

COVID-19 & Nepali Civil Society Organizations:

Impact, Responses & Opportunities



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Opportunities

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COVID-19 and Nepali Civil Society Organizations: Impact, Responses, and Opportunities

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Foreword

COVID-19 pandemic has multifarious impacts globally. It started at the end of 2019 and has since been spreading through multiple waves; impacting health, economy, human wellbeing and security, mobility, and human rights.

In this context, assessment of the actual impact of the pandemic to different sectors and accordingly the recovery strategy or plans have been important. NGO Federation of Nepal (NFN), an umbrella organization of more than 6000 NGOs in Nepal, has observed the impact especially on the CSOs/NGOs. Therefore, to assess the magnitude of this impact, to understand the response activities and coping mechanisms of CSOs, to understand CSOs' perception of the government's response to COVID-19 and to find out CSOs' perception on the state of freedom of expression and freedom of association during COVID-19 in Nepal, NFN commissioned this 'Impact Study of COVID-19 in CSOs in Nepal'.

The report shows that most of the CSOs reported a reduction in their ability to deliver programs and services; organizations with advocacy-based programs were more impacted. The report also illustrates significant decrease in the registration of new CSOs. Funding sources, availability of fund for regular programs and the availability of funds for response to COVID-19 were all low. The report further demonstrates that the CSOs were not much satisfied with the efforts of

federal and province level governments; but relatively more satisfied with the efforts of local governments. Regarding the freedom of expression and freedom of association, CSOs working in urban areas felt better freedom of expression compared to the organizations working in rural Nepal. The detailed read of the report shows more interesting data, facts, analyses, explanations and illustrations of the findings. Therefore, I would suggest all the CSOs and CSO leaders to use this report for designing programs, reference, advocacy and responses to COVID-19 in Nepal.

We hope this report will be valuable to all the CSOs and stakeholders in Nepal and beyond. We hope this report is accessible to the stakeholders and anyone interested in this area and it provides an opportunity to reflect on and recover from the impacts of COVID-19 on CSOs. Moreover, we expect an increased role of CSOs during this pandemic, reaching out to the rural areas and most affected sections of the society. NFN will also seriously consider the findings and take necessary measures in response to and recover from COVID-19.

My sincere gratitude goes to Mr. Dipendra KC, his team and NFN Secretariat for their relentless work to bring this report to this excellent form. I would heartily like to thank all the CSOs that managed their time to participate in this study. I would like to appreciate the support provided by Deputy Chief of Party, Mr. Prem Ojha and Senior Law Policy and Human Rights Advisor, Mr. Tanka Aryal from CS:MAP (Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project), FHI 360 to conduct this study. Finally, I would like to thank FHI 360 and USAID for supporting us to conduct this study through the CS:MAP project.

Jit Ram Lama

President

NGO Federation of Nepal

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Acryonms

| | |
|----------------|--|
| AGM | Annual General Meeting |
| AIN | Association of International NGOs in Nepal |
| CCMC | COVID-19 Crisis Management Center |
| CS:MAP | Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project |
| DAO | District Administration Office |
| DHS | Department of Health Services |
| DRR | Disaster Risk Reduction |
| FHI 360 | Family Health International |
| GA | General Agreement |
| GESI | Gender Equity and Social Inclusion |
| ICU | Intensive Care Unit |
| INGO | International Non Governmental Organization |
| KII | Key Informant Interview |
| MoF | Ministry of Finance |
| MoHP | Ministry of Health and Population |
| MOWCSC | Ministry of Women Children and Senior Citizens |
| NFN | NGO Federation of Nepal |
| NGO | Non Governmental Organization |
| PA | Program Agreement |
| PCA | Principal Component Analysis |
| PPE | Personal Protective Equipment |
| RT-PCR | Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction |
| SOP | Standard Operating Procedure |
| SWC | Social Welfare Council |
| ToR | Terms of Reference |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| WHO | World Health Organization |

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Executive summary

Impact on CSOs

1. Eighty-seven percent of CSOs reported a reduction in their ability to deliver programs and services. As the situation of pandemics improved, organizations also reported a slight improvement in their ability to provide services. While there was a slight improvement in the capacity of CSOs, 58 percent of CSOs still reported a decline in their ability to deliver regular programming.
2. Fourteen percent of the organizations reported their program/services came to a complete halt. This is an alarming finding. This indicates that approximately 1400 CSOs could not continue with their program and services for nearly a year.
3. Advocacy-oriented organizations reported a slightly greater impact on their ability to deliver regular programs and services.
4. COVID-19 has affected the registration of new CSOs. There was an 89 percent decline in new CSO registration in 2076-2077 than 2075-2076. Similarly, there was an 8 percent decline in new project approvals.

Concerns

1. Six out of ten CSOs expressed were worried they would not meet the registration/renewal deadlines.
2. Four out of ten CSOs were either moderately or very concerned they might have to lay off their employees over a long period. Similarly, half of the organizations are concerned they will not be able to pay their operating expenses.
3. Half of the CSOs are concerned that they will not be able to manage the increased demand for their services. Similarly, more than half of the CSOs are also worried that they will not be able to meet face-to-face with the community they serve.
4. Most CSOs have switched to special AGM or online AGMs due to restrictions imposed by COVID-19.

Funding

1. Only four out of ten CSOs received some form of funding to carry out covid response activities.
2. Ten percent of the SWC approved projects were for COVID-19 response and recovery in FY 2076-2077. The approved projects accounted for 1.3 percent (USD 2.02 million) of the total approved budget of USD 151.85 Million.
3. Despite the growth in number of projects, the funding percentage approved for COVID-19 is relatively lower than other projects. Only 5.1 percentage of the total approved amount was for COVID-19. The relatively larger number of projects and a smaller share in amount indicate relatively smaller-sized and fragmented projects for COVID-19.
4. Sixty-eight percent of the funded organizations received funding from INGOs, followed by 33 percent from the government and 24.7 percent from the membership fees.
5. The share of funding from the INGOs increased by 14 percent compared to the organization's budget last year. On the other hand, the percentage of funding from the government declined by 17 percent.
6. Funding from private organizations increased by 5 percent during COVID-19. However, in totality, the contribution of the private sector for CSOs remains relatively low.
7. There is a bias towards service delivery organizations when it comes to funding. For example, 71 percent of service delivering organizations received grants from INGOs compared to 56 percent of advocacy organizations.
8. Six out of ten donors organizations' encouraged them to speak freely on the issues and challenges their organization and communities were facing and sought areas they could help.
9. Only one out of ten organizations felt that their donor demonstrated any commitment to invest in strengthening the organization's digital capacity and infrastructure.

CSO Response

1. Nepalese CSOs contributed approximately USD 30 million during the first wave of covid outbreaks.

2. Over 40,000 volunteers contributed voluntarily during the pandemic. Similarly, approximately 50,000 paid staff were involved in response and recovery during the first wave of COVID-19.
3. The CSOs provided approximately 15,700 sets of PPE and other sanitation kits during the first wave of the pandemic.
4. The top three response activities include: distribution of sanitation kits, generating awareness, and sensitizing communities.
5. Eight out of ten CSOs reported serving people from the Dalit community. Similarly, six out of ten CSOs provided support to indigenous people.

Perception on the response from the government

1. CSO leaders, in general, are not very satisfied with the government on their COVID-19 containment measures. On a scale of 1 to 5, the mean satisfaction score was 2.74, indicating a relatively lower level of satisfaction.
2. CSOs in Province 2 reported the lowest level of satisfaction. On the other hand, CSOs from Karnali province expressed a better level of satisfaction.
3. CSOs expressed they were relatively more satisfied with the local governments' effort than the efforts of provincial and federal governments.

Perception on freedom of expression and association

1. Respondents from Provinces 1, 2, Bagmati, and Karnali, perceived better freedom of expression compared to Lumbini, Gandaki, and Sudurpaschim Province.
2. Urban CSO leaders felt better freedom of expression compared to their rural counterparts.
3. Smaller (< 25) and medium-sized organizations (25 - 50) leaders felt better freedom of expression compared to the leaders of larger organizations (> 50).
4. Organizations working in advocacy were more critical of the state of freedom of expression compared to service delivery organizations. Similar differences were observed between female-led organizations and male-led organizations, where females were more critical than men.

Emerging opportunities

1. Six out of ten organizations networked with fellow CSOs and conducted several online meetings and charted the course for their response.
2. Some organizations have created loose networks among the organizations to offer innovative solutions during the pandemic.
3. More than half of the organizations also prepared a post-pandemic operational strategy for their organization.
4. One in three organizations also accelerated the adoption of digital technologies for their work.



While CSOs are often understood as service delivery agents, it is equally important to acknowledge and understand the critical advocacy and watchdog role these organizations play against the state's power and the market. This report also aims to delve deeper into the state of freedom of expression and association in Nepal and how CSOs perceive it.

Introduction

Background

COVID-19, the disease caused by a new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, has become a global crisis. As of May 25, 2021 over 166 million COVID-19 cases were confirmed, resulting in more than 3.4 million deaths worldwide (WHO, 2021). Nepal alone has over five hundred thirty thousand PCR tested positive cases and over six thousand seven hundred deaths (MoHP, 2021). Although the government of Nepal continues to grapple with the public health and socio-economic challenges posed by the pandemic, civil society engagement is

In addition to relief, organizations were involved in distributing relief material and sanitation kits, generating awareness and sensitizing communities, managing health screening camps and isolation facilities hand-in-hand with the government.

essential in providing services during extreme events.

Studies outline civil society's crucial role in fighting against this proliferating infectious disease, either by reinforcing gov-

ernment-led efforts or filling institutional voids left by the government in many countries. For example, civil society in Japan responded by service provisioning, information dissemination, and advocacy. Similarly, South Korean civil society responded by providing charitable donations, service provisioning, and advocacy (Cai, Okada, Jeong, & Kim, 2021). Similar evidence was observed in neighboring India, where over two-thirds of Not for Profit Organizations (NPOs) were engaged in relief work during the first wave of COVID-19. In addition to

relief, organizations were involved in distributing relief material and sanitation kits, generating awareness and sensitizing communities, managing health screening camps and isolation facilities hand-in-hand with the government. They were also active in supporting stranded migrants and rehabilitating village communities (CSIP, 2020).

Although Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are in the frontline of crisis response, they often do not get recognition for the vital work they do. Like any other organization, CSOs are not exempt from the effect of the pandemic. Their mobility was stifled, and their operations were significantly reduced with the onset of the virus and subsequent movement restrictions imposed by the government. During the first wave of the pandemic, nine out of ten Nepali CSOs reported either a halt in the services they provided or a significant reduction in the services they offered in the first month of the nationwide lockdown (K C, Bhandari, & Mahat, 2020). There is a dearth of studies that document the vital contribution these organizations have and the adversities they face in doing so. Most of the existing studies are cross-sectional and often do not capture a longitudinal effect of the pandemic on CSOs. Hence, this study aims to document the long-term impact of COVID-19 on CSOs and their response activities.

NGO Federation of Nepal initiated this study to document the impact of the COVID-19 on CSOs, response activities carried out by the organizations, and to explore emerging opportunities for CSOs.

The study has the following key objectives:



Objectives of the study

1. To assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on CSOs.
2. To understand the response activities carried and coping mechanisms adopted by CSOs.
3. To understand CSOs' perception of the government's response to COVID-19 during the pandemic.
4. To illustrate CSOs' perception of the state of freedom of expression and freedom of association during COVID-19

While this study aims to be comprehensive in documenting the role of civil society in extreme events like the pandemic, it has certain limitations.



Limitations of the study

1. The study fundamentally covers the registered CSOs and not for profit companies. Other civil society actors like universities, press, trade unions, labor unions are not covered in this study.
2. Relatively smaller sample size and lack of coverage of other civil society actors pose the challenge to generalize the findings to broader civil society strongly. Despite the limitation, this study provides valuable exploratory information.
3. The data collection process for this study concluded at the onset of the second wave of COVID-19 outbreak. Hence, the study will not cover the efforts of civil society during the second wave of the pandemic extensively.



Structure of the report

The report is divided into eight major parts. The first section of the report presents the background and objectives of the study, followed by the study methodology. The third section of the study covers the legal and policy context for CSOs. In the subsequent section, the report presents the impact pandemic had on CSOs registration and renewal, program delivery, funding, as well as explores how organizations pivoted and responded. The fourth section of the report presents the important contribution Nepali CSOs made during the pandemic. It is then followed by a critical assessment of the state of freedom and expression and CSO's perception during the pandemic. The second last section of the report explores CSOs' perception of the government's ability to handle the pandemic. The study ends with a conclusion and set of recommendations for CSOs, donors, and the governments.

Study Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach in understanding the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs, response by these organizations, and to document emerging opportunities for CSOs. The unit of analysis was registered NGOs, profit not distributing companies, and associations and federation. This study included organizations registered as non-governmental organizations, associations and federations, and profit not distributing companies in the study.

Primary Data

Population and sample

This study used the NGO affiliation registration database from the Social Welfare Council, the database of members of the NGO federation, and the registration information of profit not distributing companies from the company registrar's office. All three databases were merged, which resulted in 57,967 organizations, 96.9 percent of the population were registered as NGOs, and the rest 3.1 percent were registered as profit not distributing companies.

Sampling technique

A simple random sampling technique was used in identifying the organizations to participate in the survey. The following formulae was used the following formula to determine the sample size:

$$n = \frac{z^2 p(1-p)}{e^2}$$

The margin of error (e) was +/- 5%, which is also often known as the confidence interval. A confidence level of 95% was used; this value indicates that our mean would fall within our confidence interval of +/-5%. The corresponding z -score of 95% confidence level is 1.96. The study used a 0.5 standard of deviation (p) in calculating the sample size.

The formulae resulted in a sample size of 384 organizations.

Response rate

KoBoToolbox was used to deploy a web survey. The organization's board members and executive directors were invited through an email to participate in the survey between December 1, 2020, to April 15, 2021. Participants of the study received a reminder email and phone call. A total of 800 organizations were invited to participate in the study, out of which 301 organizations participated. The total response rate of the survey was 37.63%. Twenty-seven entries with incomplete information were dropped, only 274 valid samples were considered for the study. The response rate is slightly lower than the 38.9% response rate of web surveys suggested by the literature (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). However, the response rate of the survey was lesser than the earlier round of a similar survey. It might be because the first round of the survey was conducted during the lockdown period, while the second-round study was conducted when such a restriction in mobility was not enforced.

Data collection instrument

This study adapted the survey instrument developed by K C, Bhandari, and Mahat (2020b). It further added questions to understand the nature of the effect on CSOs, response activities carried out, donor relationship, organization change and pivot as well the perception of CSOs on the freedom of expression and overall satisfaction with the handling of the crisis by the government. The survey was translated into the Nepali language, and the respondents were given a bilingual survey. Two independent researchers checked the accuracy of the translation. Two organizations were asked to participate and provide feedback before deploying it to other participants.

The survey instrument is presented in the appendix.

Statistical analyses

The study used SPSS to perform a statistical analysis of the data. It mainly relied on descriptive statistics to analyze the data. The study reports Mean and Standard Deviations of continuous variables, while frequency count and percentage are reported for the categorical variables.

Scale constructions

In addition, several scales are constructed during the data analysis. The study performed a principal component analysis (PCA) of 23 questionnaire items to identify key constructs. The PCA resulted in five key constructs with an Eigenvalue greater than 1. However, after careful consideration of factor loadings of each item on each construct, the study derived four key constructs. The constructs were then named the CSO vulnerability scale, government response satisfaction scale, freedom of expression scale, and marginalized community concern scale. The internal reliability of the scales ranged from 0.78 to 0.89, indicating good internal reliability (see table below).

