

GOVERNANCE WATCH

MEDIA MONITORING REPORT

ISSUE - 09

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Governance Monitoring Centre Nepal (GMC Nepal) is Centre for Social Change (CSC)'s flagship initiative, functional since 2020. 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 method, 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 nation-wide interests are focused. To identify such occurrences at national, provincial, and local levels conflicts, this report fundamentally assesses four indicators- legal and policy frameworks, government bodies and mechanisms, through rigorous monitoring of news and events reported by five national daily newspaper sources- The Kathmandu Post, Kantipur Daily, Annapurna Post, Online Khabar and Seto Pati.

This report thus highlights key governance conflicts observed in the previous two months and a set of recommendations as potential avenues to resolve those conflicts.

Note: This report may explain multiple occurrences of the governance conflicts by highlighting only specific news and events. Hence, the governance conflicts may not be limited to examples specified in this report.

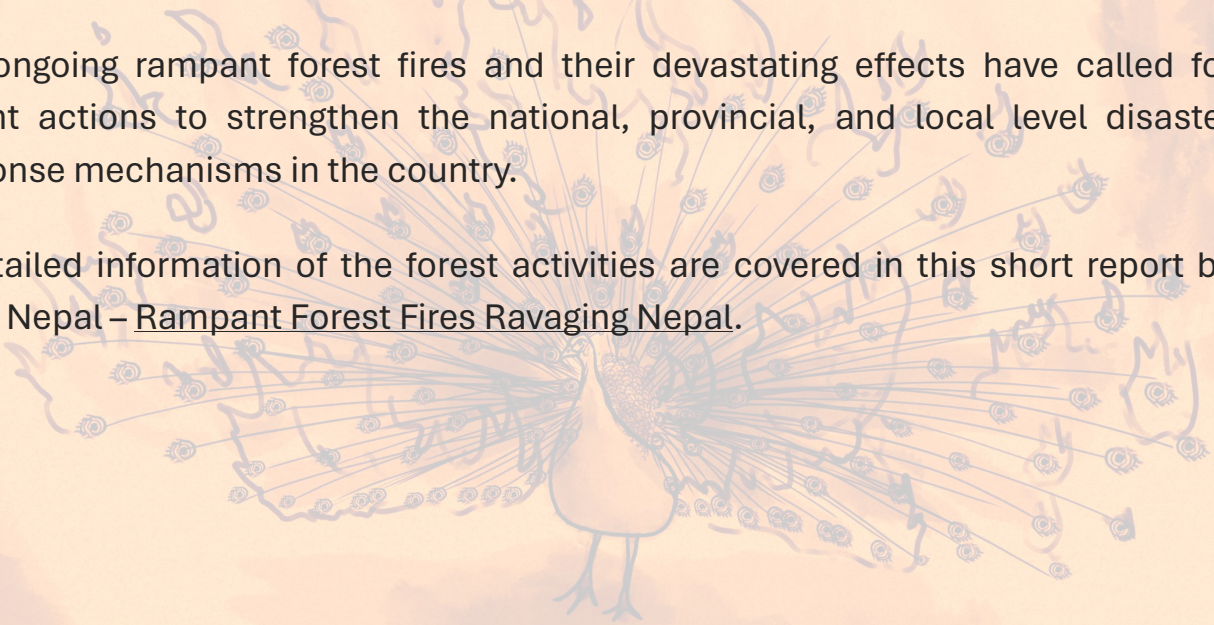
During the publishing of this report, rampant forest fires engulfed all seven provinces of Nepal at various degrees, severely affecting the people, but more so, the animals, birds and other species native to forests of Nepal.

It is significant to note that while the structural damages, human casualties and economic impacts are accounted for, long term impacts and accurate worth of forest fires damages endured by the environment and ecology is largely unaccounted for. Also, communities from low socio-economic status, Indigenous and historically marginalized groups are the ones who face its disproportionate effects.

Reports show that forest fires destroy over 40,000 hectares of Nepal's forest area annually, casting increasing damages with each passing year. As some of the damage is irreversible in terms of its worth and existence, serious attention must be paid in deploying immediate and effective crisis response strategies. At the same time, strategies that focus on enhancing community preparedness and rapid response during fire emergencies are equally important.

