals employed under Forest Produce Development Committee, against delay in salary distribution since the past year. Since these protests were held at Babarmahal, Kathmandu, the highest occurrence of natural resource related conflicts are seen to be in Bagmati Province. In other accounts, local levels in Gandaki Province opposed a forest-related act that would grant state control over the excavation and sale of river products, potentially curtailing local rights. The bill allows the state to manage stones, pebbles, and sand within the national forest area, raising concerns among local representatives about their constitutional rights. Such cases denote a serious need for participation of local actors in the process of law and policy making that adhere to the local needs, rather than adoption of a top-down approach.

Also, the two CIAA relevant cases in natural resource conflicts were against former mayors in Kanchanpur and Udaypur districts, who were involved in revenue scams related to river-based extractions and development projects. Such cases highlight the capabilities of government actors in worsening the occurrence and extension of natural resource conflicts through their involvement in illicit activities.

Development Governance Conflicts
Media Coverage: August 2023 - September 2023

Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on development governance conflicts (August-September 2023)

Summary of Recorded Events

In the past months of August and September 2023, GMC Nepal recorded a total of 19 events under development governance conflict. Bagmati province has repeatedly witnessed struggles on contractors' deferred payment and deadlines extension issues related to development projects, conflicting interests over development budget against the purpose of sustainable and planned development and spirit of development governance, parking facility to service seekers and unaddressed habitat vulnerability issues of residents of areas close to garbage disposal sites. Likewise, CIAA action against corruption an irregularities on infrastructure budget and resources, land management dispute, delayed distribution of compensation to displaced people by hydropower construction projects were leading causes of demonstrations that threatened the development governance in rest of the provinces.

A closer look at these events shows that weak institutional capacity of the responsible authorities governing the development processes in Nepal has slowed achievement of a progressive and sustainable development of the country. Also, heavy political influence and corruption has distorted standard framework for timely inflow of infrastructural investment, development policy implementation and development disaster response mechanisms to ensure the basic livelihood opportunities of citizens who are displaced by the action of development projects.

Key Recommendations

From the 193 events recorded in the months of August and September 2023, some key factors were identified that have evidently triggered governance conflict in the four governance areas. As potential responses to address these ongoing conflicts, following recommendations are derived as way forward.

Political governance

- A robust conflict resolution mechanism is necessary to tackle the evident political conflicts and tensions between the three tiers of government in federal Nepal. Institutions to mediate and resolve disputes and to ensure that conflicts do not escalate to the detriment of governance and public services is essential to address current political issues.

- Empowering local governments with more autonomy and resources is highly relevant, especially in cases where disputes arise due to the central government's interference. Giving ownership to local authorities of their affairs and resources can reduce conflicts related to the central government's control over local matters.

- Enhancing civic education can help inform citizens about their rights, responsibilities, and the processes available for addressing their concerns through non-disruptive means. A well-informed citizen can contribute to more peaceful conflict resolution.

Ethnocultural governance

- To ensure protection and safety of women, the state needs to offer specialized assistance in cases involving women and expedite the legal proceedings to deliver justice swiftly, particularly in cases of Violence Against Women (VAW).

- Introduction of a bill in parliament, particularly one aimed at amending affirmative action policies, is a sign that the nation may be deviating from its intended course. The ongoing exclusion within governance further alienates historically marginalized communities. Therefore, the government should prioritize bringing historically marginalized communities to the forefront and providing them with additional support until social inclusion is effectively attained.

- The rising number of group clashes underscores the fact that social cohesion in society is significantly disrupted. Therefore, it is imperative for the government to actively seek methods to restore cohesion and preserve harmony. Various conflict resolution measures, including dialogue, should be explored as viable means to achieve this goal.

Natural resources governance

- Records of wildlife attacks and illegal wildlife trades are consistent with preceding reports. Hence, distinct guidelines designating specific roles and responsibilities of authorities in the three tiers of government must be strictly implemented to adequately address the existing human-nature conflict and promote human-nature symbiosis.

- Strict compliance of environmental laws and policies must be ensured to prohibit damage or exploitation of natural resources and needs to be urgently addressed among federal, provincial and local governments. Especially, actions of government representatives need to be strictly monitored to stop their illicit involvement in corruption and illegal activities.

- The government must timely and adequately address the plights of government employees involved in different tiers taking up different responsibilities, facing delayed salary delivery as far as a year. Budget planning and resource allocation processes must carefully assess the magnitude of resource requirement to avoid such cases in the future.

Ethnocultural governance

- Effective regulation of resource-based development is prerequisite to control corruption and irregularities and promote good governance in infrastructure investment sector.

- Strengthening legal and institutional framework to ensure the resettlement, rehabilitation/post-relocation, compensation and livelihood opportunities of displaced population by development project at the time of designing the infrastructural development projects is essential.

- Increased civic participation at the time of development planning, designing and formulation of project can help ensure self-accountability, transparency and ownership of the development project and curb irregularities.

About CSC

Centre for Social Change (CSC) is a non-profit making social think-tank based in Kathmandu, Nepal. Since its establishment in 2015, CSC has been actively working to bring positive transformation in the socio-political dynamics of Nepali society through involvements in the fields of research, development practice, education, advocacy, and community mobilization. CSC's current works are focused on issues surround conflict transformation, peacebuilding, democracy and governance, migration, labor and employment, civic space, civil society development, public policy, climate change, and social development.

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