

# Public Sector Accountability During and After COVID 19

RESEARCH OF

*Susasan*

LEAD

YoungInnovations 

COLLABORATORS



**FREEDOM FORUM**  
"A Nepali CSO (civil society organization) dedicated to democracy, human rights and governance"

DISTRICT COLLABORATORS



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सिन्धुपाल्चोक

# Message from the Susasan Team Leader

I am pleased to inform you that a status report on **“Public Sector Accountability During and After COVID 19”** is published for public consumption. The report is one of the output of project Susasan (Sustainable Use of Technology for Public Sector Accountability in Nepal) implemented by CECI Nepal with the financial support of the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada (GAC). This report reflects components of public sector accountability specific to local governments.

Susasan Project has been working closely with 12 local governments<sup>1</sup> providing support in the promotion of transparency, accountability and citizen state engagement in public service delivery. Meanwhile, the Nepal government declared a lockdown to minimize effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In the scenario of COVID-19 Pandemic and lockdown, the project managed to work with local governments in examining the components of transparency, accountability, citizen engagement and service delivery. This study is one of the primary steps taken forward to assess how the local governments have taken initiatives to respond to the widespread pandemic in terms of transparency, accountability and citizen engagement.

I trust that the findings of the report will be helpful to design and implement better response, relief and rehabilitation programs in a more transparent, accountable and participatory manner.

**Hem Tembe**

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<sup>1</sup> Local government is a tier among three levels of government i.e federal, state, and local.. The local government includes: Metropolitan, Sub-metropolitan, Municipalities and Rural Municipalities

# Preface

This report is the result of aligning our team's work on public sector accountability at the local level to the current situation of COVID-19 in Nepalese context. Having worked to promote innovative ways and approaches to foster transparency and accountability across 12 local governments in Nepal over the past 3 plus years, we have realized that the true spirit of transparency, accountability and civic participation can be achieved only when we can establish practical and easy mechanisms to connect governments with the citizens. At the same time, the concept of public sector accountability can be internalized properly only when it is connected to contextual realities.

The issue of COVID-19 is perhaps the greatest reality in today's time. Local Governments claim that they are trying their best to work for the people by making the most use of their authorities and scarce resources for COVID-19 response, relief and rehabilitation. However, citizens on the other hand feel that their local government's efforts are still not upto the mark and there are significant rooms for improvement. This is where the report tries to bridge the gap between supply and the demand side by bringing out findings related to local government's powers and authorities to deal with the COVID-19 situation. At the same time, it highlights key aspects on how citizens and citizen representatives view initiatives taken by the local government along with a highlight on their expectations for the local government. We believe that findings shared in this report will be a stepping stone for local governments to assess the current situation with a critical lens and work collectively on re-aligning their effort to make them more practical and coherent with citizen need and demand.

We have collaborated with the entire team of SUSASAN project, spread across six districts and 12 local governments including district level CSOs, national partners and other associates to come up with a practical research design. Accordingly, we have conducted desk study to assess roles and responsibilities of Local Governments in emergency situations like the COVID-19 crisis. At the same time, we have mobilized our CSO network to identify and reach out to citizens, civil society and Local Government representatives for structured surveys, key informant interviews and focus group discussion on their perception and needs assessment. Findings from these have been carefully analyzed to come up with this status report on Public Sector Accountability during and after COVID-19.

Due to challenges in physical mobility because of lockdown and transportation issues, we had to rely mostly on using virtual means to talk to people and carry our research activities. At the same time, the number of people who participated in our research is somewhat lesser in number than what we expected due to unreachability of people in the current context. However, we believe that these limitations do not have significant impact on findings presented in this report. We believe that this research can further be improved upon to conduct similar exercises in other local governments and context.

**Bibhusan Bista**  
CEO  
YoungInnovations

# About the Status Report

This status report titled 'Public Sector Accountability During and After COVID-19 Pandemic' is an output of the Project 'Sustainable use of Technology for Public Sector Accountability in Nepal - Susasan'. The study was conducted across 12 local governments where the Project has been supporting in improving digital governance.

The report is a composite of finding out of a number of tools used for data collection majorly including desk research of constitutional and statutory provisions and anecdotal evidence, focused group discussions (FGD) with elected representatives and senior officials of local governments, Key Informant Interviews (KII) with public information officers, ward members of local governments, members of non-government organizations and telephony-based survey (VSurvey) with citizens.

The study was led by YoungInnovations in coordination with Center for International Studies and Cooperation - CECI Nepal and Freedom Forum. In the entire process of data collection until the development of the report, facilitation was sought from Policy Lab.

Similarly, field level coordination while conducting surveys, FGDs and KIIs were facilitated by organizations as follows:

## 1. Bagmati Province

- |                   |                              |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| a. Lalitpur       | a. SOLVE Nepal               |
| b. Sindhupalchowk | b. Tuki Association Sunkoshi |

## 2. Far West Province

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| a. Kailali    | a. Rural Development and Research Center (RDRC) |
| b. Dadeldhura | b. Rural Environment Development Center (REDC)  |
| c. Achham     | c. Malika Development Organization (MDO) Nepal  |
| d. Bajhang    | d. Sahara Nepal                                 |

We highly appreciate the contributions offered to be each and every individual during the entire process of study and the preparation of this report. To specifically mark, we thank Mr. Saroj Pathak, Ms. Anusha Kharel, Ms. Shiwamta Koirala for their input in research design, finalization of questionnaire and report write-up.

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# Acronyms

<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>DCSO</b>	District Civil Society Organisation
<b>CCMC</b>	COVID Crisis Management Center
<b>CICTT</b>	Case Investigation and Contact Tracing Teams
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease
<b>FY</b>	Fiscal Year
<b>LG</b>	Local Government
<b>MoFAGA</b>	Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration
<b>PCR</b>	Polymerase Chain Reaction
<b>PHEIC</b>	Public Health Emergency International Concern
<b>PPE</b>	Personal Protective Equipments
<b>RDT</b>	Rapid Diagnostics Test
<b>SC</b>	Supreme Court
<b>Sec.</b>	Section
<b>SUSASAN</b>	Sustainable Use of Technology for Public Sector Accountability
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation

# Chapter I

## 1. Introduction

### Background

The COVID-19 Pandemic has resulted in a complete lockdown of the general administration as well as public movement across the world. With a severe threat to humankind, the entire focus is now directed into adopting preventive and curative measures. Nepal is not an exception where greater efforts are laid into preventing the transmission of the infection. The nation has been seeing a three-week long lockdown resulting in a complete stoppage of offices, enterprises and all other institutions.

Specifically in the context of local level, the concern of the public at large is more in learning what is being done in their constituency in order to fight the pandemic. The primary focus is at addressing the medical requirements involving testing, isolating and quarantining people. The secondary focus is to address the subsistence of people who live under poverty and or low income. The roles of local government here is even critical as they most of the time engage closely with the daily lives of the people.