The ongoing rampant forest fires and their devastating effects have called for urgent actions to strengthen the national, provincial, and local level disaster response mechanisms in the country.

A detailed information of the forest activities are covered in this short report by GMC Nepal – [Rampant Forest Fires Ravaging Nepal](#).

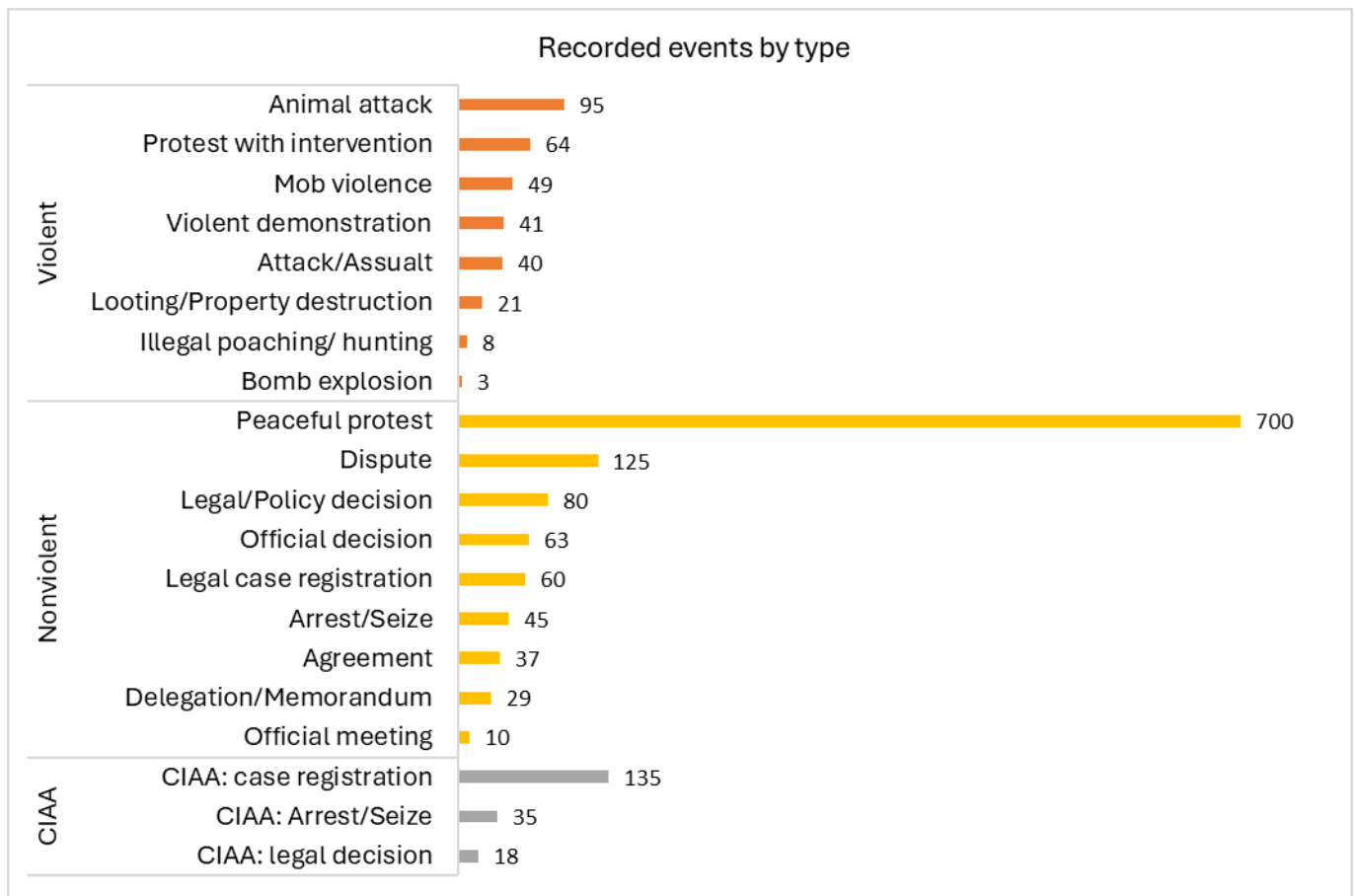
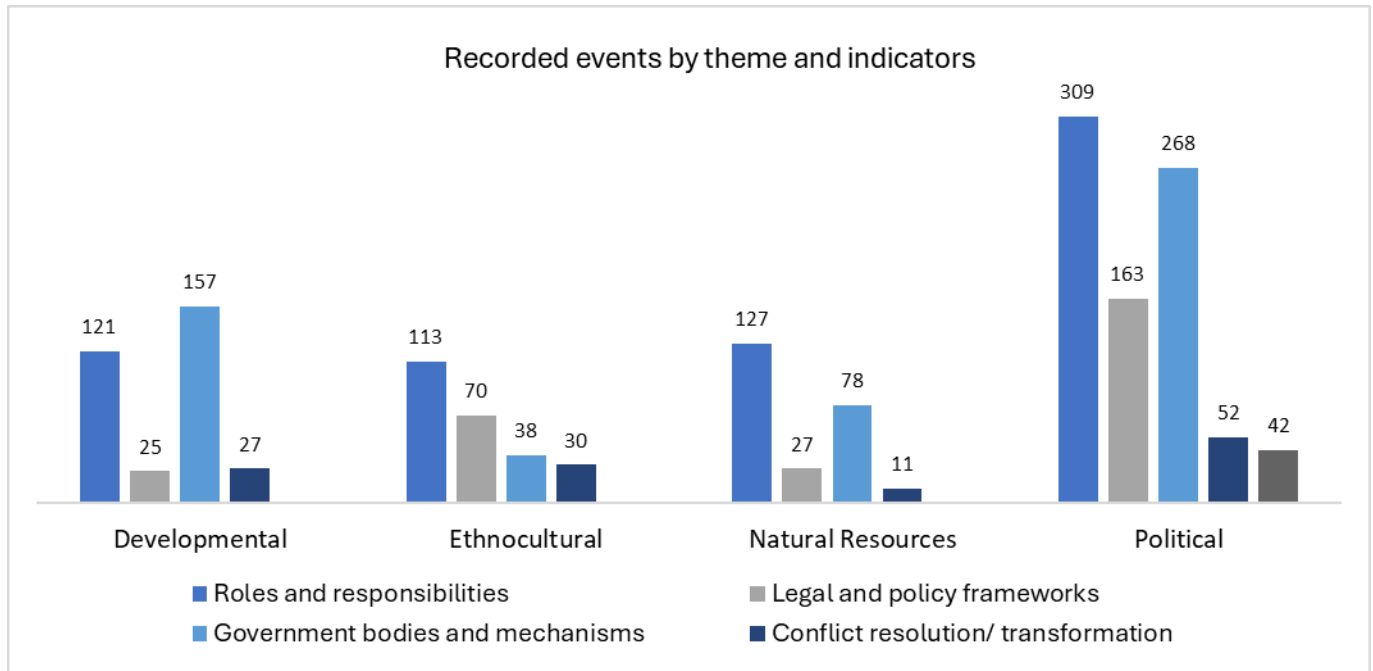