The CSO vulnerability index measures the vulnerability of CSOs to shocks and their ability to cope with sudden changes in their organizational environment. The scale is measured on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating the highest level of vulnerability and 5 indicating the least level of vulnerability. The construct is calculated using the items mentioned below. Each item was measured on a five-point Likert scale:

1. Loss of funding
2. Having to layoff employees
3. Delayed grant processing for a program/general operating support
4. Inability to pay rent/operating expenses
5. Decline in donations
6. Inability to meet registration/renewal requirements

7. Increased demand for service
8. Restricted movement of staff
9. Reduced face-to-face community interactions

The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.88, indicating good internal reliability among the items measuring the construct.

The government response satisfaction scale measures the satisfaction of CSOs with the relief and response activities carried out by different levels of the government. The scale measures the satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 meaning least level of satisfaction and 5 indicating the highest level of satisfaction with the government actions. The scale was constructed using six items measured on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. The items are:

1. How transparent and accountable do you think your local government is in providing relief materials?
2. How effectively do you think your local government is managing the health care facilities (quarantine/isolation and other health facilities)?
3. Overall, how satisfied are you with the level of coordination by the local government with the CSOs?
4. Overall, how satisfied are you with the performance of the local government in containing COVID-19?
5. Overall, how satisfied are you with the performance of the provincial government in containing COVID-19?
6. Overall, how satisfied are you with the performance of the federal government in containing COVID-19?

The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.88, indicating good internal reliability among the items measuring the construct.

The freedom of expression scale was constructed to measure CSOs' perception of the state of freedom of expression. The scale also measures the perception of CSOs' on the state of openness of civic

space. The scale measures the state of freedom of expression on a scale of 1 to 5. 1 would indicate closed civic space, and five would mean an open civic space. The scale was constructed using five items measured on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. The items are:

1. The government's COVID-19 measures are making it harder for civil society to aid those impacted by the crisis.
2. Government has restricted access to information, obscuring the nature of the crisis and undercutting civil society's ability to respond effectively.
3. The government has excluded civil society from decision-making in its COVID-19 response, omitting vital voices.
4. The government is chilling free expression, shielding itself from criticism while penalizing dissent.
5. Lockdown is stifling peaceful and socially distant protests.

The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.78, indicating a good internal reliability among

the items measuring the construct.

The excluded and vulnerable community concern scale was constructed to measure the level of concern of CSOs for marginalized communities. The scale measures on a scale of 1 to 5. 1 would indicate the least level of concern, and a score of 5 would indicate a greater level of concern. The scale was constructed using three items measured on a five-point Likert scale. The items are:

1. To what extent are you concerned about equal and fair access to relief and recovery by the public?
2. To what extent do the most vulnerable and marginalized populations have access to relief and recovery measures?
3. To what extent is there sufficient attention to the specific needs of vulnerable and marginalized populations?

The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.81, indicating excellent internal reliability among the items measuring the construct.

TABLE 1 Scales and their reliability scores

| Scale | 2021 | | | 2020 | | |
|---|------------------|-----------------|-----|------------------|-----------------|-----|
| | Cronbach's alpha | Number of items | N | Cronbach's alpha | Number of items | N |
| CSO Vulnerability Scale - 5 items | 0.89 | 5 | 259 | 0.86 | 5 | 204 |
| CSO Vulnerability Scale - 9 items | 0.88 | 9 | 252 | | | |
| Government Response Satisfaction Scale | 0.88 | 6 | 254 | | | |
| Freedom of Expression Scale | 0.78 | 5 | 251 | | | |
| Excluded and vulnerable community concern scale | 0.81 | 3 | 260 | | | |

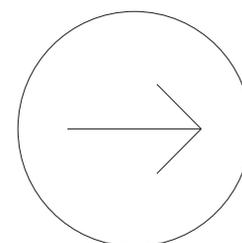
Key informant interviews

In addition to collecting the survey data, the researchers also conducted ten semi-structured interviews with the representatives of CSOs, umbrella organizations of CSOs, and independent civil society actors who are engaged in response and relief activities. The study also collected the data from the association of the representatives of the local government.

The interviews were conducted after the preliminary analysis of survey data. Each interview lasted between 35-50 minutes. The principal investigator conducted the interviews, and a research assistant helped in taking notes. The researchers then used the qualitative interview data to triangulate the validity of information collected through the survey, add richer details to the findings, and develop short case studies.

Secondary data

In addition to the primary data collection, the study also relied extensively on secondary data. The researcher used secondary data from Social Welfare Council, IECCD of the Ministry of Finance to understand the nature of foreign aid received for coronavirus response. Similarly, the study analyzed several newspaper articles and studies from various agencies to illustrate the state of freedom of expression and association in the country. The study also reviewed relevant existing laws and policies.



Impact of COVID-19 on Freedom of expression and association during COVID-19

There is no doubt coronavirus is one of the major public health crises human civilization has recently faced. However, in the name of containing the spread of the virus, governments worldwide have responded in such a way that would have significant implications for fundamental freedoms and civic space. While it is crucial to mitigate the threats of the virus, these governmental efforts are stronger, legitimate, and more effective when they respect human rights.

Governments around the world have imposed emergency laws in response to the pandemic. One hundred forty-one countries have measures that affect assembly. Similarly, 56 countries have measures that affect expression, and 59 countries affecting privacy (ICNL, 2021). These numbers are unprecedented and need serious

attention from civil society. States often use emergency powers because they offer shortcuts, and such power often tends to stay longer and can be hard to revert. Civil society has a very crucial role to play in ensuring that the state respects fundamental freedoms during such time. Civil society has to be vigilant and keep its eyes open.

In Asia and the Pacific alone, 23 countries have either fully or partially prohibited gatherings, and over 18 countries, including Nepal, have taken legislative action to address the coronavirus (ICNL, 2021). It is especially dangerous in the Nepalese context because the government has introduced several new ordinances bypassing the discussions and scrutiny in the parliament.

TABLE 2

Measures of Nepalese freedom of expression, association, and human rights by different international organizations during COVID-19

| Measuring organization | Index/Scale | Score | Scale |
|---|--|-------------------------|---|
| Oxford Coronavirus Government Response Tracker | COVID-19: Stringency index (2021) | 91.67 | 1 – 100 (Strictest) |
| International IDEA Global monitor of COVID-19's impact on democracy and human rights (2021) | Freedom of expression, gender equality | Concerning developments | Concerning developments, Developments to watch |
| | Freedom of association and assembly, freedom of movement | Developments to watch | |
| Reporters without borders | Press Freedom Index (2021) | 106 | |
| CIVICUS | CIVICUS Monitor (2021) | Obstructed | Closed, Repressed, Obstructed, Narrowed, Open |
| Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) | Freedom of expression index (2020) | 0.79 | 0 (low freedom of expression) -1 (High freedom of expression) |

Source: (Hale et al., 2021; International IDEA, 2021; RSF, 2020); author generated table

Freedom of expression and association under threat

The constitution guarantees considerable freedom and rights to its citizens also safeguards political rights such as the right to association, expression, and exchange of ideas, participation in the state system, etc. The third part of the constitution has set an enabling environment for civil society by ensuring freedom of expression and opinion, the right to assemble peacefully without arms, form unions, and associations. Furthermore, articles 17, 25, 29, 33, and 34 stipulate the citizens' economic freedoms, while articles 31, 35, 38, 39 guarantee the right to education, health, the rights of children, women, and the article 40 guarantees the rights of Dalits.

Despite these constitutional guarantees, a number of these rights were curtailed during the COVID-19 pandemic to contain the spread of the virus. Several incidents have been reported where reporters have received threats for covering the news or for being critical to the government's response. Similarly, the press council shut down several online portals for spreading misinformation and creating panic among the public. Furthermore, there have also been cases of threats and arrests of journalists, along with cyberbullying of those writing about government mismanagement and corruption (RSF, 2020).

Attempts to undermine freedom of expression do not stop there. Critics of the government have been targeted. For example, a former government secretary was arrested from his home for writing critical comments against the Prime Minister on his social media. He faced cybercrime charges under the Electronic Transaction Act (The Kathmandu Post, 2020).

In addition to freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly was also severely curtailed. The graph below shows the COVID-19 stringency index for Nepal, which measures the variation in governments' responses. This composite measure is based

on nine response indicators, including school closures, workplace closures, and travel bans, rescaled to a value from 0 to 100 (100 = strictest)(Hale et al., 2021). From 24 March to 30 July, most gatherings were severely limited. Many commercial activities were closed, including restaurants, travel, and trekking. On 30 July, restrictions were lifted. Restrictions were re-imposed in some regions of the country, including the Kathmandu Valley, from 19 August to 16 September.

The global monitor of COVID-19's impact on democracy and human rights has flagged the developments in freedom of expression as 'concerning developments' from a democracy and human rights perspective. Several domestic incidents corroborate the concerns expressed by international watchdog institutions.

Despite the government's restrictions, independent activists continued to stage protests condemning how the government handled the crisis. The box below presents one case study of how an independent group of young people took to the street demanding accountability towards its citizens.

CSO leaders' perception on the state of freedom of expression and association

The study also documented the perception of the leaders of formal civil society organizations on the state of freedom of expression and freedom of association by asking a series of questions. The freedom of expression scale was constructed to understand the CSO leaders' perception. A score of one would indicate the least perceived freedom of expression, and a score of five means the highest freedom of expression.

Critics of the government have been targeted. For example, a former government secretary was arrested from his home for writing critical comments against the Prime Minister on his social media. He faced cybercrime charges under the Electronic Transaction Act (The Kathmandu Post. 2020)

The national average was 3.2, and there were minor differences across provinces. Respondents from provinces one, two, Bagmati, and Karnali, perceived better freedom of expression compared to Lumbini, Gandaki, and Sudurpaschim province. Similarly, Urban CSO leaders felt better freedom of expression compared to their rural counterparts. Furthermore, smaller (< 25) and medium-sized organizations (25 - 50) leaders felt better freedom of expression compared to the leaders of larger organizations (> 50). As expected, organizations working in advocacy were more critical to the state of freedom of expression compared to service delivery organizations. Similar differences were observed between female-led organizations and male-led organizations, where females were more vital than men.

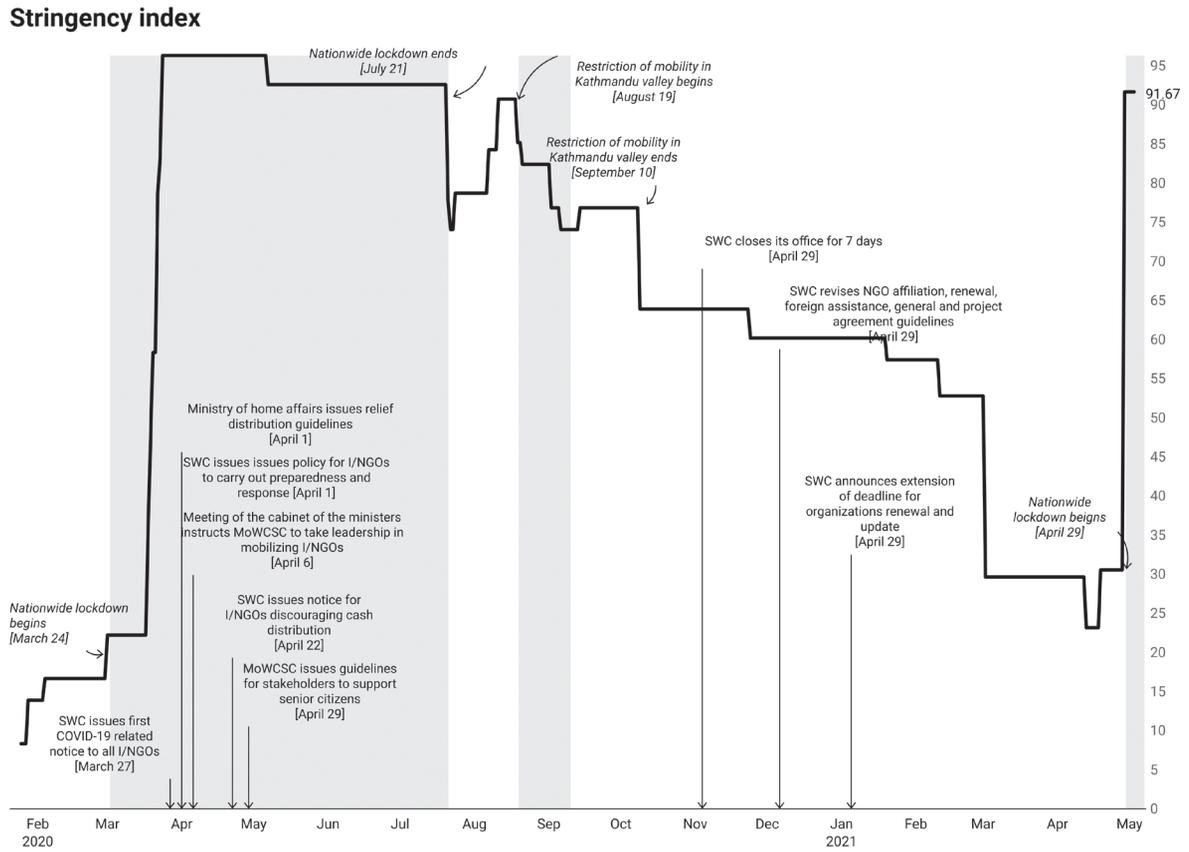
TABLE 3

CSO perceived freedom of expression

| | Mean | SD | Minimum | Maximum |
|----------------------------------|------|-----|---------|---------|
| Nepal | 3.2 | 0.8 | 1 | 5 |
| Province | | | | |
| 1 | 3.4 | 0.7 | 1.8 | 5 |
| 2 | 3.3 | 0.9 | 1.6 | 5 |
| Bagmati | 3.3 | 0.7 | 1 | 5 |
| Gandaki | 3.0 | 0.6 | 2 | 4.2 |
| Karnali | 3.3 | 0.8 | 1 | 4.2 |
| Lumbini | 3.2 | 0.9 | 1.4 | 4.4 |
| Sudurpaschim | 3.0 | 0.8 | 1 | 4 |
| Urban/Rural | | | | |
| Rural | 3.0 | 0.8 | 1 | 4 |
| Urban | 3.3 | 0.8 | 1 | 5 |
| Organization Size | | | | |
| < 25 | 3.3 | 0.8 | 1 | 5 |
| 25 - 50 | 3.3 | 0.5 | 2 | 4 |
| > 50 | 3.0 | 0.8 | 1.6 | 4.2 |
| Advocacy/Service Delivery | | | | |
| Service Delivery | 3.3 | 0.8 | 1 | 5 |
| Advocacy | 3.1 | 0.8 | 1 | 4.8 |
| Gender | | | | |
| Female | 3.2 | 0.8 | 1 | 5 |
| Male | 3.3 | 0.8 | 1 | 5 |
| Other | 3.3 | 1.0 | 2.6 | 4 |

FIGURE 1

COVID-19 stringency index and government interventions affecting civil society



Source: Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker, Social Welfare Council, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Social Welfare and Senior Citizens - Created with Datawrapper

Author generated chart, source: (Hale et al., 2021; Social Welfare Council, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e, 2021f, 2021g, 2021h, 2021i)

COVID-19 related government policies and impact on CSOs

The social welfare council released a series of guidelines and announcements for I/NGOs in response to COVID-19 (Social Welfare Council, 2020a, 2020b). These announcements encouraged I/NGOs to raise funds, and SWC would speed up approval of COVID-19 related projects within a week. Similarly, I/NGOs were requested to allocate 20% of their SWC approved budget towards COVID-19 response for a period of two months. SWC to approve the amendments within three days. The appropriated funds to be used towards procuring health equipment and relief to be provided in coordination with the local government following the standards issued by the Ministry of Finance. In response to the guidelines, some twenty-two INGOs and two dozen NGOs proposed approximately one Billion Nepali Rupees towards the pandemic (Bhatta, 2020).