The pandemic and the ongoing lockdown will have adverse effects on the lives of the people in the long run. The longer term impact might urge all tiers of governments to bring effective plans and programs. Ensuring that the local governments implement these plans and programs in a transparent, accountable and participatory manner is important.

### Objectives

The Objectives of the study are as follow:

- a. Map and identify roles and responsibilities of local government regarding COVID-19 situation based on legislative provisions, special directives by a higher authority such as federal government, judicial decisions and various anecdotal remarks made by higher authority;
- b. Collect information on the status of past, present or future activities, programs and initiatives related to COVID-19 taken by local governments.
- c. Collect citizen's perception towards local government's activities and roles during COVID-19 crisis.

## 2. Methodology

The study used a combination of desk reviews, consultative meetings, and surveys to collect data and information.



## Desk Review

A comprehensive desk review was conducted to map and identify roles and responsibilities of the local government related to COVID-19 crisis. The desk review was based legislative provisions, special directives by higher authority such as the federal government, judicial decisions and various other anecdotal remarks made by relevant agencies and authorities including Government of Nepal's line ministries and special committees formed to act on COVID-19 crisis in Nepal

The desk review comprises review of following three components:

- a. Federal and local arrangement (statutory) along with judicial decisions (if any) regarding and/or relating to COVID-19 crisis on roles and responsibilities of local government;
- b. Directives issued by authorities with regard to LG's engagement in pandemic control and rehabilitation;
- c. Anecdotal evidence, from higher authority such as the Prime Minister, regarding roles and responsibilities of Local Government in Pandemic.

## Interview with the Information Officers of LGs

Interviews were carried out with the Information Officers of each LGs. These interviews were focused on verifying the status of works and responsibilities of LG as instructed by the Federal Government. These interviews were conducted by partner District Civil Society Organizations (DCSOs) in their respective working areas. The questionnaire consisted of a checklist of roles, responsibilities and duties of LGs during COVID-19 crisis obtained through desk review.

## Consultative meeting

A facilitated joint consultative meeting with the leadership of all 12 LGs was conducted using an online conferencing platform. The purpose of the meeting was to allow concerned authorities to further share their achievements and challenges along with future plans and programs from their concerned LG end. Participants included representatives of 11 LGs (excluding Bagmati Rural Municipality). The initiatives taken by LGs as a response to COVID-19 crisis along with existing problems and limitations were openly shared and discussed during this joint consultative meeting.

## Surveys

Three different surveys were administered to assess the perception of citizens, civil society, and ward representatives.

### **SURVEY-I: CITIZEN**

The respondents of Citizen Survey were the general citizens of all 12 LGs. This survey was conducted to assess and understand the perception of citizens (of all 12 LGs) on various COVID-19 related works and activities of LGs. Because of the limitation on mobility caused by the COVID-19 crisis, Interactive Voice Response (IVR) based voice survey was used to collect data. Respective local DCSOs provided the list of respondents along with their telephone numbers.

### **SURVEY-II: CIVIL SOCIETY MEMBERS**

The respondents of this survey included members of local CSOs working within each of the 12 LGs. This survey was conducted to assess and understand the perception of civil society members (of all 12 LGs) on various COVID-19 related works and activities of LGs. The respondents from 58 different CSOs were part of the survey. The partner DCOSOs provided the list of respondents for the survey.

### **SURVEY-III: WARD REPRESENTATIVES**

The respondents of the survey included elected representatives of the wards within each of the 12 LGs, comprising of elected ward chair and members (women and dalit ward members from each wards) as respondents. This survey was conducted to assess and understand the supply side interventions and their perception on effectiveness of covid related activities .

# Chapter II: Policy Environment

## 3. Local Governance in Nepal

Local governments are the core community-level public entities that exercise authority or carry out governmental functions at the local level. The constitution of Nepal, 2015 provides for three levels of government: Federation, the state and the local level.<sup>2</sup> The village bodies, municipalities and district assemblies come under the local level.<sup>3</sup> In the present context, there are 753 local governments in Nepal which are expected to institutionalize democratic governance at the local level.

The Constitution of Nepal has recognized local government as a part of the constitutionally recognized and largely autonomous polities. This shifts the onus of delivering several constitutional obligations to the local governments.<sup>4</sup> The local governments should operate in a democratic, accountable, and transparent manner to uphold the principles enshrined in the constitution. Furthermore, the constitution also premises upon a unique relationship of local government with the citizens, which we prefer to call a retrofitted “local social contract,” which will evolve into a set of shared mutual expectations and obligations as accountability relationships between them. The local governments are conceived in terms of their direct “social contract” relationship with the local people and in constitutional relationship with other levels of government and constitutional bodies.<sup>5</sup>

## 4. Local Government and COVID-19

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus has created widespread concerns around the world. WHO declared COVID-19 as Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and urged the affected countries to ‘isolate, test, treat and trace’ in order to suppress and control COVID-19.<sup>6</sup> The virus is spreading exponentially resulting in the need to take effective and appropriate measures in time. Nepal has undertaken response-related initiatives to fight against COVID-19, such as procurement of essential supplies, upgrading health infrastructure, building the capacity of medical personnel, spreading awareness and imposing lockdown throughout the country to minimize social contact.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Article 56(1)

<sup>3</sup> Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Article 56(4)

<sup>4</sup> Hari Prasad Dhungana, ‘The Prospect of Accountability in Local Governance in Nepal’, *Journal of Management and Development Studies* Vol. 29, pp 01-19

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> World Health Organization, ‘COVID-19 Public Health Emergency International Concern (PHEIC); Global Research and Innovation Forum: Towards a Research Roadmap’, February, 2020

<sup>7</sup> Dhurba Gautam, ‘Nepal’s Readiness and Response to COVID-19: Key Initiatives, Emergency Challenges, and the Way Forward’, National Disaster Risk Reduction Centre, Kathmandu, Nepal. 2020.

The local governments of Nepal act both as government and service providers in Nepal. The local level governments exercise jurisdictions pursuant to exclusive and concurrent powers enshrined in the constitution. Following are the provisions of the constitution that provides the responsibilities of the local governments in matters related to public health.

- a. **Exclusive Power** - Schedule 8 of the Constitution assigns the powers and responsibilities to the local government. Part 9 and 10 of the schedule authorizes the local government to formulate laws governing basic health and sanitation and laws governing local market management, environment protection, and biodiversity respectively.
- b. **Concurrent Power** - Schedule 9 of the constitution deals with the jurisdictions of powers and responsibilities of the local governments shared with the provincial and federal governments. These powers are required to be acknowledged and assigned through legislative and financing measures at all tiers of the government. Part 3 of the schedule provides all three tiers of government the concurrent responsibility concerning the health sector in Nepal.