A Cumulative Snapshot of Recorded News and Events

Media Coverage: June 2022 - March 2024

Starting from month of June 2022 to March 2024, in the past 22 months, a total of 1658 events have been recorded under this media monitoring initiative under GMC Nepal. Here, is a numeric snapshot of the data gathered so far.

| Event type | No. of events recorded |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Violent | 321 |
| Nonviolent | 1149 |
| CIAA | 188 |
| Total recorded events | 1658 |



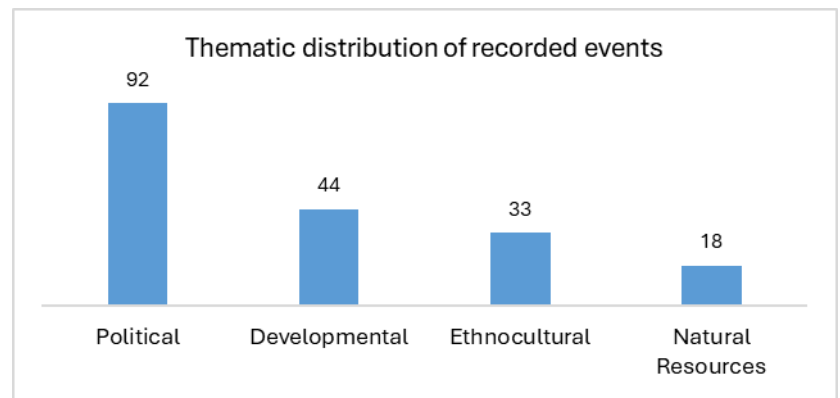
Overview of Recorded Events

Media Coverage: February 2024 - March 2024

This 9th issue of 'Governance Watch', encapsulates a total of 187 news and events related to governance conflicts in the areas of natural resources, development, ethnocultural and political governance in Nepal. Consistent to previous reports, most of these governance conflicts, i.e., 187 cases were nonviolent in nature. Although comparatively less in numbers, the 31 recorded violent events show use of force and aggression and power struggles among the various involved actors, demanding nonviolent measures of grievance sharing and solutions to ensure peaceful governance in the four governance areas focused by this study.

The 35 Commission for Abuse of Authority Investigation (CIAA) relevant cases were registered cases against political and government actors (comprising local, provincial, and central levels) for illicit accumulation of resources and misuse of power and authority for personal benefit. However, this indication alone is not sufficient to conclude the overall context and consequences of corruption related activities and its relevant actors and areas in Nepal. Further analysis of cases and events from multiple sources is important to corroborate this finding. Lastly, civilians, government and civil servants were recorded as the three major actors involved in governance conflicts in the four areas of study. Detailed breakdown of these observations is provided in upcoming sections. Meanwhile, graphical representation of this summary is presented as below:

| Type of events | No. of events |
|----------------|---------------|
| Violent | 31 |
| Nonviolent | 121 |
| CIAA | 35 |
| Total | 187 |