Following the directive of the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens (MoWCSC), Social Welfare Council (SWC) issued an urgent notice for all I/NGOs in Nepal in consultation with the representatives of the Association of International NGOs in Nepal (AIN) and NGO Federation of Nepal (NFN) on March 27, 2020. The notice gave the following instructions to I/NGOs:

1. Senior citizens, women, children, and people with disabilities were identified as the most vulnerable groups of COVID-19 infection. Hence, the council directed respective organizations to launch an information campaign targeting the vulnerable population.
2. All I/NGOs launching preparedness and information campaigns with the approval from SWC are requested to prioritize senior citizens, people with disabilities, children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers while distributing masks, hand sanitizers, and medicines. In addition, old age homes, children's homes, disability protection centers, and women's rehabilitation centers to be prioritized when delivering services.
3. All training, seminars, meetings, and forums organized by I/NGOs to be canceled until April 14, 2020 (End of Chaitra 2077)
4. All I/NGOs to sanitize their building and compounds.
5. Identify a focal person from I/NGO for coordination and inform MoWCSC.
6. All I/NGOs should provide medical supplies and equipment to health facilities designated by the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP).
7. All I/NGOs to take approval from SWC before handing over medical supplies and coordinate with concerned local/provincial governments.
8. One door fund mobilization work procedure to be introduced to manage fund received for prevention and containment of COVID-19.

On April 1, 2020, SWC issued a policy framework for I/NGOs to carry out preparedness and response activities related to COVID-19. The policy included the following:

1. INGOs are highly encouraged to raise international funds for new projects – both short- and long-term preparedness and response to COVID-19. The SWC would fast-track the approval process and complete it within a week.
2. INGOs are requested to immediately repurpose twenty percent of the approved budget mentioned in the existing project agreements to preparedness and response to COVID-19. The amendment proposals should be submitted within one week from the issuance of the policy for two months. SWC to approve such amendment requests within three days. INGOs to submit progress reports after the completion of the works.
3. **The amendment proposal should include the following activities in priority order:**
 - Provide health equipment/materials to government health facilities, government bodies, government and community-based hospitals, quarantine, isolation, and shelter facilities receiving a prior consent of the MoHP. The quality standard of the equipment and materials should follow Department of Health Services (DHS) standards.
 - Provide relief materials/food or cash support to the needy population in coordination with the local government as per the standard issued by the Ministry of Finance (MoF)
 - From the date of issuance of the policy, new expenses on awareness campaigns should be made in consultation with SWC
4. Project activities carried out by INGOs should be in line with the standards prescribed by the MoHP. Distribute relief materials in line with Relief Distribution

Standard, 2076 issued by MoF. Distribute relief material in coordination with local bodies. Priority for relief materials distribution should be given to the beneficiaries as specified in the standard.

5. SWC may recommend INGOs in selecting relief distribution locations as per the need

6. SWC to recommend the MoWCSC the following:

- Upon notification of the order, SWC immediately recommends tax exemption and duty-free health equipment and materials to the concerned ministries.
- Extension for General Agreement (G.A.) and Program Agreement (P.A.) for the next six months if it is ending during the crisis period.

Furthermore, a meeting of the cabinet members on April 6, 2020, instructed the minister for women, children, and senior citizens to take Leadership in mobilizing the I/NGOs in responding to the pandemic. The meeting also asked the minister to prepare a detailed action plan for protecting senior citizens and children during the crisis (Pandey, 2020).

Clause 5.1 (H) was introduced on December 6, 2020, in the NGO affiliation guideline, which provides NGOs a grace period of six months during natural disasters and national emergencies to renew their affiliation with SWC.

The fresh wave of infections beginning of May 2021 prompted SWC to issue a new circular for I/NGOs on May 2. The circular emphasized that I/NGOs work in the priorities set by the MoHP, SWC, and the local governments (Social Welfare Council, 2021f). It highlighted the following points:

1. I/NGOs were given the flexibility to deviate a certain percent of their approved budget in coronavirus response. I/NGOs, however, needed to submit the work plan in advance on how the deviated funding would be used.

| Approved budget | Allowed deviation % |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Up to 5,00,00,000 | 20 |
| Up to 10,00,00,000 | 15 |
| Up to 25,00,00,000 | 10 |
| Up to 50,00,00,000 | 7 |
| Greater than 50,00,00,000 | 5 |

This applies only to the projects that SWC has already approved. However, new coronavirus-related projects or existing projects with an additional budget have to go through the approval process as per the existing policy.

2. The deviated budget should be used on assisting with COVID-19 related care: providing oxygen, cylinders, liquid oxygen, oxygen concentrator, ventilator, ICU related equipment, infrared thermometer, pulse oximeter, PPE and other protective gears, face masks, face shields, gloves, sanitizers, PCR tests, antigen test reagents as well as managing quarantine and isolation facilities.
3. Conduct the above-stated activities for three months and submit a weekly progress report and one final report one week after the completion of three months.
4. While distributing food and other relief materials to daily wage workers, coordinate with local government and submit a report to the local government and social welfare council with evidence.
5. Prioritize daily wage workers, returnee migrants, women, children, people with disabilities, and senior citizens in conducting response activities.

In addition, SWC also conducted several focused discussions with the representatives of I/NGOs at the national and provincial level regularly at the onset of the second wave of the pandemic. These efforts were more proactive and targeted compared to the first wave of the pandemic. For instance, SWC formulated a provincial rapid response of seven board members and devised a ToR

to guide their activities (Social Welfare Council, 2021d).

While the proactive efforts of SWC created a conducive environment for CSOs to conduct their response activities more smoothly and rapidly. SWC is also created a cumbersome reporting requirement for CSOs. While it is important to maintain records and data of their intervention, the need of weekly reports to SWC might create unnecessary reporting burden for CSOs. These reporting mechanisms would help SWC to produce weekly intervention reports, however, it would be better to have a consolidated impact report when CSOs complete their intervention. This requirement demonstrates the need of SWC to showcase its work. For example, it even issued a notice for CSOs to use a designated banner with SWC logo in response programs (Social Welfare Council, 2021a).

FIGURE 2 Daily COVID-19 cases and timeline of policies impacting CSOs

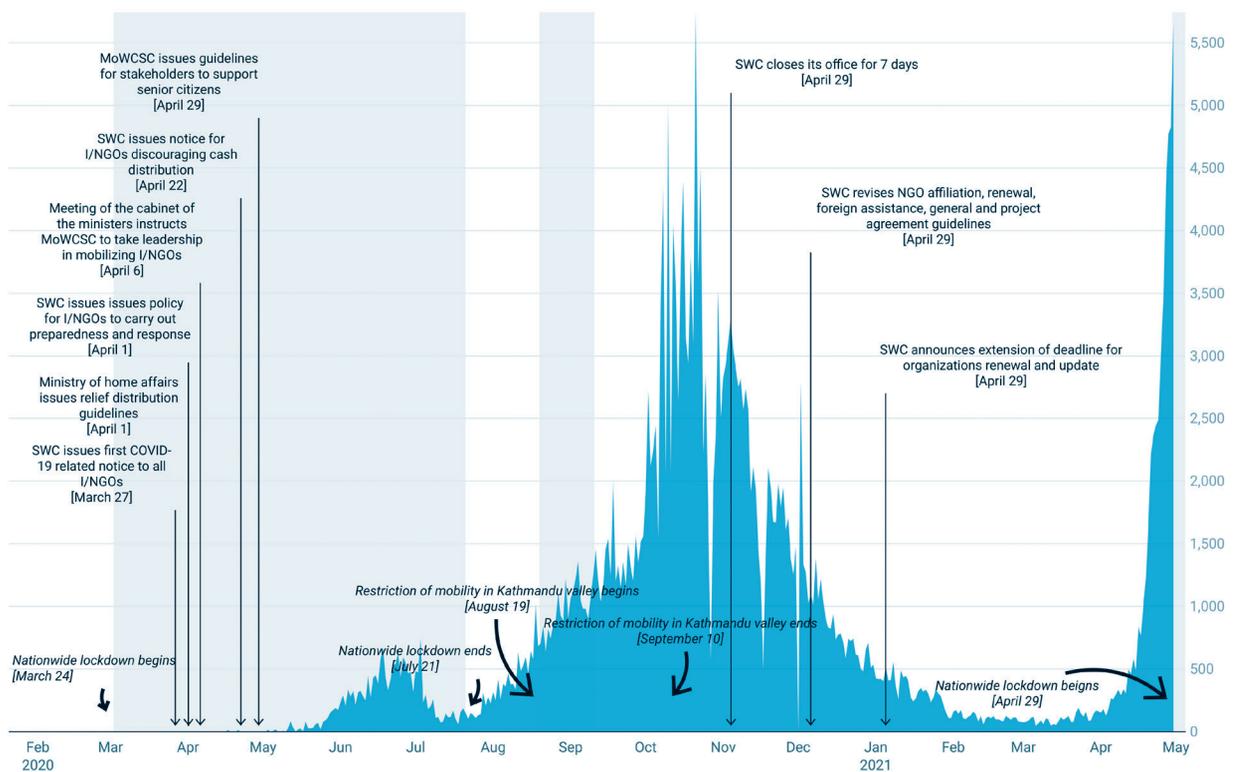


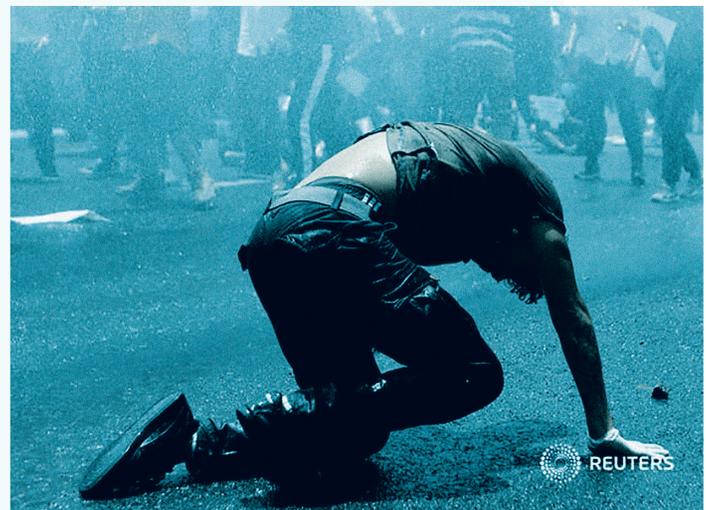
Chart: Dipendra K C •
 Source: COVID-19 Data Repository by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University, Social Welfare Council, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Social Welfare and Senior Citizens
 • Created with Datawrapper

Enough is Enough!

After being frustrated with the news of people being stranded on the border of India, the plight of the workers returning to their villages from Kathmandu and other parts during the lockdown, and the cases of mismanagement and chaos in the test, quarantine, and isolation procedures, a group of independent citizens started a petition on Change.org demanding the government to expand and expedite the PCR tests. The group handed the petition signed by over 12,000 people to the MOHP. However, the government gave a deaf ear to their petition and did not expand the range of PCR tests.

The independent group of young activists used social media to express their frustrations on the government's efforts to contain the spread of the virus. However, after several failed online pressurizing attempts, despite the government-imposed lockdown, one activist called for the people to take the streets on June 6, 2020.

The first day of the protest on June 9 attracted a few hundred youths who staged a peaceful protest following social distancing protocols and respecting the public health safety measures near the Prime Minister's residence. However, the peaceful protestors were confronted by security personnel armed with water cannons and batons. The peaceful protest ended in chaos inviting a much larger demonstration on June 11. The protest in Kathmandu had inspired similar protests in several other parts of the country.



Despite these sporadic youth-led protests, the response from the government did not come easily. One of the campaigners, lih, staged a hunger strike initially for 12 days in June and then again for 23 days in July, when he had to be taken to a hospital because his health deteriorated. The strike was called off after reaching an agreement with the MoHP. The agreement included:

1. Increasing Real-time Polymerase Chain Reaction Test (RT-PCR) as well as testing for antigens.
2. Expand testing by increasing qualified health personnel and equipment.
3. Decision makers to consult with public health experts in decision-making process.
4. Establishing hotlines for essential and health workers to request protective hears.
5. Ensure dignified funerals of the people who have died of COVID-19

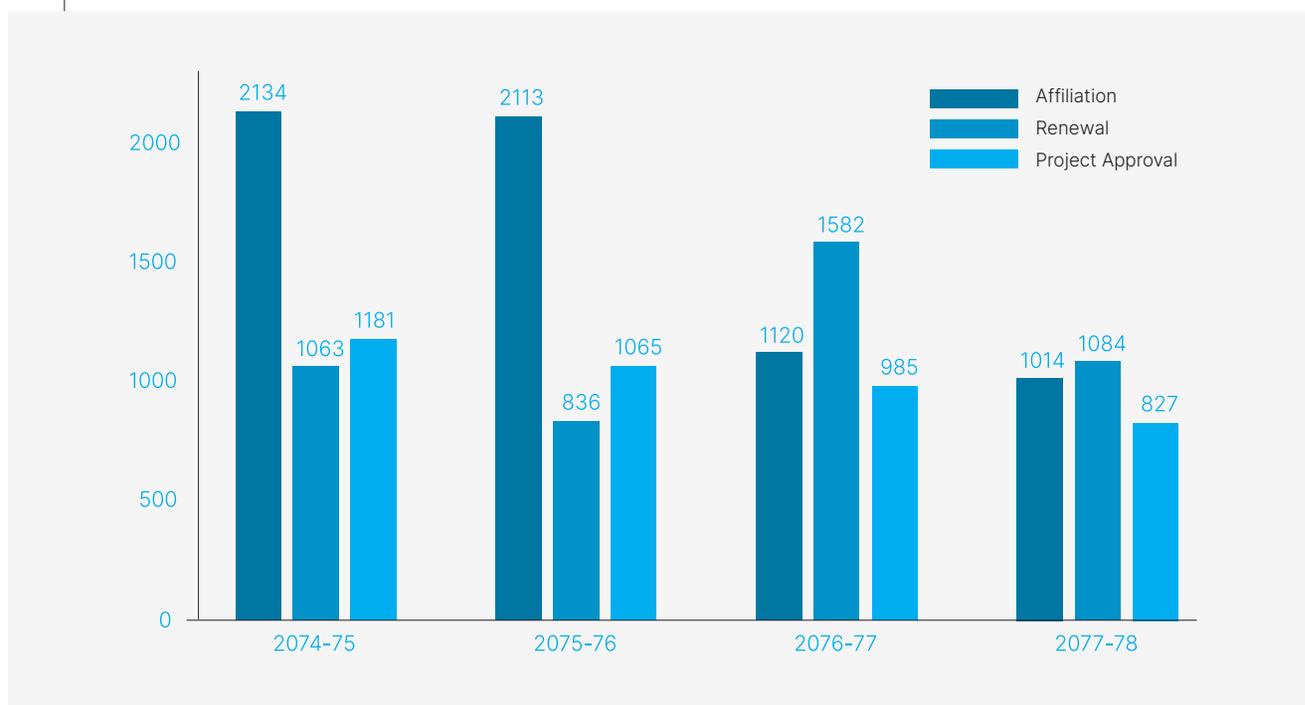
Impact of COVID-19 on CSOs

Registration and renewal

Most of the CSOs in Nepal are registered and renewed at the district administration office. However, there is no centralized database to understand the exact number of annual registrations and renewals. Hence, the data from SWC can be considered a proxy to assess the level of impact on organization registration and renewal. Affiliation data can be used as a proxy of annual new registration.