Local governments are the closest government units to the grassroots with a responsibility to create an enabling environment for public participation in the decision-making process. The local governments are much closer to the local people and are committed in delivering the public services to the local communities in an efficient, effective, and responsive way. The government of Nepal invoked the Infectious Disease Act, 1964 to address COVID-19 in Nepal.<sup>8</sup> The act was enacted in 1964 by then King Mahendra. Back then there was no concept of federal republic and thus the act does not confer any power on the provincial or the local government. Furthermore, no efforts were taken by the parliament to amend the law in coherence with the federal spirit of the constitution. Sec. 2 of the Act confers power to the government during the epidemic but does not explain the duties of the government in curtailing the outbreak of the infection. It authorizes the government to issue any orders necessary to control or abate the outbreak of infections.

Realizing the value of local government in the COVID-19 response, the cabinet meeting of the Government of Nepal on 29 March 2020 decided on certain roles of the local level during the lockdown period. The Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA) sent a letter to all the local governments for (i) Maintaining the minimal standard of quarantine as per the "Quarantine Operation and Management Protocol (2076)", (ii) To collect data on migrant workers who returned from abroad, (iii) Maintaining social distancing among returnees while living in quarantine, (iv) Providing food to the needy people so as to meet daily food needs (v) Using a single-door system while distributing relief items to affected populations, (vi) Keeping a database of people returning from foreign countries and keeping them in quarantine and updating progress on daily basis, and (vii) Providing personal protective equipment (PPE) to medical persons but not to office bearers of local government.

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<sup>8</sup> Jivesh Jha, 'How Laws in Nepal and India are responding to Coronavirus Outbreak', Lokantar, 26 May, 2020

## 5. Responsibilities of LGs during an emergency situation

There are various existing laws that deal with the responsibilities of local government during the pandemic. The power and responsibilities conferred by existing legal instruments to the local government can be categorized in the following heads:

### Development of Emergency Health Plan

The Constitution of Nepal along with various other legislations provides the local governments with law-making responsibility to address local affairs. The local government can formulate emergency health plans to address the emergency health concerns. The Local Government Operation Act, 2017 in its sec. 11(4) (b) (15) has provided the local governments with the power to develop emergency health and epidemic control plans and implement them accordingly. This responsibility of the local government has also been recognized in sec. 48 (2) of the Public Health Service Act, 2018.

### Declaration of Public Health Emergency

Sec. 48 (4) of the Public Health Service Act provides the local governments in Nepal with the authority to declare a state of public health emergency in accordance with the prevailing laws. However, the information relating to the declaration of a state of public health emergency should be disseminated and transmitted by public medium for all the concerned.

### Provide food in an emergency situation

The right to food is a fundamental right guaranteed by the constitution in Nepal. It is the right of an individual to be protected from a state of starvation, resulting from a lack of food. People have the right to claim food as a matter of right. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that its citizens are protected from hunger in emergency situations. The Right to Food and Food Sovereignty Act, 2018 in sec. 9 provides that the Local Level shall in mutual coordination with the federal government and provincial government adopt necessary measures in order to reduce the adverse impact likely to occur in food and nutrition security for any reason and to provide food immediately in the emergency situation. Furthermore, while making arrangements for food and nutrition during emergency periods, the local level should prioritize and distribute the traditional food that is produced locally (Sec. 10). The Government of Nepal also directed the local governments to provide food to the needy people to meet their basic needs during the pandemic on 29 March 2020.

### Provide information

Every citizen has the right to demand and receive information on any matter of his/her interest or public interest. This right has been guaranteed by the Constitution of Nepal as a fundamental right (Article 27). This right has been further guaranteed by the Right to Information Act, 2007. Sec. 4(2) of the act has entrusted public bodies with the responsibility to make the citizens' access to information simple and easy. Furthermore, sec. 5(3) requires the public body to publish the details of the services rendered by the body every three months to ensure the access of the information to the public. In a

similar manner, according to the Local Government Operation Act (sec. 12(2)(c)), the local bodies have the responsibility to conduct health awareness and health information programs. The responsibility of the local governments to disseminate authentic information relating to COVID-19 has been recognized in the Health Sector Emergency Response Plan developed by the Ministry of Health and Population, Government of Nepal. Moreover, such information must be passed on in local languages and suitable for people with disabilities.

## Case Investigation and Contact Tracing

The local governments are required to conduct studies and investigate the reported case of any infectious disease. In the present context, the Health Sector Emergency Response Plan has directed the local governments to investigate and trace out the cases of COVID-19 in their respective jurisdiction. For this, the local governments can form and mobilize Case Investigation and Contact Tracing Teams (CICTTs). The CICTTs is composed of public health professionals, health workers, and laboratory technicians/assistants. The CICTTs are responsible to perform rapid epidemiological investigations of the clusters and produce analytical reports to inform health actions.

## Emergency Fund Management

The Local Government Operation Act, 2017 mandates the establishment of an emergency fund at the local level governments. The local governments have the power to use the fund during emergency situations. The emergency situation can be defined as a period declared by the Government of Nepal as a situation of emergency at any zone affected by the disaster such as earthquake, flood, landslide, snowfall, epidemics, cold wave or inferno.

## Local Market Management

The local level government has the authority to manage the local market. Part 10 of schedule 8 of the constitution has provided the local governments with the responsibility to formulate laws governing the local market management. In a similar manner, sec. 11(2)(j) of the Local Government Operation Act, 2017 has provided the local government the power to manage the local trade, market, and the temporary market. The local government also has the authority to regulate the supply and export of the local goods along with the determination of the prices. These provisions help to ensure consumer rights and interests. The Consumer Protection Act, 2018 provisions the establishment of the Local Market Monitoring Committee which is responsible for carrying out field inspection and monitoring of the market on the matters relating to the supply system, price, quality, purity of the goods or services. The committee consists of the bodies and consumers under the local level in necessary numbers. Furthermore, a Market Monitoring Team can also be formed to monitor and supervise regularly as to whether any unfair business activity has taken place, the price list is kept or not, and regarding the quality, quantity or price of goods or services

Besides, the local governments in Nepal are also required to comply with the directives issued by the government of Nepal. The government of Nepal formed the COVID Crisis Management Centre (CCMC), chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Defence of the country. CCMC works closely with the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MOFAGA) and has decided on a number

of issues with regards to the engagement of the local governments in pandemic control and rehabilitation and how the local governments are supposed to carry out their workflow. It has made recommendations on how the local governments can carry out the relief activities, manage hospitals, quarantine and isolation facilities, monitor the health security, and ensure the compliance of the directives and orders issued by the Government of Nepal.

A network of CCMC has been set up at the state level and the local level up to the ward level<sup>9</sup>. The mechanism coordinated by the Ward Chairperson is responsible to carry out the relief activities as directed by the Government of Nepal and monitor and manage the record of the infected persons, medical treatment and the supply of basic materials and food to the unemployed.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, various other ministries of the government have issued directives to the local level to prevent and control the pandemic and ensure the accessibility of all citizens in the relief activities of the government. For example, the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens issued directives to give priority to pregnant women, Dalit women, orphan, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities while providing the relief distribution package. Similarly, the Ministry of Finance has appropriated a budget to provide free health check-ups, the establishment of hospitals in each ward of the local level, and distribution of food relief to those in need through the local level.