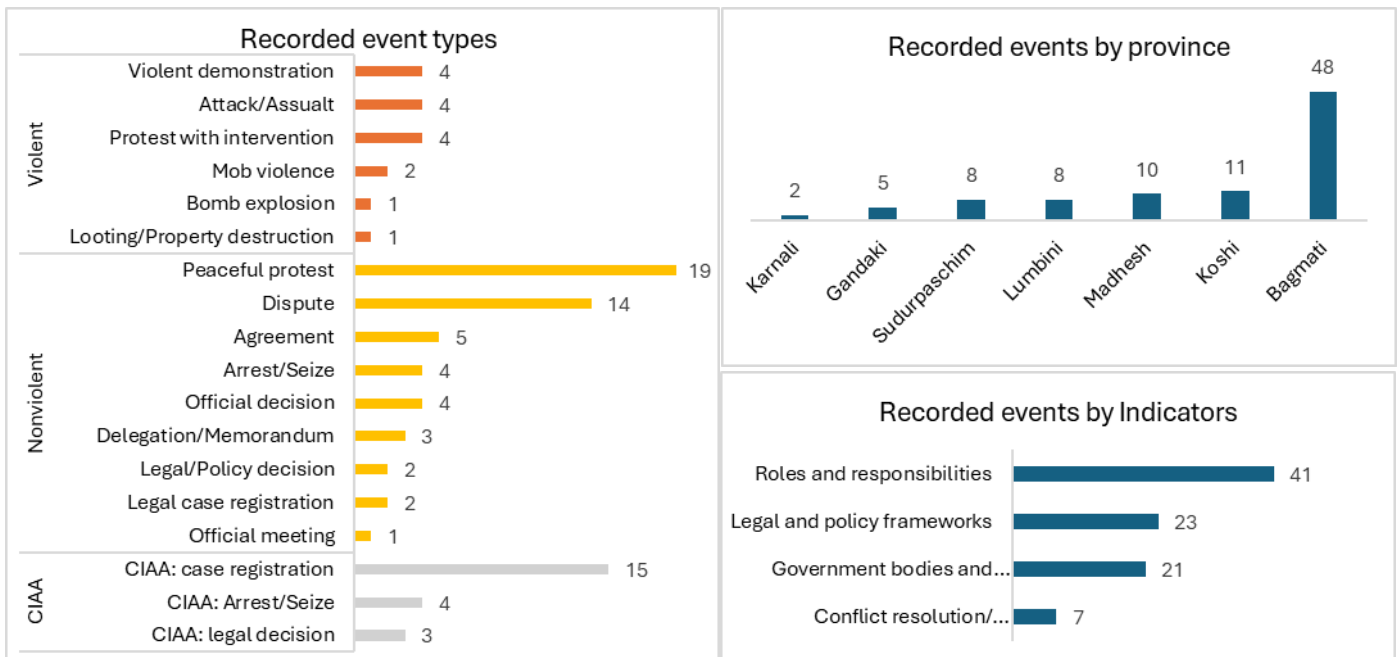
Actors Involved

- Civilians
- Government Body
- Civil Servants
- CIAA
- Elected Representatives
- Political Party
- Security Forces
- Private Sector (National)
- Consumer Committee
- Wild Animals
- Ethnic/Caste/Religious group
- CSOs
- Unidentified Group
- Judicial Body
- Development Committee
- Legislative Body
- Journalists
- Advocates
- Media
- Educational Institutes



Political Governance Conflicts

Media Coverage: February 2024 - March 2024



Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on political governance conflicts (February and March 2024)

Summary of events recorded

The largest number of recorded events during February and March 2024 (58% of the total recorded events under the political governance) were nonviolent in nature. Bagmati Province, witnessing the highest number of these conflicts was followed by Koshi and Madhesh Provinces, continuing to expose the challenges and complexities of Nepal's young federal system.

This report shows disagreements between federal and local governments regarding control over crucial areas like hospital management regulations, as raised by [Koshi state ordinance](#). Similarly, [proposed amendments](#) to the Local Government Operation Act raised concerns about the federal government centralizing power, curtailing the autonomy of local bodies. Further on, the ability of local governments to manage their affairs effectively was scrutinized, as a school in Biratnagar added the [school grade level](#), beyond authorization. Corruption cases also exposed pitfalls of limited accountability at the local level as ward chairs from [Jitpursimra](#), [Banepa](#), and [Maharajgunj](#) were implicated in bribery and irregularities in land management practices were reported in [Tikapur Municipality](#) and [Damak Municipality](#). Frustration with local governance continued to target the federal government as protests erupted over various grievances. [Metered money laundering victims](#), [microfinance borrowers](#), and [health workers in Janki municipality](#) demanded solutions from the federal government for issues originating at the local level but with national repercussions. Also, discontent within the [ruling coalition parties](#) with PM Dahal and disagreements within the [CPN-UML](#) party showed potential political instability. Also, [dissatisfaction of the JSP](#) with Madhesh Province's governance added to the issue.

The corruption cases investigated by CIAA during this period raise concerns as high-profile cases like the Lalita Niwas land grab to bribery incidents involving local officials, corruption was pervasive across all levels. Involvement of officials from the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Survey Office, Inland Revenue Office, High Court, Foreign Employment Department, Social Development Unit Office, Health Directorate, and Kathmandu Upatyaka Khanepani Limited in corruption highlight the deep-rooted nature of the problem, eroding public trust and hindering effective governance at all levels.