COVID-19 had a significant impact on the affiliation of new organizations in the fiscal year 2076-77. The annual affiliation number for the prior two years was 2134 and 2113, respectively. However, during the last fiscal year, the number plummeted by 89 percent to 1120 only. Similarly, there was an 8 percent decline in the number of new project approval. However, the last fiscal year saw a 47 percent growth in the number of renewals. The increase in number might be because of the efforts from SWC to get the CSOs renewed.

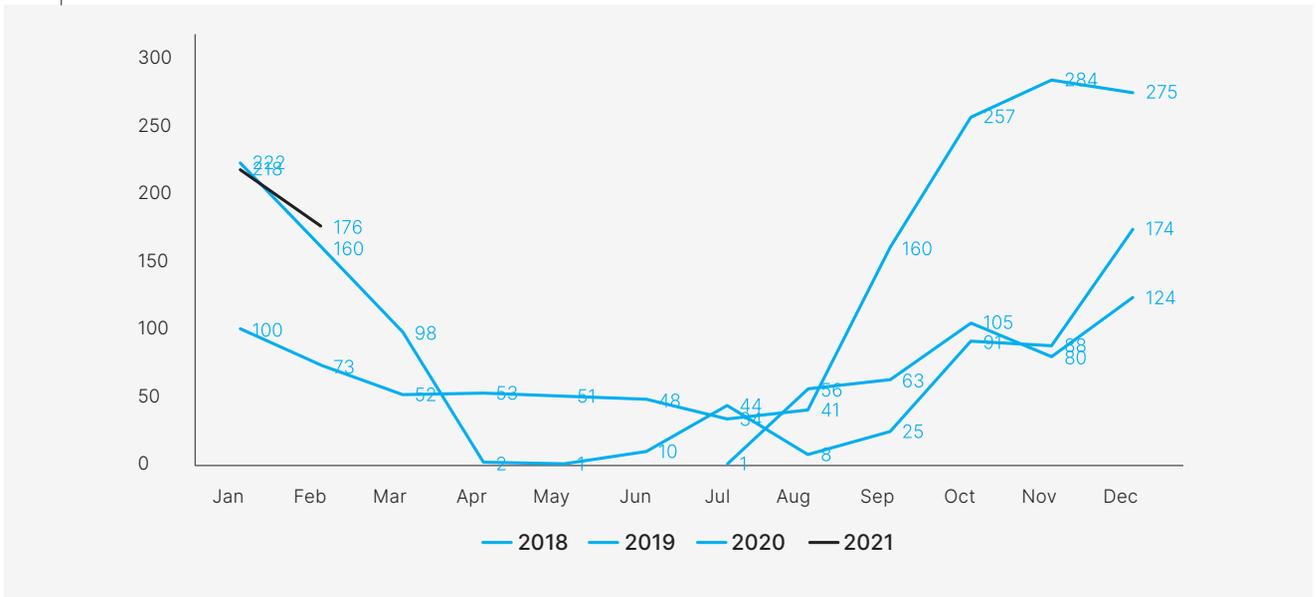
FIGURE 3 Annual CSO affiliation, renewal, and project approval numbers



Source: Social Welfare Council (2021d); Author generated chart.

The number of renewals started plummeting down starting April of 2020. The nationwide lockdown posed a significant challenge for the organizations to continue with the renewal of their organization. From April to July of 2019, a total of 186 organizations were renewed. However, the number declined by 2.26 times during the same time frame in 2020. The government stringency index of Nepal was 96.3 in April and 92.59 during May. The high score indicates the strictest measures in place. Only two organizations renewed in April and only one organization in May 2020.

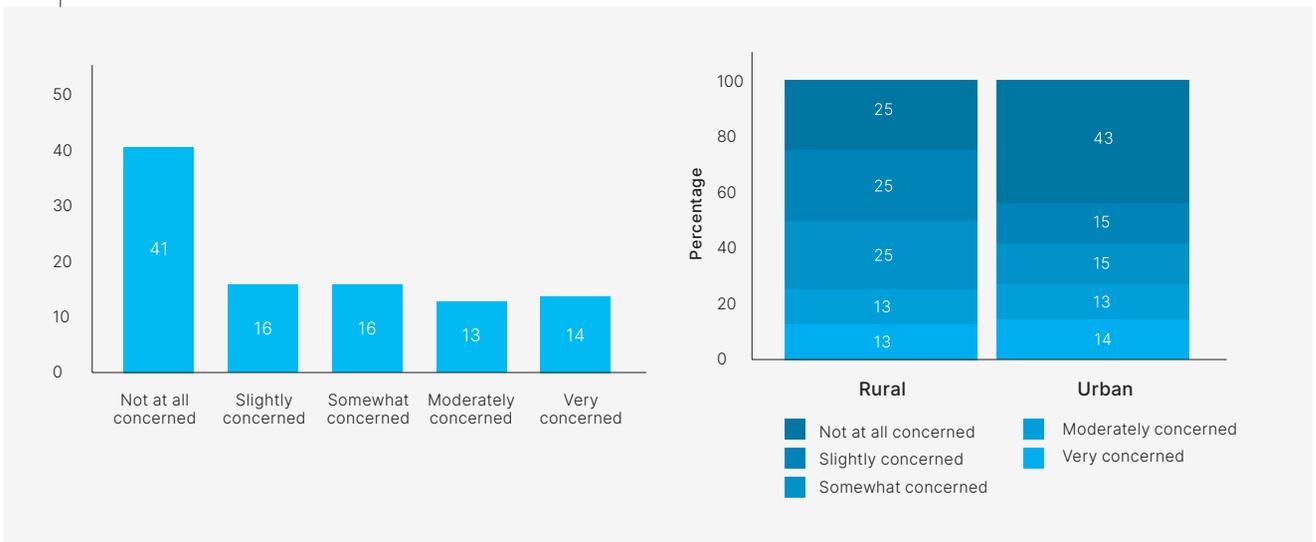
FIGURE 4 Monthly NGO renewal with SWC 2018-2021



Source: Social Welfare Council (2021d); Author generated chart.

The effect of government stringency and restrictions in mobility was reflected by the perception of the CSO leaders to meet registration/renewal requirements. Six out of ten CSOs were concerned they would be unable to meet the requirements. Seventy-five percent of the rural CSOs were affected compared to fifty-seven urban CSOs.

FIGURE 5 Ability to meet registration/renewal requirement (n=265)



The restriction in assembly and movement affected organizations in myriad aspects. One noticeable impact was on the Annual General Meetings (AGMs) of the CSOs. Several respondents indicated that they conducted their AGMs online due to the pandemic. The online AGMs created some organizational and renewal challenges for some organizations.

One CSO leader indicated that they reduced the scale of the AGM. They conducted the AGM just to meet the compliance requirement.

“We conducted the AGM just for the sake of AGM. Several policies that needed to be passed from AGMs are on hold. This year’s AGM was more like a special AGM to meet the compliance (registration/renewal) requirements. Hence, we did not have the participation of the majority of members needed to pass those policies.” – Male, Executive Director, NGO working in DRR, Dhading

While most KII respondents agreed there was no major challenge in the registration and renewal of organizations. This was partly because of the relatively lower number of COVID-19 cases during the change in the fiscal year. There were isolated incidents where some CSOs faced some hassles in renewal at the DAO.

“When I first went for the renewal of the organization at DAO, they said they would not renew the organization because we did not have the letter from other districts where we had conducted the program. On top of that, we conducted the AGM online. They (DAO officers) asked how we collected the physical signature of the members. They first were hesitant to process the renewal document. However, after citing the difficulties of COVID-19, travel restrictions and with a promise to submit the letter next year, they finally processed the renewal.” – Female, President, Organization working with young people, Kathmandu

Apart from renewal, CSO leaders also cited the importance of AGMs as networking events and the long-term impact they may have in inter-organizational relationships and coordination.

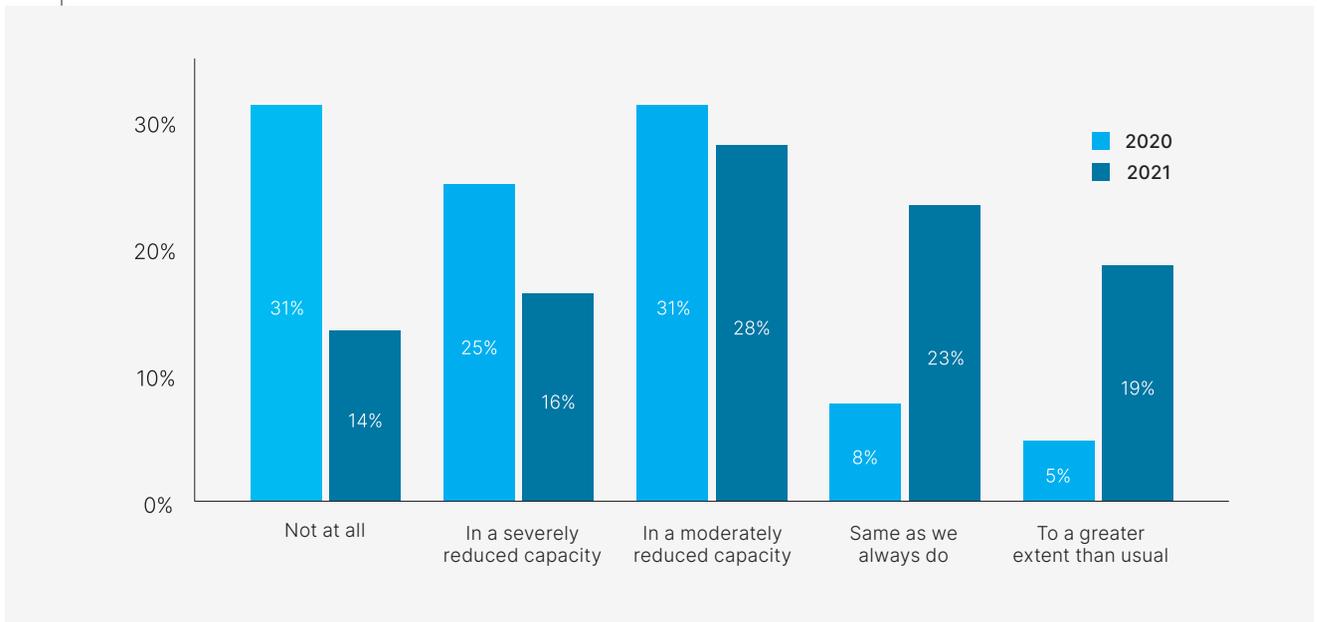
“This year, we conducted the AGM online. It was the need of the time. However, I feel we lost the opportunity to network with other organizations. In the past (without COVID), we took the AGM as an opportunity to introduce new leaders to the representatives of other organizations. This time we were introduced via emails and received congratulatory messages in email.” – Female, President, Organization working with young people

Program/Service Delivery

COVID-19 had a severe impact on the ability of CSOs to deliver their regular programs and services. During the first wave of the pandemic, 87 percent of CSOs reported a reduction in their ability to provide programs and services. As the situation of pandemics improved, organizations also reported a slight improvement in their ability to provide services. While there was a slight improvement in the capacity of CSOs, 58 percent of CSOs still reported a decline in their ability to deliver regular program.

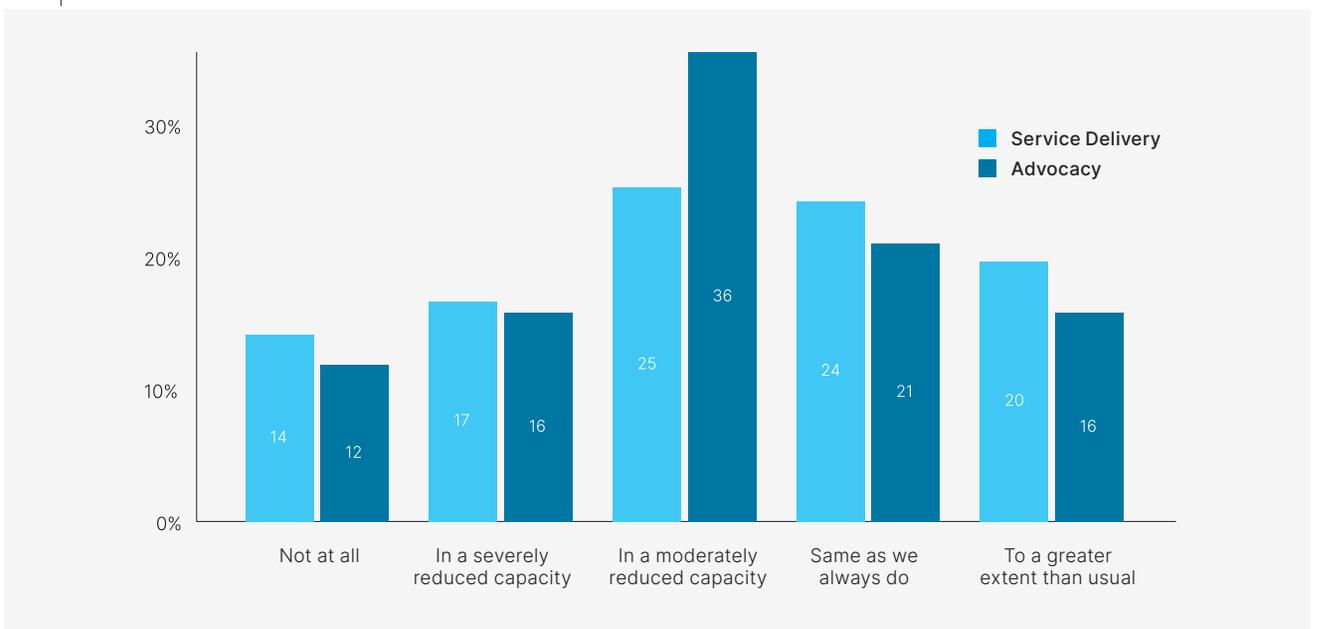
Fourteen percent of the organizations reported their program/services came to a complete halt. This is an alarming finding. This indicates that approximately 1400 CSOs have not been able to provide their program and services for nearly a year. A long-term inability of CSOs to deliver their program and services indicate that these CSOs are at the risk of being shut down. In addition, the findings hint that the effect of the pandemic on CSOs can have long-term impacts on their operation.