## Judicial Decisions

The Supreme Court (SC) has issued directives concerning the roles and responsibilities of the local governments during the COVID-19 pandemic. The SC directed the local governments to identify the people who entered Nepal through the air or land routes and arrange quarantine or home quarantine with security measures and to focus on daily wage laborers and people whose income has been affected due to the lockdown while distributing relief materials.<sup>11</sup> The Supreme Court also directed the local levels to collaborate with the government of Nepal to manage transportation of people who were stranded in Kathmandu valley and other city areas and are willing to return to their home.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, the supreme court directed the local governments to be transparent so that any abuse of the relief materials can be avoided.<sup>13</sup> COVID-19 has created disturbances in the economic order of the country. The SC issued the directive to the local governments to work in coordination with the provincial government to make the seeds, fertilizers and agricultural instruments available at the local level free of cost or at concessional rates and promote insurance of agricultural crops and livestock to develop the rural economy as self-sustaining so that this lockdown period can be used as an opportunity to revive the agricultural sector of Nepal.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The smallest administrative unit within local government

<sup>10</sup> Prime Minister's Speech, 7th April, 2020

<sup>11</sup> Writ no. 076-WO-0933, 076-WO-0934, 076-WO-0936 (2076/11/26)

<sup>12</sup> Writ no. 076-WO-0938 (2077/01/05)

<sup>13</sup> Writ no. 076-WO-0933, 076-WO-0934, 076-WO-0936 (2076/11/26)

<sup>14</sup> Writ no. 076-WO-0938 (2077/01/05)

## 6. Accountability of the Local Governments

The local governments are the closest government units connected to citizens at the grassroots. The accountability of the local governments is not limited to their effective and efficient operation. It also concerns the establishment of a trust based relationship between the government officials and the citizens. People should be able to trust that their local government acts responsibly. The local governments exercise authority or carry out governmental functions at the local level. A democratic system can be maintained only if the people's participation in the system of governance is maintained and a system that is in the best interest of the people and is accountable to the people.<sup>15</sup> To ensure the effective implementation of the principles of transparency and accountability, the local governments can disclose the public expenditure, the services they are providing, and how government officials are working to improve the community. Various legal instruments allow citizens to hold local governments accountable for their actions. The core reason behind the accountability of the local governments towards people is to ensure that any institutions that use public money and make decisions that affect people's lives can be held responsible for their actions. The Constitution of Nepal and the Local Government Operation Act, 2017 are the key legal documents that shape the accountability system of local government in Nepal. However, other sets of laws, the Commission of Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) Act 1991, Financial Procedures Act 1999, Audit Act 1991, Public Procurement Act 2007, Right to Information Act 2007 and Good Governance (Management and Operation) Act 2007 also deal with the legal arrangements on government accountability.

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<sup>15</sup> Advocate Chandrakanta Gyawali and others v. Prime Minister and Council of Ministers (NKP 2074, DN 9770)



# Chapter III: Findings and Analysis

## 7. Local Arrangement and Innovations: Key Initiatives

In light of the provisions of the Constitution, Acts, Rules, Regulations, and the directives issued by the government, the local levels have undertaken the responsibility to address the COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal. The local governments have adopted various innovative measures to address the pandemic at their own initiative. As per the data obtained from the consultative meetings with the local representatives and the information officers of 12 local governments of Nepal, the major steps were taken by the LGs to prevent and control the pandemic can be enlisted as below:

- a. Establishment and management of quarantine and isolation facilities.
- b. Formation of a Committee on Disaster Risks through which monetary assistance, food, and other basic necessities have been distributed to people in need.
- c. The local governments have appropriated a budget for the fiscal year 2077-78 (2020-21 A.D) focusing on COVID-19 to purchase medicine, PCR test machines, and PPE along with the upliftment of marginalized and vulnerable groups affected by the pandemic.
- d. The LGs have been conducting awareness programs to inform people of the risks of COVID-19 and the measures adopted by the LG to address the pandemic, the relief programs, and the health facilities. The 'COVID Transparency Portal'<sup>16</sup> has been used for the effective flow of information.
- e. Lack of PCR machine and RDT test kits caused problems in tracing the COVID-19 infected persons. And thus, to make PCR testing of COVID-19 rapid and feasible, 12 local governments of Bajhang district decided to buy new PCR machines themselves.
- f. To motivate the health workers working continuously during the pandemic, Sunkoshi Rural Municipality had increased their salary of 4 months within the lockdown period by 70%.<sup>17</sup>
- g. Corona Health Insurance has been provided to frontline health workers.

To ensure the accountability and transparency in the steps taken by LGs to prevent and tackle COVID-19, the LGs are publishing the activities being conducted on the website of the LG, official Facebook page, and the data portal of the municipalities with an intention to inform the public. Furthermore, the report of total expenditures made by the LGs is also presented in the executive meeting of the municipalities and press releases are conducted from time to time.

The LGs faced various challenges while addressing the pandemic. The challenges include:

- a. Difficulty in making the local communities understand the precautions to be taken to prevent the spread of the virus
- b. Initially, LGs lacked the manpower and adequate resources to handle the situation and manage the influx of people returning from abroad and from other parts of the country

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<sup>16</sup> COVID Transparency Portal of the local local governments ensure transparency and citizen engagement during the pandemic. The portal ensures publication of real time data on aid pledged and received. The portal is updated with data of hotspots like status of the infected in local level, isolation & quarantine centers, health facilities, ambulances, government committees and other relevant materials. Also, the portal provides a mechanism of self-evaluation of symptoms by citizens to which the health unit can respond.

<sup>17</sup> Statement from Deputy Vice-Chairperson of Sunkoshi Rural Municipality

- c. Inability to distribute sufficient relief materials to workers of the unorganized sector.
- d. Many LGs had been using schools and colleges as quarantine centers. However, there is a problem in choosing an alternative location for quarantine facilities as the issue of reopening the school remains.

## 8. Citizen perception on activities of LG regarding their response to COVID-19 crisis

<b>Name</b>	Survey - Citizen Perception
<b>Data Collection Method</b>	Structured Questionnaire
<b>Tool</b>	IVR based Voice Survey
<b>Location</b>	12 Local Government where Susasan project is implemented
<b>Population Size</b>	The total population of citizens of 12 Local Governments
<b>Sampling Method</b>	Convenience Sampling <sup>18</sup>
<b>Sample Size of Respondents</b>	920
<b>Response rate</b>	25.5 % (235)
<b>Survey Date</b>	1st July to 29th July 2020

The leaders at LGs are at the forefront of the public sector response to the COVID-19 crisis in Nepal. While the response effort has been from all levels of government (Federal, Provincial and Local) and there involves some complexities of the web of concurrent efforts by all levels of government, the LGs are at the center, because of their visibility and reach to the ultimate recipient, ie the citizens of such response effort. Also, it is to be noted that the Federal Government has been pursuing and using LG and their mechanism to implement its relief and response effort on COVID-19 related activities.