Development Governance Conflicts

Media Coverage: February 2024 - March 2024



Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on development governance conflicts (February and March 2024)

Summary of events recorded

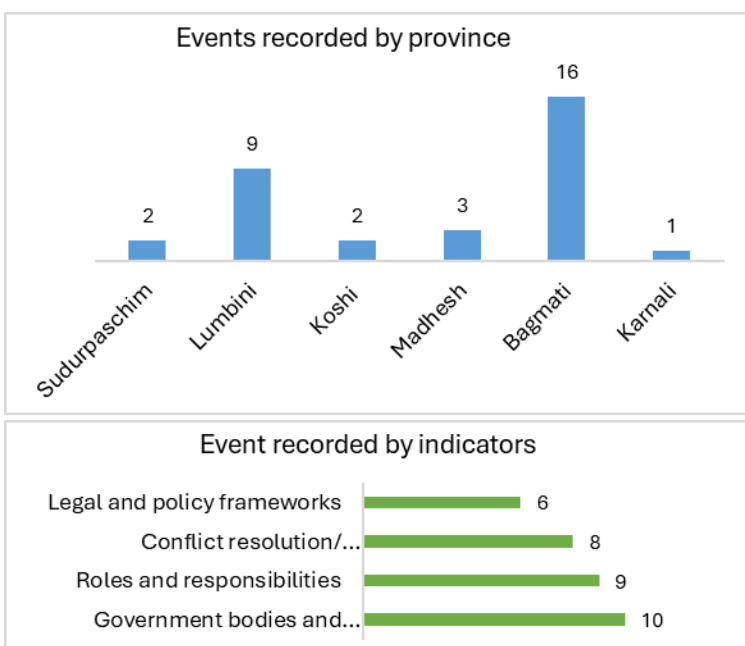
In the past months of February and March, GMC Nepal monitored and recorded 44 news events under development governance conflicts. Mostly nonviolent in nature, these events mainly entailed the nationwide [protests staged by dairy farmers](#) for multiple days. Coordinated by the Central Milk Producers Cooperative Union, demonstrations were held across 64 districts of Nepal, on the highways and other public areas, demanding the government to help expedite overdue payment of more than NRS. seven billion from state-owned Dairy development Corporations and privately-owned dairy industries to dairy farmers in Nepal. On other accounts, this report observed authority level disagreements in urban development strategies, especially on the matter of [space allocation for free vehicle parking](#) in the vicinity of Darahara, Kathmandu and protests from civilians' side on matters of urban space usage for [business and street vending](#), which [also turned violent](#) in some accounts.

Further on, this report observed an upsurge in CIAA registered cases, involving government authorities in local and national level development projects. These recurring cases included charges against authorities involved in [Nepal Telecom procurement irregularities](#), corruption case involving the [Tandawada Irrigation Project](#) Consumer Committee and [Melamchi water supply project](#) and false bills presented for [reparation of water supply scheme](#) in Chankheli Rural Municipality (RM) Humla. Additional cases also add to the conclusion that resources and benefits allocated for development projects in Nepal were misused by the people in authority. Such rise in CIAA related cases in development governance draws attention to implementation of stricter monitoring bodies and regulating mechanisms to ensure proper utilization of resources to achieve sustainable development objectives of all three governing tiers of Nepal.

Ethnocultural Governance Conflicts

Media Coverage: December 2023 - January 2024

| Type of events | No. of events |
|------------------------------|---------------|
| Violent | 6 |
| Protest with intervention | 4 |
| Violent demonstration | 1 |
| Attack/Assault | 1 |
| Nonviolent | 27 |
| Peaceful protest | 12 |
| Official decision | 5 |
| Agreement | 4 |
| Arrest/Seize | 3 |
| Legal/Policy decision | 3 |
| Total Recorded Events | 33 |



Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on ethnocultural governance conflicts (February and March 2024)

Summary of events recorded

In the months of February and March 2024, a total of 33 ethnocultural governance conflicts were documented, with the majority being nonviolent. Consistent to the preceding bi-monthly reports, incidents involving Arti Sah's family's effort to bring justice to her alleged murder in May 2023, were recorded in this period too. Facing [multiple resistance](#) from police, they demanded arrest of four suspects involved in Sah's murder but only her husband was arrested in relation to the case. Nonetheless, the family [met with the Prime Minister](#) and Home Minister, and a [five-point agreement](#) was reached in March 2024, that includes a new investigation of the case by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), financial aid, and pledge to meet their concerns in exchange for their withdrawal of protests.