FIGURE 6 Normal program/service delivery of CSO



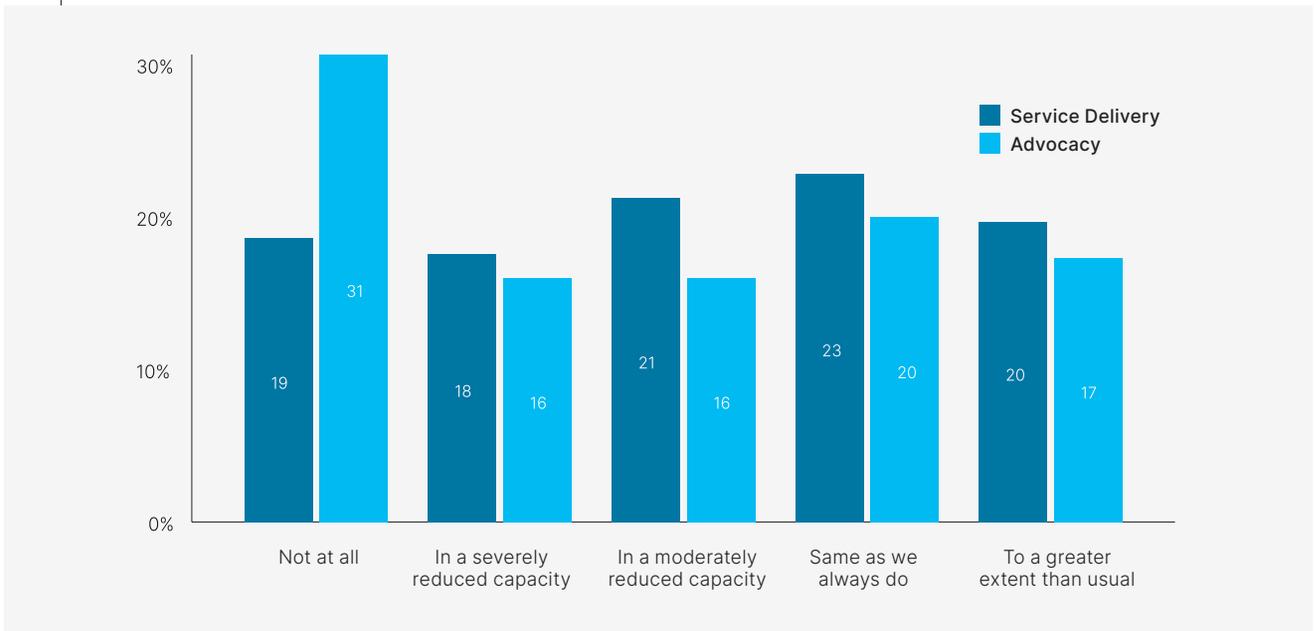
While no statistically significant difference was observed between advocacy-oriented organizations (n=76) and service delivery organizations (n=198), advocacy-oriented organizations still reported a slightly greater impact on their ability to deliver regular programs and services. Fifty-two percent of the advocacy organization reported either a moderate or severe reduction in their ability to provide their programs/services compared to 42 percent of service delivering organizations. Similarly, 44 percent of service delivery organizations reported a normal or greater ability to provide services than 37 percent of advocacy organizations.

FIGURE 7 Normal program/service delivery of CSO by the major function of the organization



In general, the restriction of mobility imposed by the government was one of the biggest concerns expressed by CSOs. CSO representatives expressed their dissatisfaction with not recognizing the importance of freedom of mobility for CSO staff despite being one of the early responders after healthcare professionals, security personnel, and government officials. As shown in the chart below, more than two-third CSOs expressed their concern about the restricted mobility of their staff. There was a slight difference among respondents from advocacy-oriented organizations and service delivery organizations. Eight out of ten advocacy oriented CSOs expressed their concern compared to seven service providing organizations.

FIGURE 8 Concern of CSOs over restriction in movement



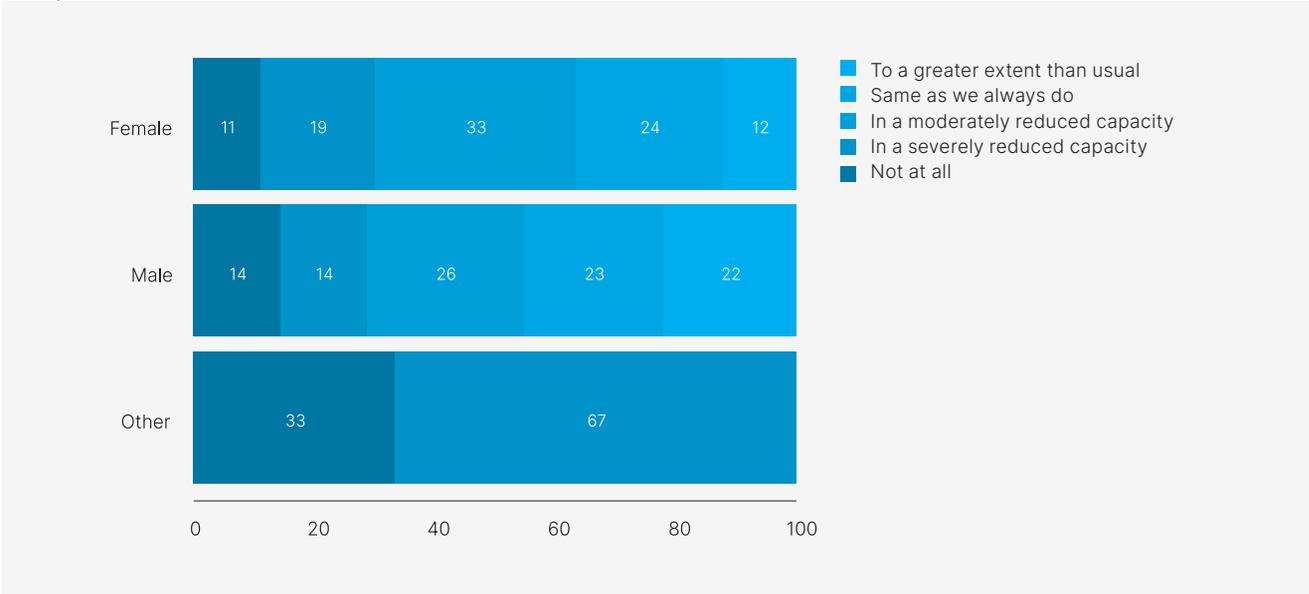
The consequence of such a restriction of movement affected organizations significantly in their service delivery and advocacy.

“Our advocacy work requires in-person bilateral meetings, discussions in groups. We need in-person meetings for lobbying. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected our efforts. We were making child participation guidelines in all local levels as well as provincial governments’ planning process to ensure the participation of children in the government planning process. Our work has been stuck at the level of the cabinet of ministers in Karnali and Lumbini province..... Our work is stuck because we need in-person meetings to meet for conceptual clarity as well as convince the local politicians...we are trying to organize these meetings virtually, but we have not been successful” – Male, President, an umbrella network of child rights organizations

There was a slight difference in response between female and male-led CSOs. Sixty-three percent (n=90) of CSOs led by females responded that their ability to provide services is limited compared to 54 percent (n=181) male. The most alarming finding was for CSOs led by gender minorities. All gender minority-led CSOs reported either a complete halt in their service delivery or a severe reduction.

FIGURE 9

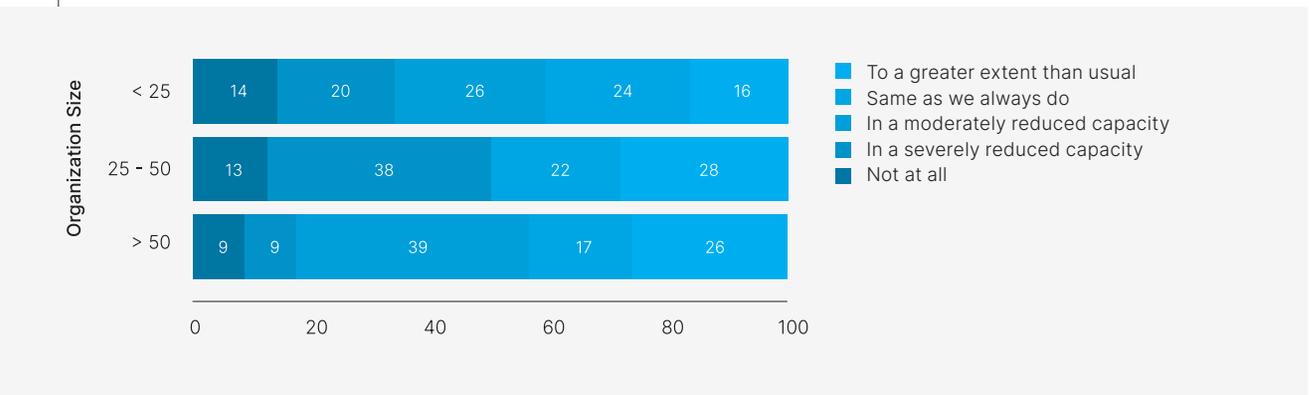
Normal program/service delivery of CSO by the gender of the organization's president



Smaller organizations expressed a greater impact on their programming compared to larger organizations. Fourteen percent of the organizations with less than 25 employees were not delivering their programs at all. The percentage declined as the size of the organization grew. This is an indication that larger organizations are better positioned to manage during extreme events.

FIGURE 10

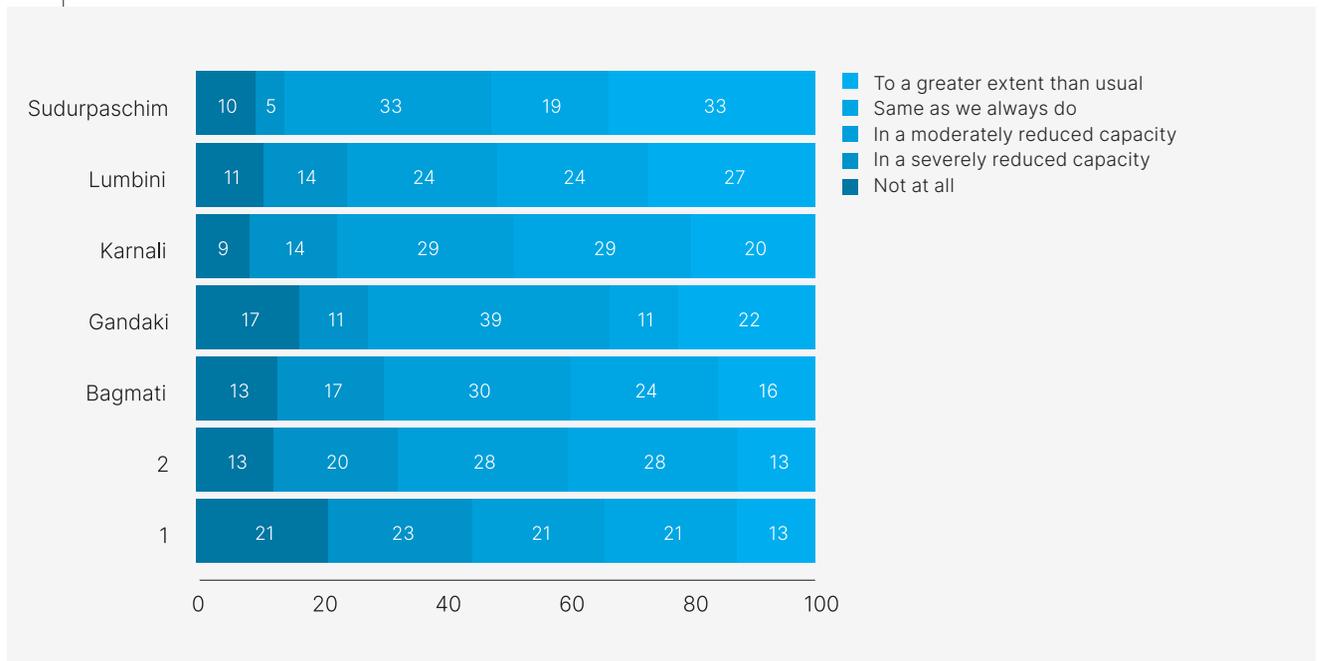
Organization size and normal program delivery



Spatial differences in the impact

There are spatial differences in the impact on normal program delivery. Twenty-one percent of the Province 1 CSOs reported they were not delivering their program at all. Similarly, 17 percent of CSOs from Gandaki also reported a halt in their service delivery. CSOs reported the least impact from Karnali, where 9 percent reported they did not deliver any services.

FIGURE 11 Impact on program delivery by province



Furthermore, CSOs in urban areas reported a greater impact compared to rural areas. Half of the rural CSOs offered their program and services regularly or in a greater than usual compared to 41 percent of urban CSOs. Similarly, CSOs were more active in delivering their programs outside Kathmandu valley than those in the valley.

FIGURE 112 Program delivery by urban/rural



Action Nepal

Action Nepal in Dhading district provided technical support to Seven Palikas (Gajuri, Galchhi, Benighat Rorang, Ganga Jamuna, Thakre, and Jwalamukhi) to draft Rural Municipalities Quarantine Management Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) and Code of Conduct to prevent gender-based exploitations and violence. All seven Palikas drafted and endorsed both these policies. These policies played a vital role for the local governments in setting a vision to improve their efficiency and adequately manage their quarantine/isolation centers targeting the most vulnerable ones.

The organization also provided demand-based psycho-social counseling and motivating orientations through trained facilitators, which was highly effective. More than 418 peoples were supported with psycho-social counseling through direct contact/phone contacts within a project period.

In addition, 1075 standard hygiene kits were distributed to the Palika Health Unit to support personal hygiene management of people, especially women, children, elderly and pregnant women staying at quarantine/isolation centers. Seventeen semi-permanent toilets, 26-bathroom spaces, and 27 pedal touch handwashing stations (along with cleaning material) were installed at 12 quarantine centers, ensuring the proper sanitation of people during their quarantine stay. Virus preventive materials like masks, sanitizer, face shields, and gloves were provided to the front-line health works, security personnel, and members of the quarantine management committee (Action Nepal, 2020). The interventions of the project contributed to the hygiene and sanitation behavior of the community people. Also, they sensitized them to take more care of their hygiene as a first step to mitigate the spread of the COVID -19 Pandemic.

The organization also provided demand-based recreational materials such as the internet, television sets, sports materials, Yoga Mat, Musical sets, and books at quarantine centers.



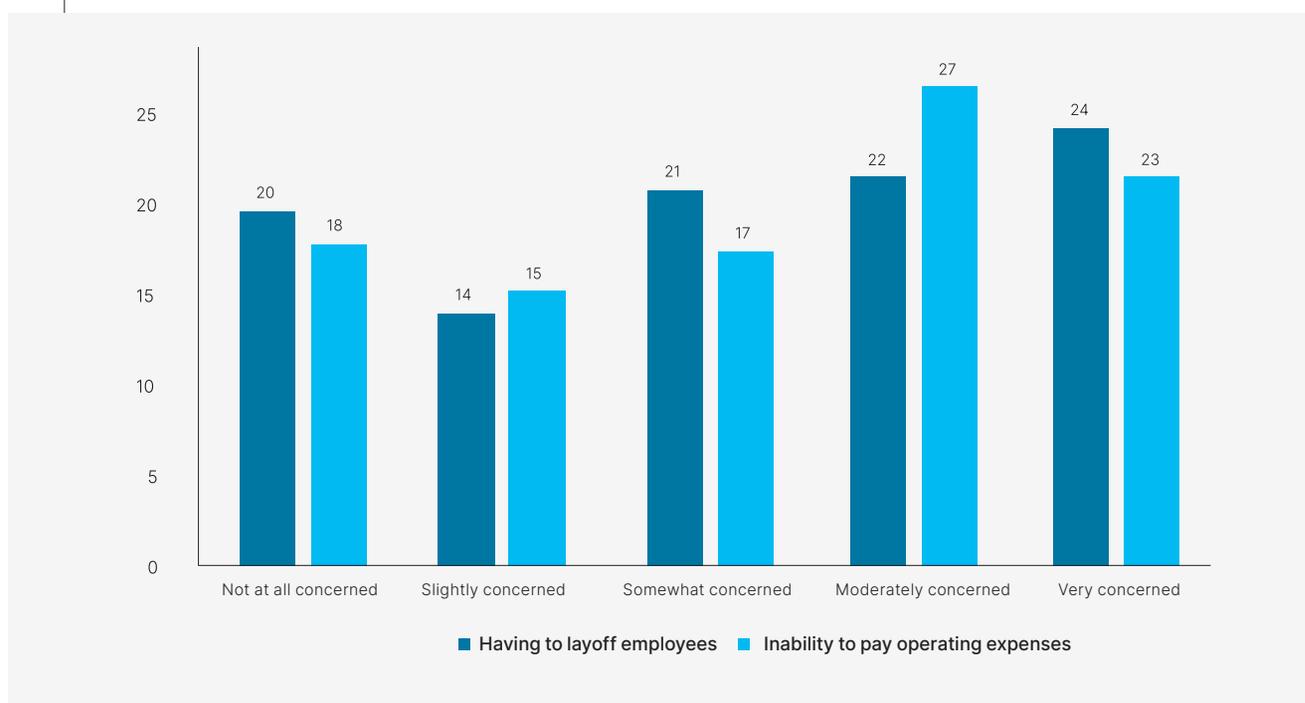
CSO concerns

Operating concerns

In addition to the impact on delivering regular programs and services, organizations also expressed several other concerns. One of their concern was their own ability to meet keep their operations going. Four out of ten CSOs were either moderately or very concerned they might have to lay off their employees over a long period. Similarly, half of the organizations are concerned they will not be able to pay their operating expenses.