In this chapter, we draw insights from the responses of 235 citizens to shed light on citizen's views and/or assessment on the activities of their LG regarding LG's relief and other activities in response to COVID-19 crisis.

The analysis calls attention to the key findings as follow:

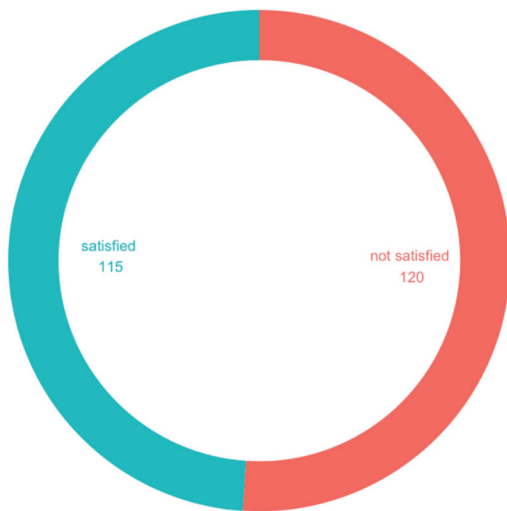
### Majority of citizens are not satisfied as well as not aware of the activities of LG related to COVID-19 crisis

The majority (51.06%) of the respondents reported that they are not satisfied with the activities of LG (see Figure 8.1). Likewise, a significant proportion (47.23 %) of the respondents reported they were not aware of any relief activities (in response to the COVID-19 crisis) run by LG (see Figure 8.2). It is to be noted that all LG had run a relief program along with other activities regarding the COVID-19 crisis before the survey was conducted.

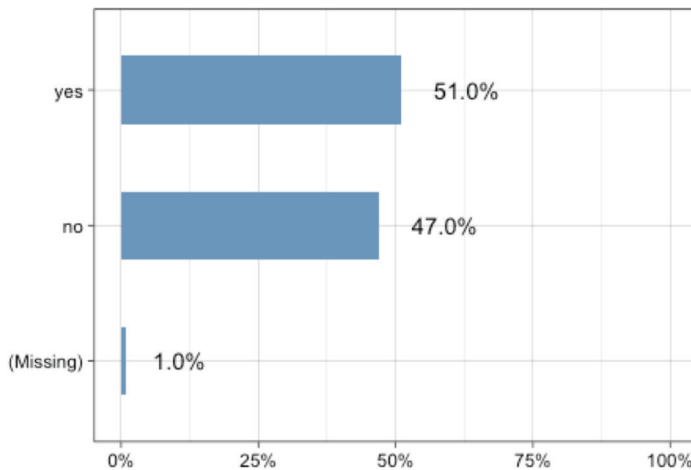
<sup>18</sup> Phone numbers of the respondent were obtained from various partner CSOs of each Local Government.

These responses could indicate a gap in information dissemination in LGs part regarding their relief program. , It could also indicate a possible inefficiency in conducting disaster response programs by LG. While citizen’s expectations from LG could be higher than that of a need assessment made by the government with available resources, the complete unawareness of the relief program (which is a major component of COVID-19 related response by LG) should be concerning.

**FIGURE 8.1:** Satisfaction over actions carried out by local governments for combating and controlling the impact of COVID 19



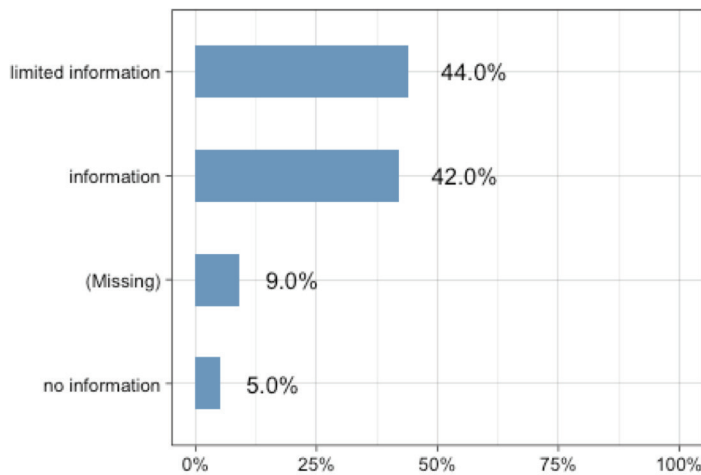
**FIGURE 8.2:** Informed public regarding the relief activities conducted by their local governments



**Of respondents who are aware of relief programs, only a few didn’t have information on details of the relief program**

Of 121 respondents who had information on relief programs only 6 (4.96%), did not have information on the details (where and how) of such relief programs run by LG (see Figure 8.3). This indicates that if LG is successful in disseminating its programs, most of the population would have important information about the details of such a program.

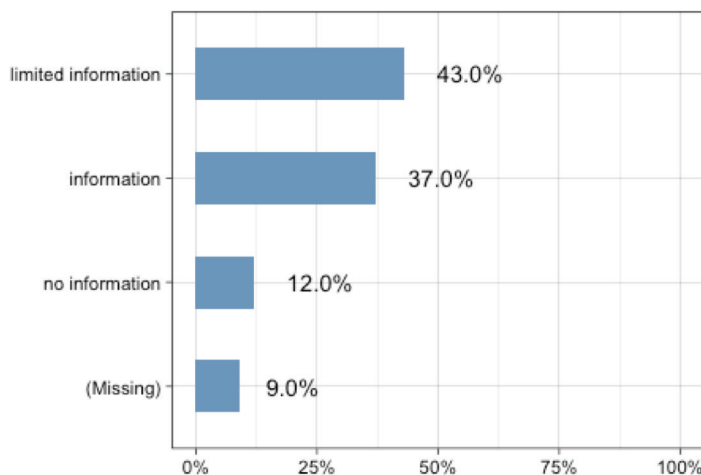
**FIGURE 8.3:** Access to information on where and how the relief is being distributed



### A significant proportion of respondents have no or limited information about the roles and responsibilities of LG

12 % of the respondents are not informed at all of the roles and responsibilities of LG, while 43 % of respondents had limited information (see Figure 8.4). The information on the roles and responsibilities of a government is an important component for a functioning democracy as well as for holding the government accountable for their works. Lack of information on the roles and responsibilities of LG regarding COVID-19 among citizens could indicate a situation where it would be difficult for citizens to hold LG accountable for their works regarding COVID-19 response.