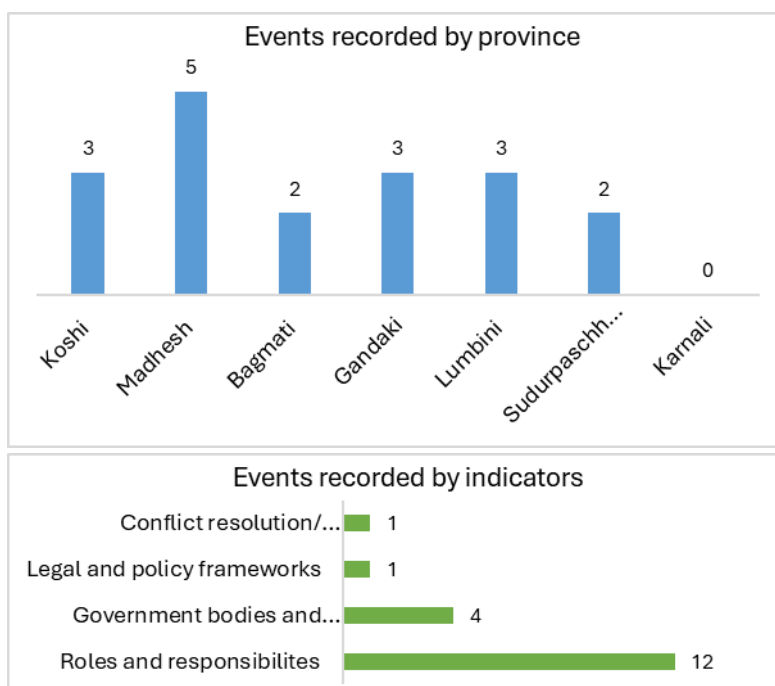
Furthermore, protests by 200 to 500 [Mohi farmers](#) in Dang demanding ownership of the land they've cultivated for generations, known as Mohiyani rights. In March 2024, the farmers reached an [agreement](#) with the government to transfer land rights to them and bring new laws to address Mohi farmers' concerns. Additionally, the Rukum District Court issued a [full verdict](#) on the Soti incident, convicting multiple defendants for the murder of six individuals, driven by caste-based discrimination. On similar issue, demonstrations were held demanding justice for the murder of [Ajit Mizar](#), over inter-caste marriage, but those protests led to detention of protesters for violating restricted areas. Furthermore, there were also cases of sexual misconduct by elected representatives and officials with a [ward chairman arrested](#) on charges of raping a 20-year-old, a [ward member arrested](#) for allegedly raping a woman in Kanchanpur and a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) from the Armed Police Force (APF) [arrested](#) for allegedly filming an obscene video of a woman at a restaurant in Halchowk.

During this period, there were also numerous conflicts arising from differences in religious and cultural backgrounds. In Rautahat, [clashes](#) occurred during immersion of goddess Saraswati's idol imposing indefinite curfew order in several wards of Ishanath Municipality. In response to this incident, protests erupted in Birgunj city leading to further clashes between Hindu and Muslim communities forcing the local administrative to impose a [curfew](#) to control the situation.

Natural Resources Governance Conflicts

Media Coverage: February 2024 - March 2024

| Type of events | No. of events |
|------------------------------|---------------|
| Violent | 6 |
| Wild animal attack | 6 |
| Nonviolent | 9 |
| Official decision | 3 |
| Legal/Policy decision | 2 |
| Delegation/Memorandum | 2 |
| Dispute | 2 |
| CIAA | 3 |
| CIAA: case registration | 3 |
| Total Recorded Events | 18 |



Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on natural resources governance conflicts (February and March 2024)

Summary of events recorded

During the months of February and March 2024, a total of 18 recorded news and events were relevant to Natural resource governance conflicts in Nepal, majority being nonviolent in nature. The violent events comprised of recurring news of human-wildlife conflict resulting in [death](#), [injuries](#) and [displacement](#), of both humans and wild animals, yet again highlighting a major gap in effective remedies to the withstanding issue. For instance, Tripurasundari Rural Municipality (RM) in Sindhupalchowk issued a notice to cut down trees in private lands to rid of monkeys damaging crops. The decision, however, was criticized, with environmental experts suggesting alternative solutions such as planting fruit trees in forests to deter monkeys from entering settlements.