“We should have completed a number of projects. However, we have not been able to complete some projects, especially those that required physical presence. Some organizations have faced a situation where the projects are likely to be canceled. This poses a significant challenge to manage the employees who were working on those projects. Similarly, how to complete the project activities successfully remains a big concern.” President, National Federation of the Disabled

FIGURE 13 Operating concerns of CSOs

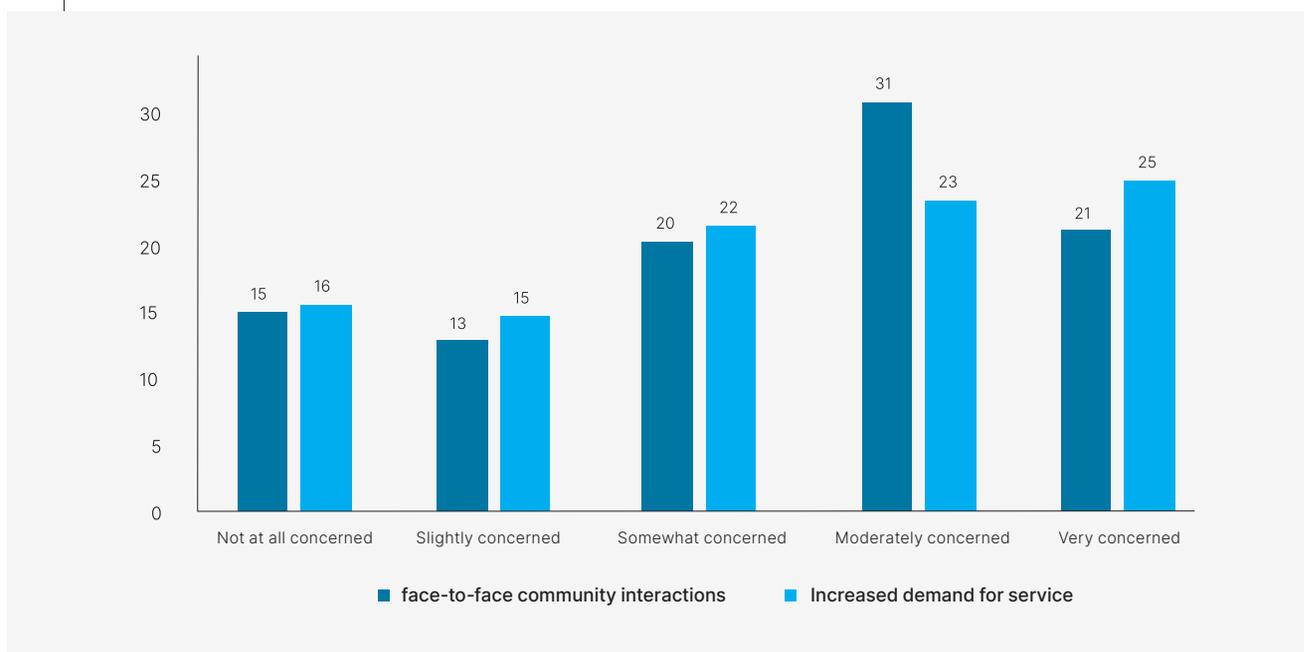


Concerns over meeting the needs of the communities

CSOs are faced with the dual challenge of maintaining their operation and having to deliver programs and service during the extreme event with several constraints around them. The demand for services from CSOs has increased exponentially during the crisis. While, CSOs are working under limited means. Hence, it is evident that nearly half of the CSOs are concerned that they will not manage the increased demand for their services. Similarly, more than half of the CSOs are also worried that they will not be able to meet face-to-face with the community they serve.

“People with disability have not been able to get the medicine; particularly there is a deficiency of medicine that needs to be imported. Similarly, the distribution of these medicines requires in-person activities...which we have not been able to provide. Furthermore, people with disabilities have not been able to repair some of their supporting devices. Hence, we are concerned about not being able to meet our constituencies in-person” - President, National Federation of the Disabled

FIGURE 14 CSOs’ concerns on their ability to meet community needs



Funding concerns

Funding was one of the major concerns expressed by CSOs. More than half of the CSOs expressed their grave concerns on several issues related to funding. There were concerns that their organizations will lose existing funding to possible anxiety over the decline in donations. Similarly, CSOs also expressed their concerns about potential delays that may occur in processing their grants. These issues may stem from the fact that several projects need an extension in the deadline to complete their ongoing activities. Several organizations expressed concerns about not being able to complete designated activities due to restrictions on mobility. CSOs consistently requested more flexibility from donors on implementing existing projects.

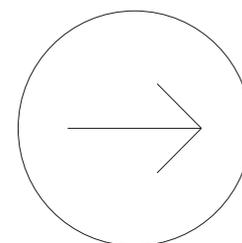
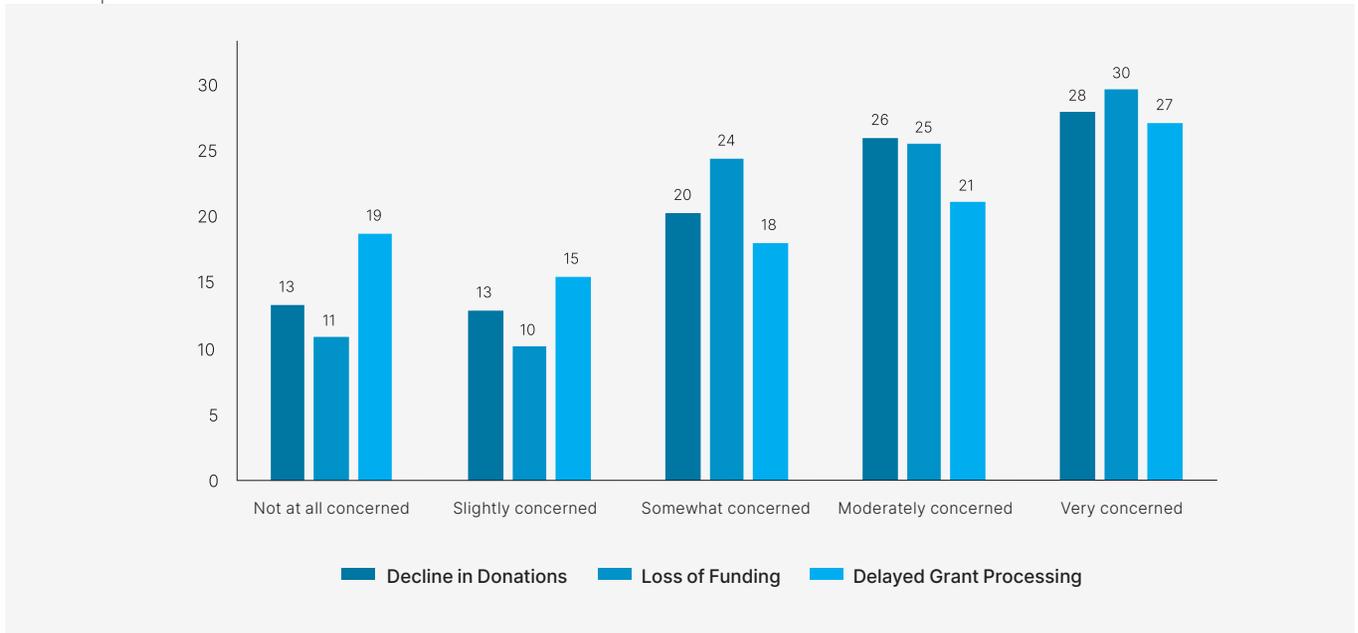


FIGURE 15

CSO's funding concerns



Impact on funding for COVID-19 response and recovery

Funding for CSOs

Out of 985 projects approved by SWC in FY 2076-2077, 10 percent of the approved projects were for COVID-19 response and recovery. The approved projects accounted for a 1.3 percent (USD 2.02 million) of the total approved budget of USD 151.85 Million. However, nearly one of the four approved projects of the first quarter of the current fiscal year was for COVID-19. Despite the growth in number, the percentage

of amount approved for COVID-19 is relatively lower compared to other projects. Only 5.1 percentage of the total approved amount was for COVID-19. The relatively larger number of projects and a smaller share in amount is an indication of relatively smaller sized and fragmented projects for COVID-19. Such projects are important for immediate response. However, the longer-term recovery would require bigger budgeted projects.

TABLE 4

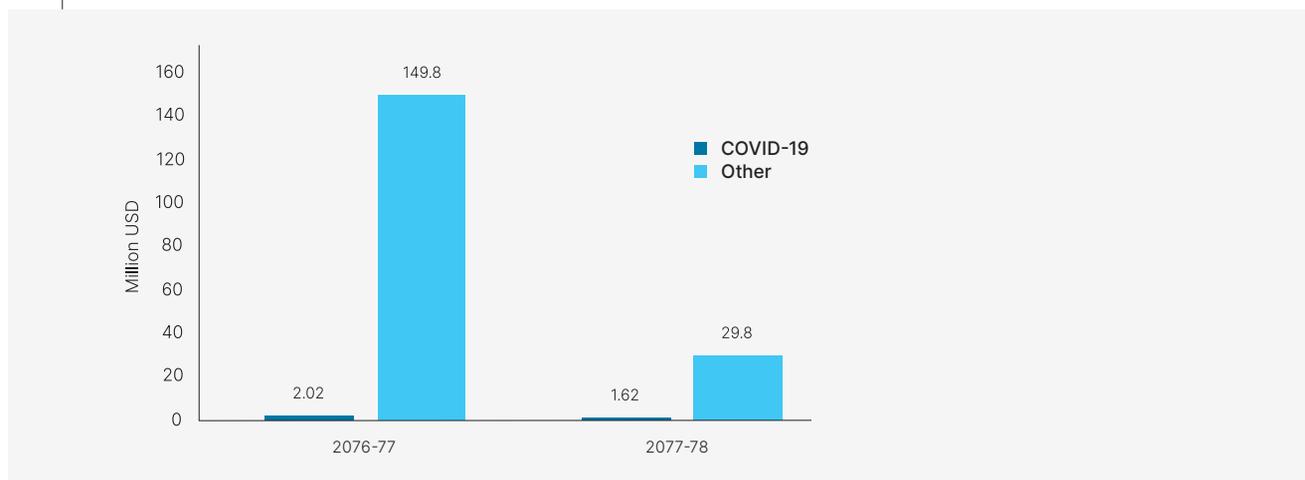
Total approved projects

| Year | Total approved projects | Percent of COVID Projects | Percent of COVID Budget | Approved Budget for COVID-19 (in million USD) |
|-----------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| 2076-2077 | 985 | 9.8 | 1.3 | 2.02 |
| 2077-2078 | 271 | 22.5 | 5.1 | 1.62 |

Source: Social Welfare Council (2021c), Author generated table

FIGURE 15

Total approved project amount



Furthermore, the survey data indicates only four out of ten CSOs received funding dedicated specifically for COVID-19 during the last year. Still, nearly sixty percent of organizations have not received financial support to carry out activities related to COVID 19 during the pandemic. The growing expectation from the local governments and public on CSOs to actively partake in response and recovery during COVID-19 and a lack of sufficient funding is likely to pressurized CSOs. Hence, both local governments and donors must critically think about providing additional resources to CSOs.

Only 41.5 percent of the responding or-

ganizations indicated they received funding during COVID-19. The traditional top funders of CSOs continue to remain as the primary funder of CSOs. As shown in the table below, 67.9 percent of the funded organizations received funding from INGOs, followed by 33.3 percent from the government and 24.7 percent from the membership fees. Private-sector funding continues to be limited for CSOs in Nepal. The share of funding from private organizations increased by 5 percent during COVID-19. However, in totality, the contribution of the private sector toward CSOs remains relatively lower.

TABLE 5

Source of funding for CSOs during the last fiscal year and COVID-19

| Funding Sources | Last fiscal year (%) | COVID-19 (%) |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| INGO | 54.0 | 67.9 |
| Central/Provincial/Local Government | 50.4 | 33.3 |
| Membership Fee | 47.8 | 24.7 |
| Private/Individual Donation | 24.5 | 22.2 |
| Bilateral Donor | 12.8 | 21.0 |
| Multilateral Donor | 8.8 | 19.8 |
| Local NGO | 10.9 | 14.8 |
| Private Organization | 7.7 | 12.3 |
| Other | 9.1 | 8.6 |

Source: Survey data, Author generated table.

TABLE 6

COVID-19 related funding by province (in USD)

| | N | Mean | SD | Minimum | Maximum |
|----------------------------|-----|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| Nepal | 207 | 31783 | 116028 | 0 | 850000 |
| Province | | | | | |
| 1 | 37 | 1480 | 4165 | 0 | 22100 |
| 2 | 29 | 62504 | 217557 | 0 | 850000 |
| Bagmati | 53 | 28389 | 91506 | 0 | 431687 |
| Gandaki | 14 | 58453 | 128392 | 0 | 477275 |
| Karnali | 29 | 12806 | 43668 | 0 | 170000 |
| Lumbini | 26 | 14134 | 44382 | 0 | 218450 |
| Sudurpaschim | 19 | 86835 | 174321 | 0 | 725900 |
| Urban/Rural | | | | | |
| Rural | 25 | 42889 | 169357 | 0 | 850000 |
| Urban | 182 | 30257 | 107235 | 0 | 844050 |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Female | 66 | 32712 | 118526 | 0 | 844050 |
| Male | 139 | 31772 | 116042 | 0 | 850000 |
| Other | 2 | 1913 | 2705 | 0 | 3825 |
| Number of employees | | | | | |
| < 25 | 165 | 4383 | 17068 | 0 | 170000 |
| 25 - 50 | 24 | 106123 | 198537 | 0 | 725900 |
| > 50 | 18 | 183829 | 259669 | 0 | 850000 |
| Organization age | | | | | |
| 0 - 10 | 36 | 1712 | 4602 | 0 | 21250 |
| 11 - 20 | 78 | 33179 | 118291 | 0 | 844050 |
| 21 - 30 | 88 | 34263 | 106704 | 0 | 725900 |
| > 30 | 5 | 182853 | 373215 | 0 | 850000 |