**FIGURE 8.4:** Informed public regarding the duties and responsibilities of local governments for combating and controlling COVID 19 Pandemic

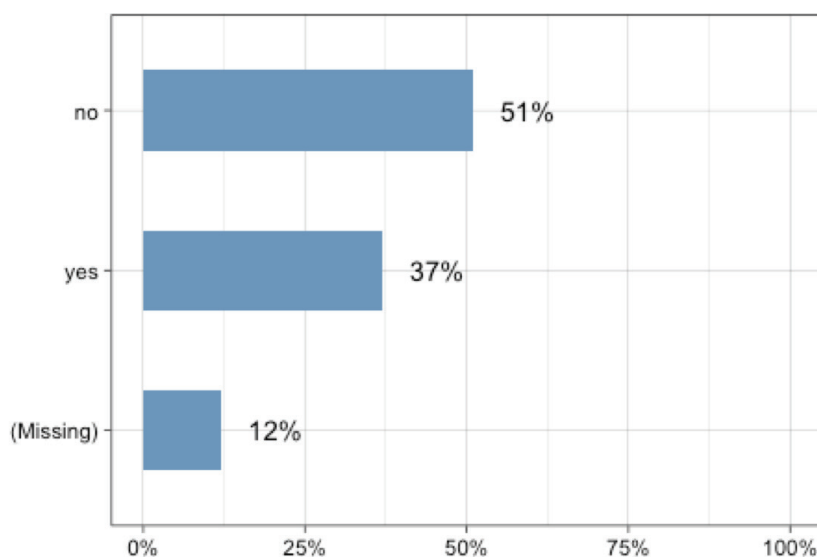


### Lack of trust

A majority (51%) of respondents reported that they didn't think their political representatives at LG were working in a fair manner (see Figure 8.5). Trust on the elected representatives is important for LG to

effectively conduct their programs and activities. This lack of trust could indicate possible ineffective programs and activities regarding COVID-19 response by LGs.

**FIGURE 8.5:** Public perception if their local governments have been working in a fair manner amid COVID 19 Pandemic



## 9. Survey of Civil Society respondents

<b>Name</b>	Survey - Civil Society Perception
<b>Data Collection Method</b>	Structured Questionnaire
<b>Location</b>	12 Local Government where SUSASAN is active
<b>Population Size</b>	Civil Society (CSOs) members of 58 organizations in 12 LG where SUSASAN is active
<b>Sampling Method</b>	Convenience Sampling
<b>Sample Size of Respondent</b>	60
<b>Response rate</b>	98.3% (59)
<b>Survey Date</b>	24th June - 4th July 2020

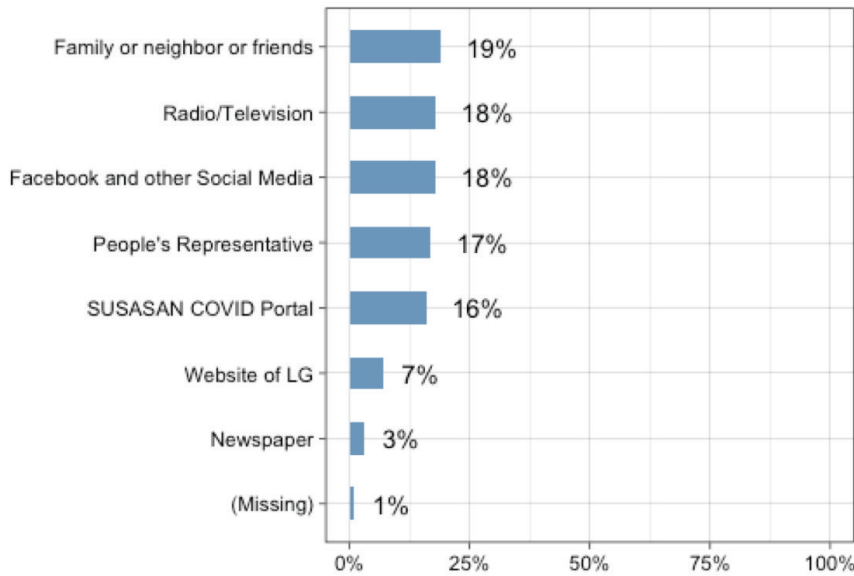
The analysis calls attention to the key findings as follow:

### Digital Media as a medium of information

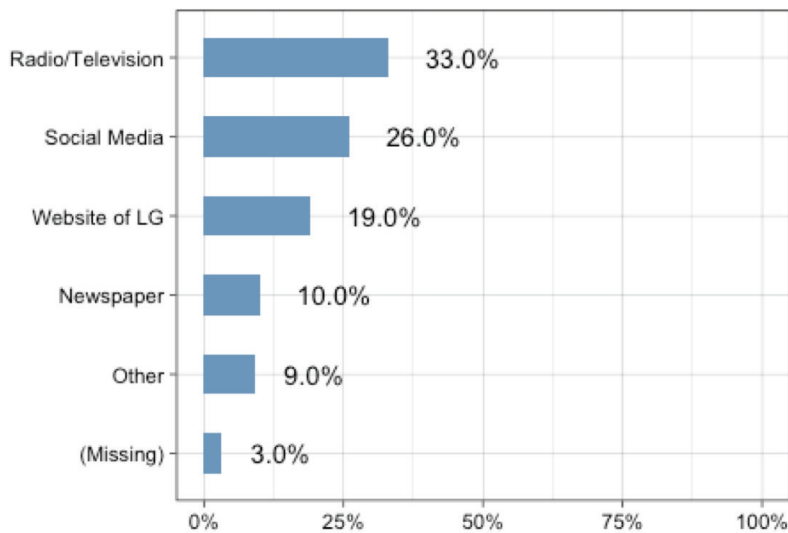
A significant proportion of the respondent (i.e 41 %) reported that they came to know about the works and activities of LG on COVID-19 through various digital media sources (based on the internet) such as the website of the LG, social media (such as Facebook) and COVID Transparency Portal (see Figure 9.1). It is to be noted that the source of information for 16% of the respondent was reported to be the COVID Transparency Portal.

Likewise, 45 % of the respondents reported that digital mediums such as social media and websites would be an effective medium for the learn about the activities of the LG (see Figure 9.2) . The response could indicate that digital penetration is significant and if used the impact can be maximized.

**FIGURE 9.1:** Mostly used medium to learn about the activities of local governments whilst combating and controlling COVID 19 Pandemic



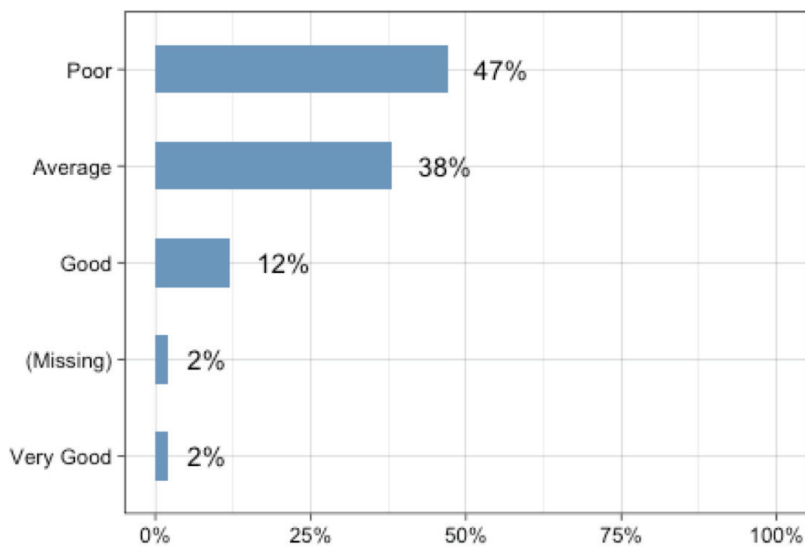
**FIGURE 9.2:** Preferred medium to assess information regarding the activities of local governments



## LG is not transparent in its activities

A significant proportion of the respondent reported that LG is not transparent in its activities (see Figure 9.3). A total of 47 % of respondents rated “poor” to the transparency effort made by LG on its activities related to the response to COVID-19. Transparency remains the fundamental building block of good governance standards; it is also directly related to the accountability mechanism with a system. A “poor” rating on transparency could indicate poor institutional mechanisms within LG towards making its works and activities transparent to the public.