Further events entailed cases of disagreements, dissatisfaction and [disputes at the authority levels](#) on the matters of river-based materials extraction. On this matter, concerns were also displayed by civilians. One such case was of [Dhanusa district's Bateshwor Rural Municipality](#) (RM), where the civilians raised allegations against the RM chairman of taking decisions against his pledges during elections and inviting tenders for sale and distribution of river products, raising risks of over extraction and environmental damage to the local area. In addition, the CIAA relevant cases recorded in this reporting period included corruption and bribery charges against government officials involved in [misuse of forest allocated funds](#), [illegal destruction of forest resources](#) and acquisition of resources through illegal consumption or trade of forest products. These events drew serious attention as the cases involved government representatives and forest authorities.

Further on, displaced families by Rupa Lake Integrated Conservation Development Project in Kaski district submitted a memorandum demanding [compensation for the acquired land](#) and return of the land unused by the lake conservation project. On a positive note, though, the Prime Minister of Nepal formed a commission to address the [outstanding land compensations](#) pledged to the locals displaced during the establishment of Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve in Kanchanpur.

Key Recommendations

From 187 events recorded between February 2024 and March 2024, 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

- Roles and responsibilities of federal and local governments must be clearly defined to minimize duplication of efforts. This can be achieved through revising legislation and establishing clear communication channels for collaboration between them.
- Empowerment of local officials is needed to improve their knowledge and skills. Additionally, transparency and accountability at the local level needs to be encouraged through citizen participation in budgeting, project monitoring, and grievance redressal.
- Anti-corruption laws must be strengthened promoting financial transparency within government institutions at all levels. This includes empowering the CIAA and implementing stricter fiscal management practices and regular audits.

Development governance

- Precise analysis of the value chain of agricultural products and farmer's access to fair market is crucial to address the grievances of dairy farmers. Measures like direct payment to farmers, regulations on production, set quotas and direct access to market can help address this issue.
- Urban planning strategies need coordination of all three tiers of government to avoid disagreements instigated by overlapping of jurisdictions. Additionally, engagement of citizens in the decision-making process is necessary to include the urban residents' needs and demands.
- Increment in corruption activities occurring through development projects brings serious attention to strengthen CIAA efforts and increase transparency in government-led projects and budget allocation processes.

Ethnocultural governance

- As highlighted by Aarti Sah and Ajit Mizar's cases, the government must establish platforms for mediation and dialogue among conflicting parties for peaceful negotiation and mutual understanding to address grievances, resolve disputes, and foster reconciliation. This especially focuses on the availability and use of public spaces for democratic expressions and public demands.
- The Mohi farmers' struggle highlights the need for a comprehensive solution to land ownership issues faced by marginalized communities. The government needs to review similar land ownership disputes faced by other marginalized communities and develop solutions to ensure land rights are upheld.
- A pressing need is felt to strengthen legal frameworks and institutions for ethnocultural conflict prevention. The government must enact and enforce laws that safeguard the rights, dignity and life of minority communities. Stricter measures including measures to prevent discrimination

and awareness campaigns necessary to combat caste-based discrimination in society.

Natural Resource governance

- The recurrence of human-wildlife conflicts calls for interventions from authorities in all three tiers of government. While loss and damage mechanisms need to be strengthened to ensure wellbeing of civilians, protection and conservation efforts need to be strongly implemented to safeguard welfare of the wildlife.
- The repetitive noncompliance of environmental laws and policies by elected representatives, especially in the cases of extraction of river-based materials, needs mechanisms that ensure supervised extractions that abide by the local guidelines, unique to the respective context.
- Corruption in natural resource management committed by elected representatives has increased concerns over equitable resource distribution among the local citizens and environmental wellbeing. Repeated resistance from locals on the matter demands strengthened role of CIAA to monitor the resource and authority acquisition by the power holders

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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