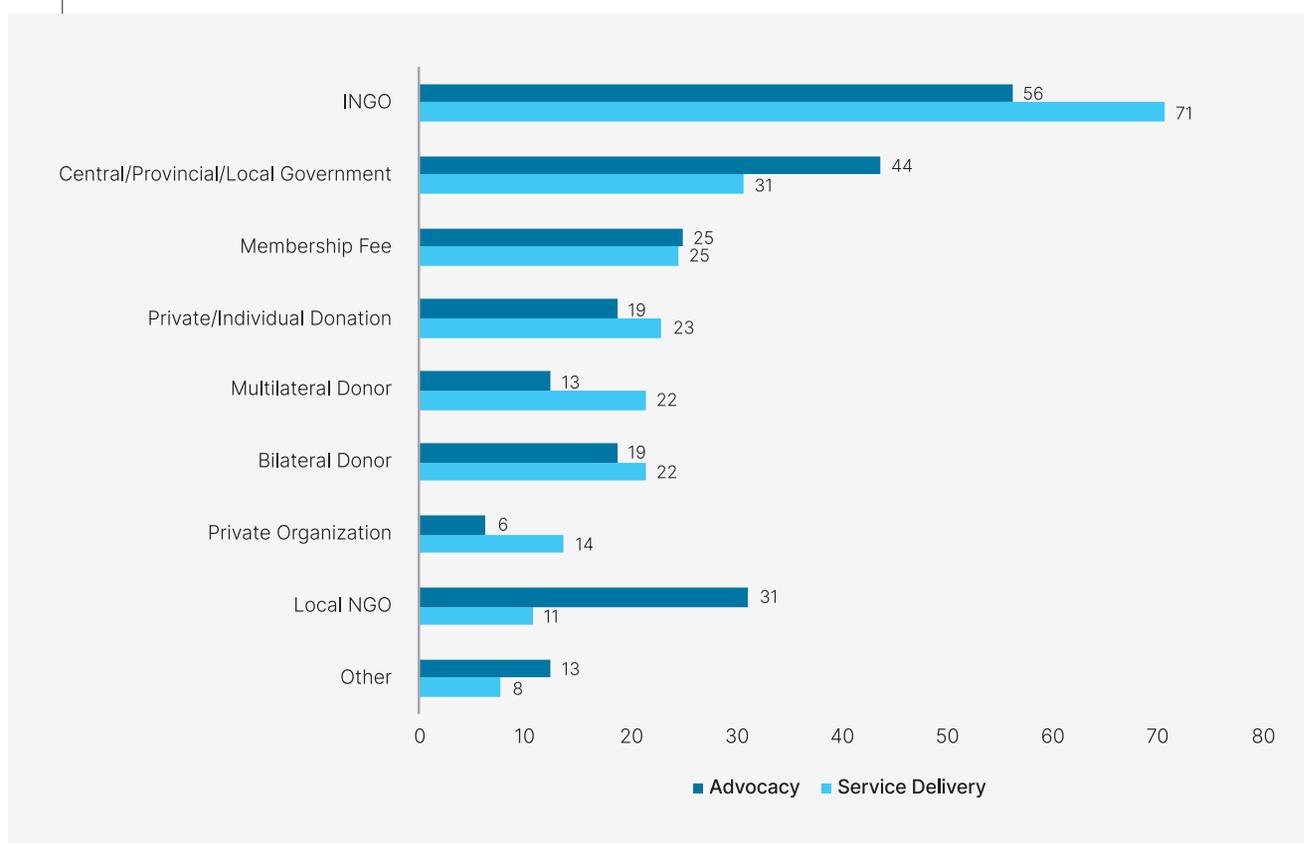
Source: Survey data, Author generated table.

Communication and relationship with donors

As mentioned earlier, when it comes to funding, four out of ten CSOs received some form of financing during the first wave of COVID-19. Out of those who received a grant, many services delivering organizations received funding compared to their advocacy-oriented counterparts. Seventy-one percent of the service-providing organizations received funding from INGOs compared to only 56 percent of advocacy organizations. It may look natural that more service-delivering organizations receive funding during emergencies. However, it is equally crucial that the advocacy-oriented organizations also received the funds. In the absence of sufficient funding, the advocacy organizations advocating for the rights and wellbeing of minorities will not be able to do their part meaningfully. Hence, it is essential for donors, particularly INGOs, to fund advocacy-oriented organizations as well. Donors have favored service delivery organizations. The trend was reported multiple times by the KII participants.

FIGURE 17

Funding differences between advocacy and service delivery organization



Donors have taken proactive actions in reaching out to their local CSO partners during the COVID-19 response. Six out of ten organizations' donors encouraged them to speak freely on the issues and challenges their organizations and communities were facing and sought ideas to help.

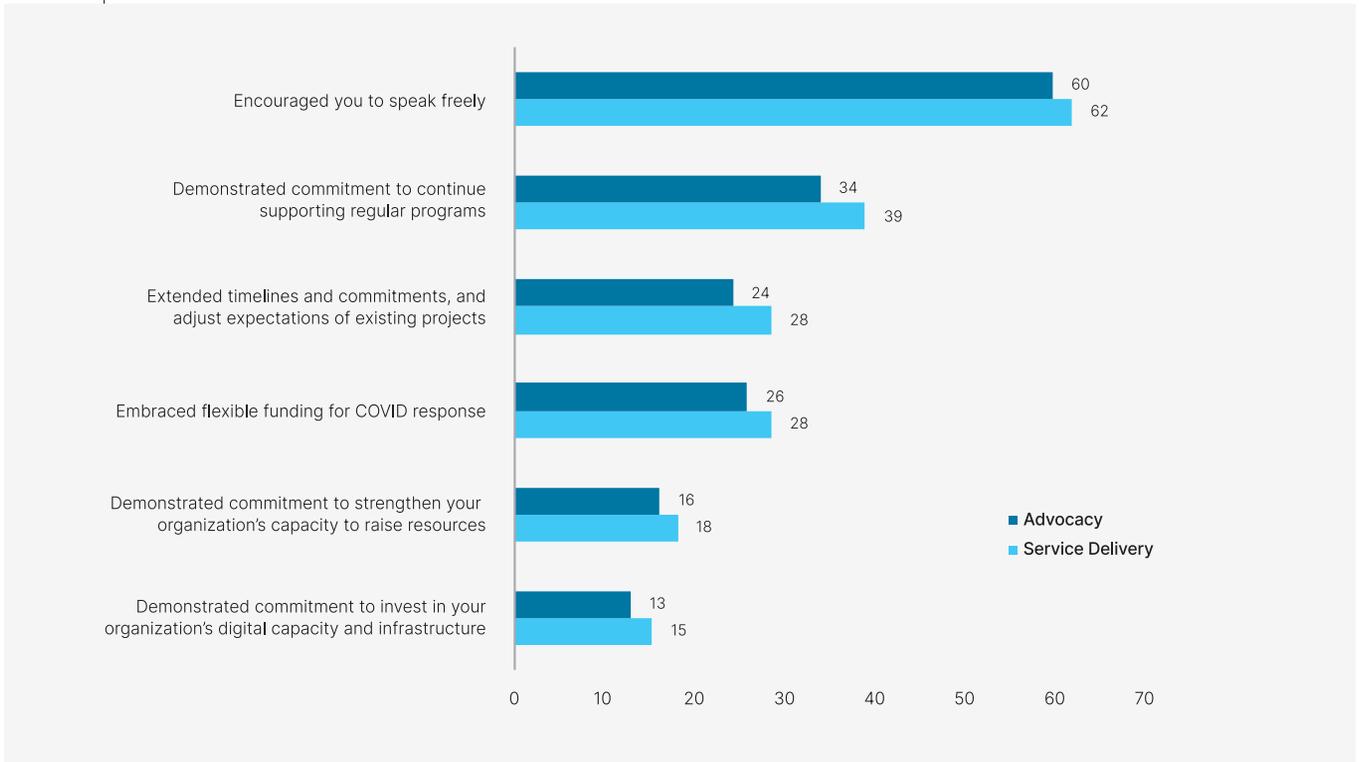
“Some donors have reached out, asked what we were doing, and committed a small amount of financial support on our ongoing response activities. In another instance, one donor-funded the COVID-19 response project targeted for returnee youth migrants. However, they did not provide any funds for overheads. The funding is only for activities without any support for the organization.”- Advocacy oriented organization, Province 3

Several KII participants expressed a positive outlook towards donors and expressed that some donors have adopted some flexibility in repurposing the grant for some organizations. It has been particularly easy for service delivering organizations.

“One donor approached us asking what can we do and how can we help? We could not do activities planned in the project. Hence, the donors agreed to repurpose the grant amount, particularly the amount allocated for training to convert isolation centers to GESI centers. We proposed converting some isolation centers to be GESI centers to accommodate the need of pregnant women, lactating mothers, and the donors agreed.” Service delivery-oriented organization, Province 2

FIGURE 18

Donor relationships and communications



However, some KII participants, particularly those working in advocacy-oriented work, were cynical about the role of donors. They expressed that it was hard to repurpose some of their existing grants. They asked for flexibility in managing the funding.

“Donors are very diplomatic. They will not say no directly, but we can understand easily that it is a no. Particularly for advocacy-oriented projects, we wanted to deviate a small percentage of the budget to the covid response. However, the donor would say that it [covid response] is not the objective/value of the project.” Advocacy oriented organization, Province 3

While there was a more positive outlook towards donors when it came to adjustments of grants and awarding new response-related activities. CSOs felt donors had not demonstrated sufficient commitment to their institutional growth and support. Only two out of ten organi-

zations felt that their donors showed any commitment to help the CSOs strengthen their capacity to raise funds.

Furthermore, due to the restrictions in mobility, most of the work had to be done online. However, several organizations struggled to transition online and are still facing challenges. Only half of the responding organizations had their website, and only three out of ten organizations used messaging applications. These numbers are a testament to the reality of several CSOs and the inherent challenge they face for digitization and to take their work online.

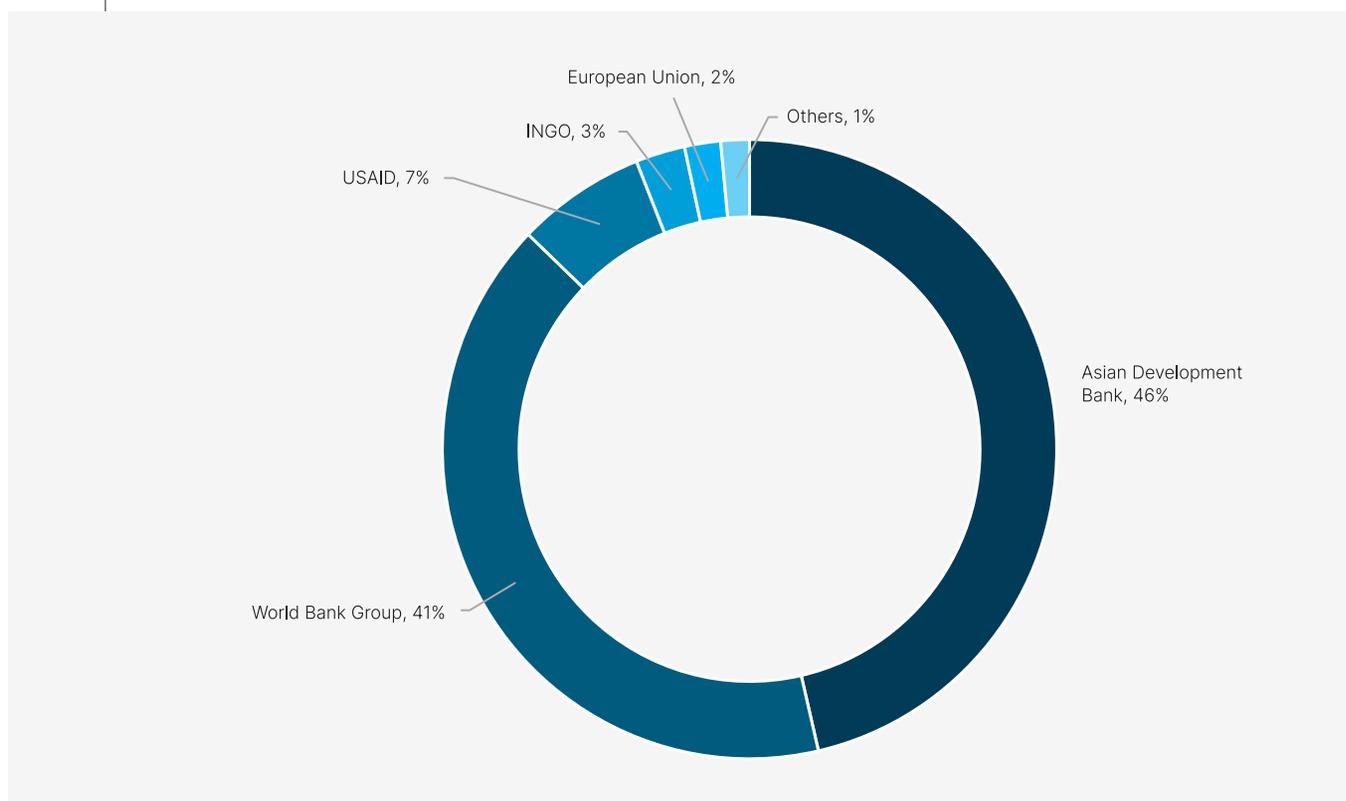
Only one out of ten organizations felt that their donor demonstrated any commitment to invest in strengthening the organization's digital capacity and infrastructure. This relatively smaller number of commitments indicates that donors are often interested in executing their projects, but the institutional development of their partner organizations is not a major concern.

Multilateral and bilateral aid for COVID-19

In addition to the projects approved by SWC, international development partners have pledged to support Nepal during COVID-19. Different development partners have committed USD 632 million through 111 projects and disbursed USD 539 million related to COVID-19 (IECCD, 2021). Asian development bank and the World bank group accounted for 87 percent (USD 469.7 million) of the total disbursements made by the development partners. INGOs accounted for 3 percent (USD 14 million) of the total disbursements made for COVID-19.

FIGURE 19

Disbursement by donor group



Source: IECCD (2021); Author-generated chart.

Concessional loan assistance accounted for 87 percent (USD 470 million) of the total aid, followed by 8 percent (USD 41 million) technical assistance, and 4.8 percent (USD 26 million) grant aid, direct implementation accounted for only 0.4 percent (USD 2 million). Eighty-nine percent (USD 480 million) of the disbursed aid was on budget, and the remaining 11 percent (USD 58 million) was off-budget.

TABLE 7

Types of assistance

| Type of Assistance | Percent | Total Disbursement (USD) |
|------------------------------|---------|--------------------------|
| Concessional Loan Assistance | 87.2 | 470 |
| Direct Implementation | 0.4 | 2 |
| Grant Aid | 4.8 | 26 |
| Technical Assistance | 7.6 | 41 |
| Grand Total | 100 | 539 |

Source: IECCD (2021), Author generated table.

CSOs' response to COVID-19

Response activities

CSOs are providing essential humanitarian support to their constituencies. Several initiatives have been spurred in response to COVID-19 across the country. See figure 16 for a detailed percentage of organizations involved in different activities. The top three activities include the distribution of sanitation kits, generating awareness, and sensitizing communities. Similarly, CSOs disseminated information about relief programs and other related programs with their beneficiaries. In addition, CSOs also provided psychological counseling to needy people.

Some efforts used digital technologies, while others are still offering their assistance in the field. Numerous CSOs have followed the guidelines issued by the government and reported working very closely with the local government institutions. For example, CSOs from Parasi and Sindhupalchok district reported providing psychologi-

cal counseling to people in need and donating cash and essential items like face masks to the local quarantine camps and hospitals through local governments. Similarly, a youth club in Bhaktapur installed water tanks in nine different places to encourage handwashing behavior.

CSOs are also repurposing their resources towards the COVID-19 response. CSOs that were using FM radios and media channels have changed their programming to respond to the pandemic. One CSO from Humla changed its anti-trafficking awareness-raising program to the COVID-19 awareness program. Similarly, a CSO from Lalitpur launched a new column in a newspaper, focusing mainly on the Pandemic. Several other CSOs also reported instances of changes in their existing programming. One CSO from Kanchanpur changed the current youth participation and volunteer mobilization program to the COVID-19 awareness and support program.