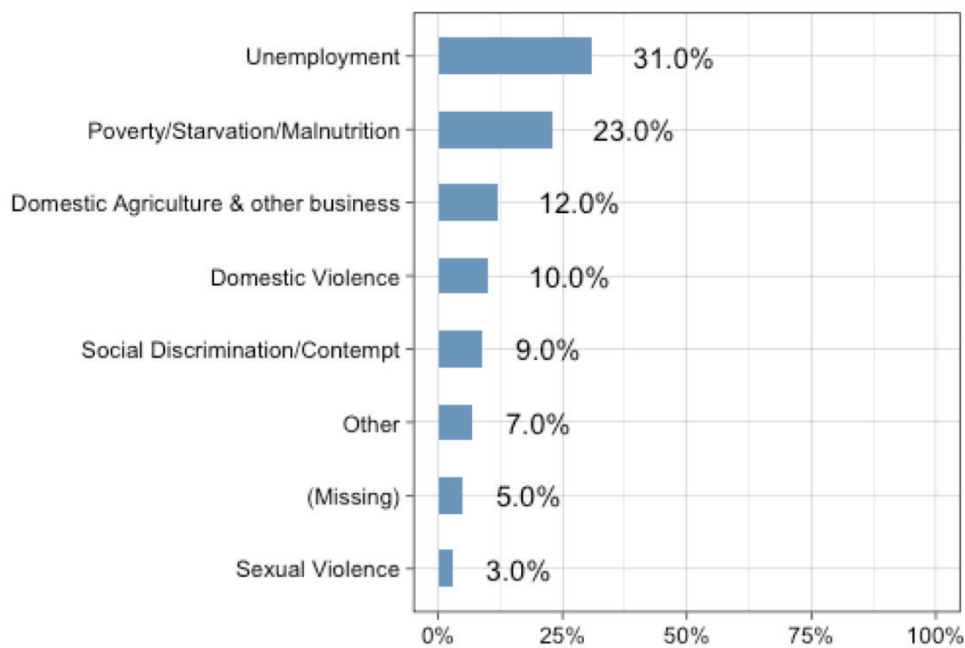
**FIGURE 9.3:** Evaluation regarding dissemination of expenses and activities in a transparent manner



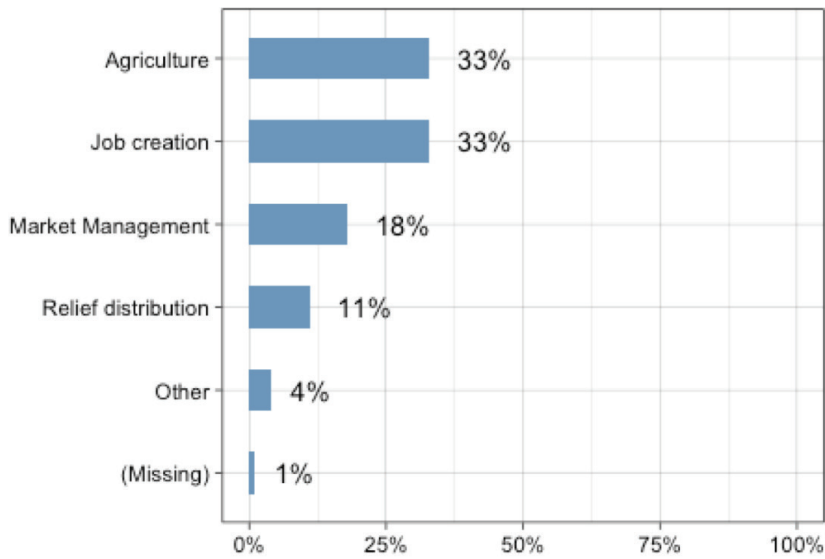
### Unemployment and Food security should be of major focus

The majority of respondents have reported unemployment and food security (poverty, starvation, and malnutrition) as an area of risk(see Figure 9.4). Likewise, such thoughts are consistent regarding priority areas for next FY (see Figure 9.5). This could indicate the loss of jobs because of COVID-19 pandemic and therefore causing possible hardship in day to day survival of people because of diminished income.

**FIGURE 9.4:** Apparent risks that is possible in the reason together with COVID 19 Pandemic



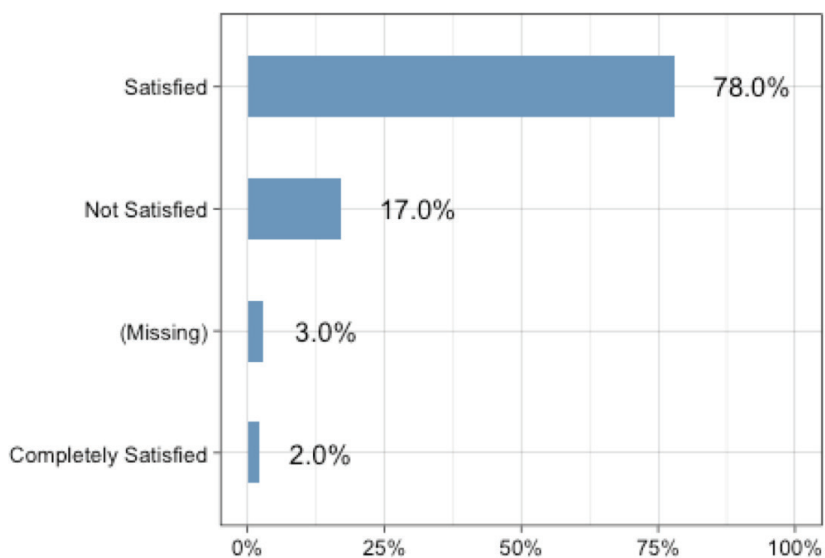
**FIGURE 9.5:** Suggested focus area in addition to health services that local governments should focus in upcoming years



### Trust on LG regarding protective measures

Majority of respondents reported that they are satisfied with the protective measures taken by LG regarding possible COVID-19 outbreak (see Figure 9.6). This could indicate that civil society is watchful of positive activities of LGs.

**FIGURE 9.6:** Satisfaction on the activities of local governments for controlling the spread of COVID-19 infections





# 10. Survey of Ward Representatives

<b>Name</b>	Survey - Views of Ward Representative
<b>Data Collection Method</b>	Interview
<b>Location</b>	12 Local Government where SUSASAN is active
<b>Population Size</b>	Total Elected Ward Representative of all the Wards of 12 Local Governments where SUSASAN is Active
<b>Sampling Method</b>	Convenience Sampling <sup>19</sup>
<b>Sample Size of Respondent</b>	72
<b>Response rate</b>	95.8% (69)
<b>Survey Date</b>	4th June to 24th July 2020

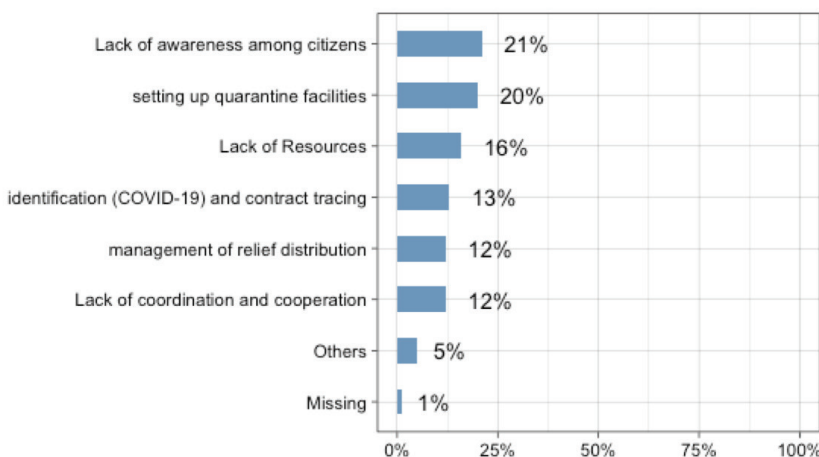
The analysis calls attention to the key finding as follow:

## Insufficient Resources and awareness among citizens as impediment

Majority of the respondents reported that the lack of resources was a major challenge faced (see Figure 10.1). It should be noted that ‘setting up quarantine facilities’ could be related to the resources. Also 21 % of the respondents reported that there is lack of awareness among citizens. Lack of awareness among citizens being considered as a challenge to Ward representatives could indicate the possible failure of LG in raising awareness among citizens regarding the matter.

It is further noted that many of the LGs initially faced the problem of lack of resources (both financial and human resource) during the initial days of COVID-19 crisis. This has been substantiated by the consultative meeting<sup>20</sup> with representatives from LGs<sup>21</sup>.

**FIGURE 10.1:** Major challenges faced while carrying out relief distribution and other activities



<sup>19</sup> For a purpose of the survey, respondents i.e. ward representatives were identified by virtue of gender and political affiliation. For example, specific to political affiliation, the ward representatives other than the ruling party in the municipal executive were identified.

<sup>20</sup> Meeting was held virtually on 6th July, 2020, Monday

<sup>21</sup> See Annex I

## Special Arrangement for vulnerable group

The respondents reported that special arrangements were made regarding women, children, senior citizens among others. Separate Quarantine facilities, and special health care facilities for pregnant women were arranged. Likewise, remote learning and special nutrition programs were arranged in case of children. It is to be noted that most of such arrangements were recommended and instructed by the federal government, however, actual arrangements indicate the seriousness among local representatives on the issue of social protection of vulnerable groups during COVID-19 crisis.

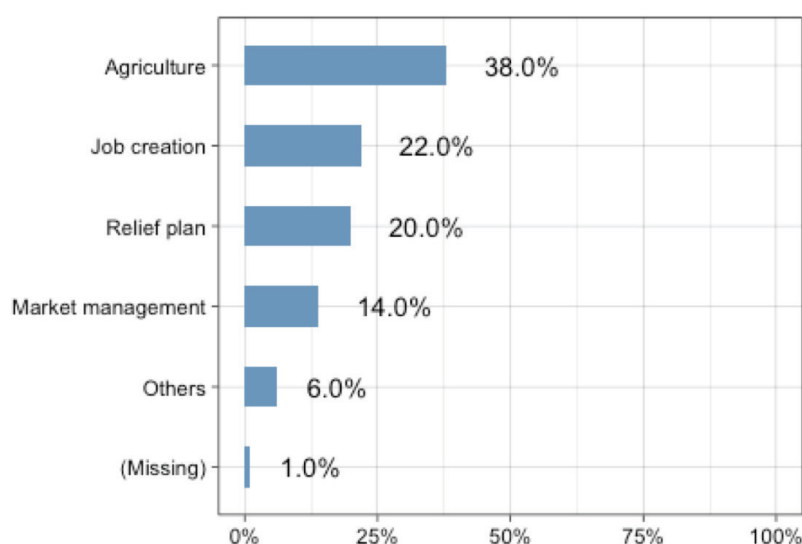
The representatives of LGs, in the consultative meeting<sup>22</sup>, confirmed that they have appropriated budget for the FY 2077-78 focusing on COVID-19 for the purchase of medicine, PCR test machines and PPE along with the upliftment of marginalized and vulnerable groups affected by the pandemic<sup>23</sup>.

## Agriculture in priority for post-COVID-19 recovery and resilience effort

38% of the respondents reported that Agriculture should be prioritized in plans and programs for next FY. The excess priority given to agriculture by the Ward Representatives could indicate the impending food scarcity and poor food security status at the local level because of COVID-19 crisis. It also could indicate the foresight shown by the elected representative in protecting their citizens from the further aggravated crisis because of COVID-19 crisis.

The rapid influx of citizens from foreign employment at LG could have triggered concern regarding Agricultural safety and employment.

**FIGURE 10.2:** Suggested focus area in addition to health services of local governments and ward in specific should in upcoming years



<sup>22</sup> Held on 6th July, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> See Annex I for a summary of the Consultative meetings.

## 11. Survey on status of implementation of decisions made by the federal government regarding COVID-19 crisis

<b>Name</b>	Survey - Implementation of Decision at LG
<b>Data Collection Method</b>	Structured Questionnaire
<b>Location</b>	12 LG where SUSASAN is active
<b>Population Size</b>	12 Information Officer of 12 LG
<b>Sampling Method</b>	Total Population sampling
<b>Sample Size of Respondent</b>	12
<b>Response rate</b>	100%
<b>Survey Date</b>	27th June 2020

The findings of the interview indicate that the majority of the instructions made by the Federal Government regarding COVID-19 response to the LG were adhered to. On only 8 such instructions (among 28) made by the Federal Government, the implementation was in fewer than 10 LGs (Among 12). The lowest implementation rate is regarding preparation of isolation wards with a minimum number of ventilators at Local Level. Likewise, the implementation rate regarding disinfecting public places with disinfectant is also relatively lower. This could indicate possible unavailability of adequate human, physical and financial resources.

**FIGURE 11.1:** No of LG that implemented instructions provided by Federal Government regarding COVID-19