FIGURE 20

Percentage of organizations involved in COVID-19 response activities

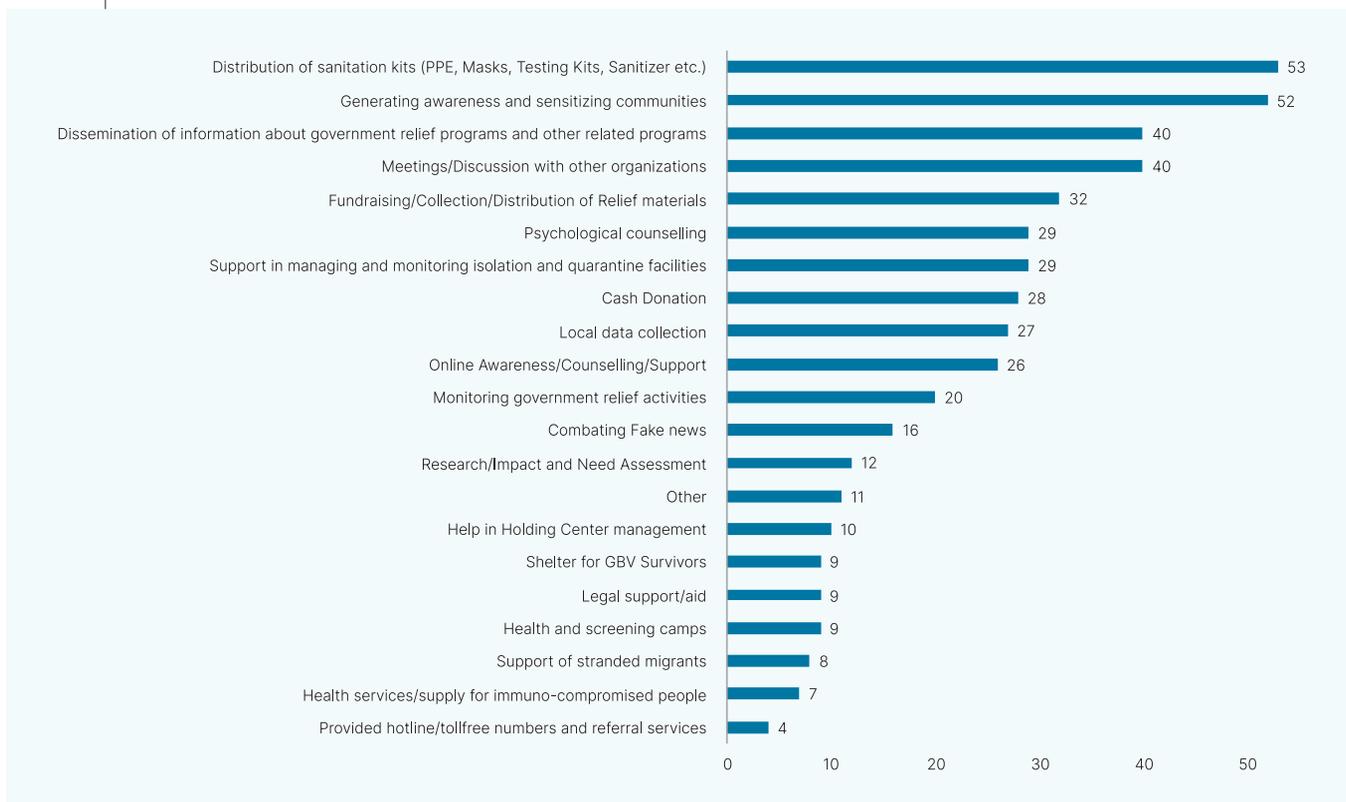


TABLE 8

CSOs' contribution in numbers during the first wave of COVID-19

| CSO Contributions | Average | Tentative contribution* |
|--|---------|-------------------------|
| Sanitary Kits | | |
| Tentative cash/kind donations (in USD) | 7187 | 30,184,667 |
| PPE | 37 | 156,710 |
| Testing Kits | 18 | 76,507 |
| Masks | 4393 | 18,450,054 |
| Sanitizer | 987 | 4,144,560 |
| Hand washing station | 54 | 227,825 |
| Soap | 5742 | 24,117,064 |
| Sanitary Pads | 432 | 1,816,139 |
| Voluntary contribution | | |
| Number of female volunteers involved from your organization | 62 | 260,198 |
| Number of male volunteers involved from your organization | 30 | 127,982 |
| Number of sexual and gender minorities volunteers involved from your organization | 2 | 7,753 |
| Paid Staffs | | |
| Number of female paid staffs involved from your organization | 6 | 23,150 |
| Number of males paid staffs involved from your organization | 6 | 24,242 |
| Number of sexual and gender minorities paid staffs involved from your organization | 1 | 2,596 |

* Estimates are based on 42 percent of organizations delivering their program/service as usual or better than before of approximately 10000 active NGOs in Nepal. These estimates are calculated for the first wave of COVID-19 response activities. For the second wave, please see the numbers from SWC below.

CSOs' contribution in Sanitary Kits



Cash/Kind Donations
30,184,667



Sanitizer
4,144,560



PPE
156,710



Handwashing Stations
227,825



Testing Kits
76,507



Soap
24,117,064



Masks
18,450,054



Sanitary Pads
1,816,139

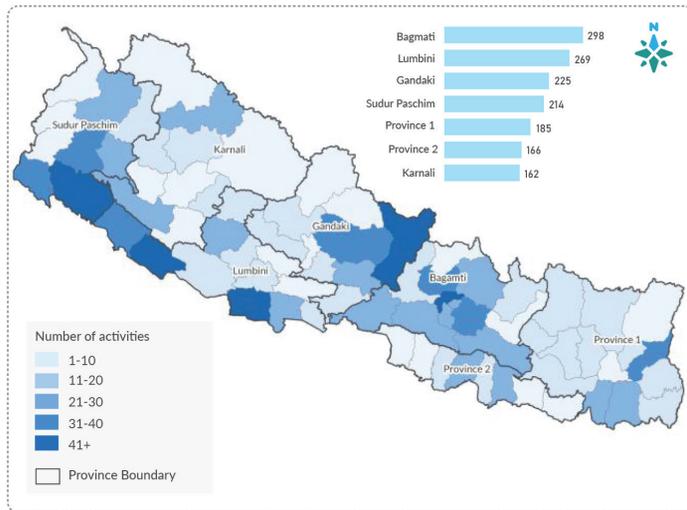
COVID-19 Response by Social Organizations in Coordination with Social Welfare Council

National Level Progress Report on COVID-19 as per work by Humanitarian Organizations and others.
(as of July 02, 2021)

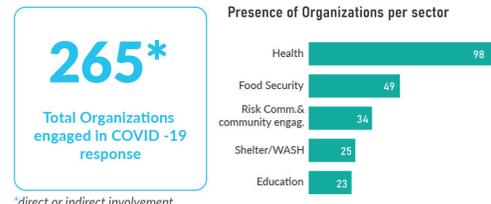
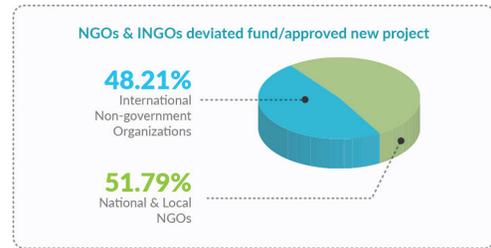


COVID-19 RESPONSE ACTIVITIES DISTRIBUTION WITH PROVINCIAL STATUS

The operational presence reflects the actors that have already implemented or are in the implementing phase as of reporting date.



PRESENCE OF ORGANIZATION



COVID-19 SUPPORT FROM HUMANATARIAN AGENCIES



COMMITTED BUDGET AS PER ORGANIZATION TYPE

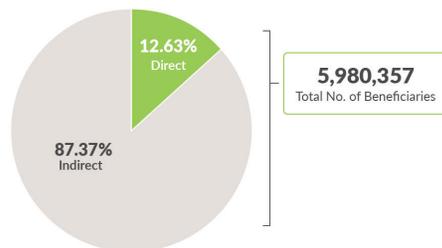


Technical Assistance Support by Housing Recovery and Reconstruction Platform

ACTIVITY STATUS BY SECTOR



TOTAL REACHED BENEFICIARIES



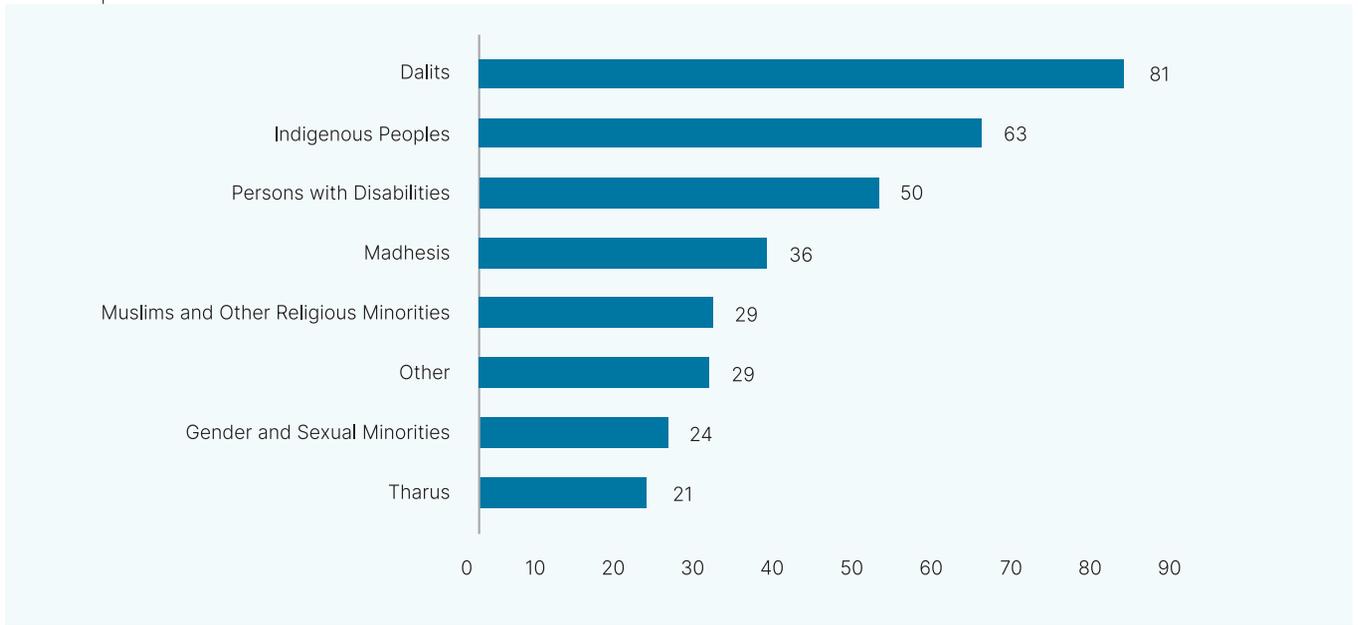
Scan to see organizations name list involved in COVID-19 support



Serving the excluded and vulnerable

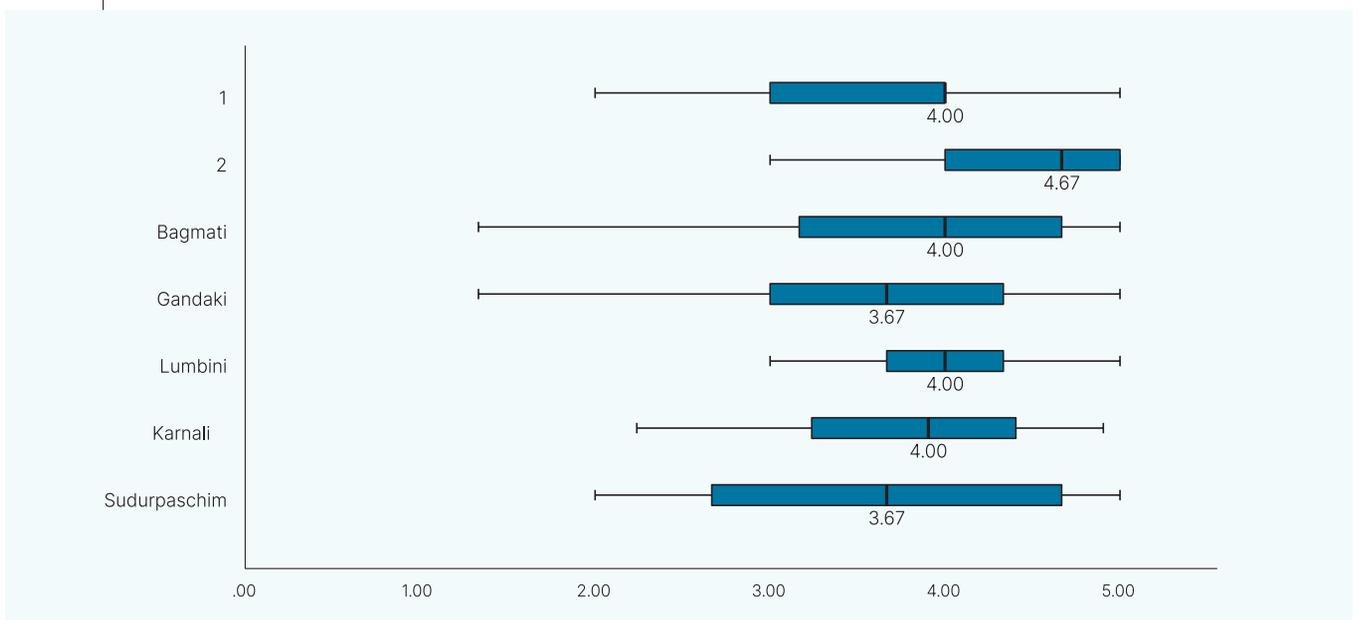
Nepali CSOs have prioritized the excluded and vulnerable communities in their response activities. Eight out of ten CSOs reported serving people from the Dalit community. Similarly, six out of ten CSOs provided support to indigenous people. Figure 17 depicts the percentage of responding organizations serving the members of excluded and vulnerable communities.

FIGURE 21 CSO response beneficiaries



Furthermore, CSOs expressed concerns that some excluded and vulnerable communities might be excluded in government response. Such concern was highest among CSOs in province 2, followed by Province 1, Bagmati, and Lumbini. CSOs from Gandaki and Sudurpaschim expressed relatively lower concern than other provinces.

FIGURE 22 Excluded and vulnerable community concern scale



Advocacy functions

NGO Federation of Nepal participated and hosted several meetings with different government agencies since the pandemic unfolded. On April 7, a dozen CSO leaders organized a meeting with the minister of women, children, and senior citizens, where they committed to helping the state respond to the crisis. On the same day, some sixty-nine CSO representatives met the national planning commission (NPC) member to explore ways to respond to the situation. On April 9, 2020, CSO leaders participated in another meeting with the vice-chair of the NPC to foster a partnership between CSOs and the government (NGO Federation of Nepal, 2020). Similar meetings were organized regularly in May 2021 during the second wave of the pandemic.



More than one hundred fourteen citizens, including writers, social activists, researchers, and professionals, condemned the government for its lack of seriousness in responding to the crisis

(SaihaPost. 2020)

On April 9, nineteen civil society umbrella networks and federations issued a press statement appealing for the management of quarantine and isolation centers, provisioning essential health supplies includ-

ing PPE and other relief packages for pregnant and women in their maternity, senior citizens, children, needy, landless, wage laborers, control of the spread of false information, and respecting the fundamental rights of the citizens.

In addition to these activities, numerous CSOs reported individual initiatives in representing the voice of the underserved communities. Several organizations resumed hotline telephone numbers to report gender-based violence, violation of child rights,

or even to provide free legal aid for marginalized communities.

Watchdog

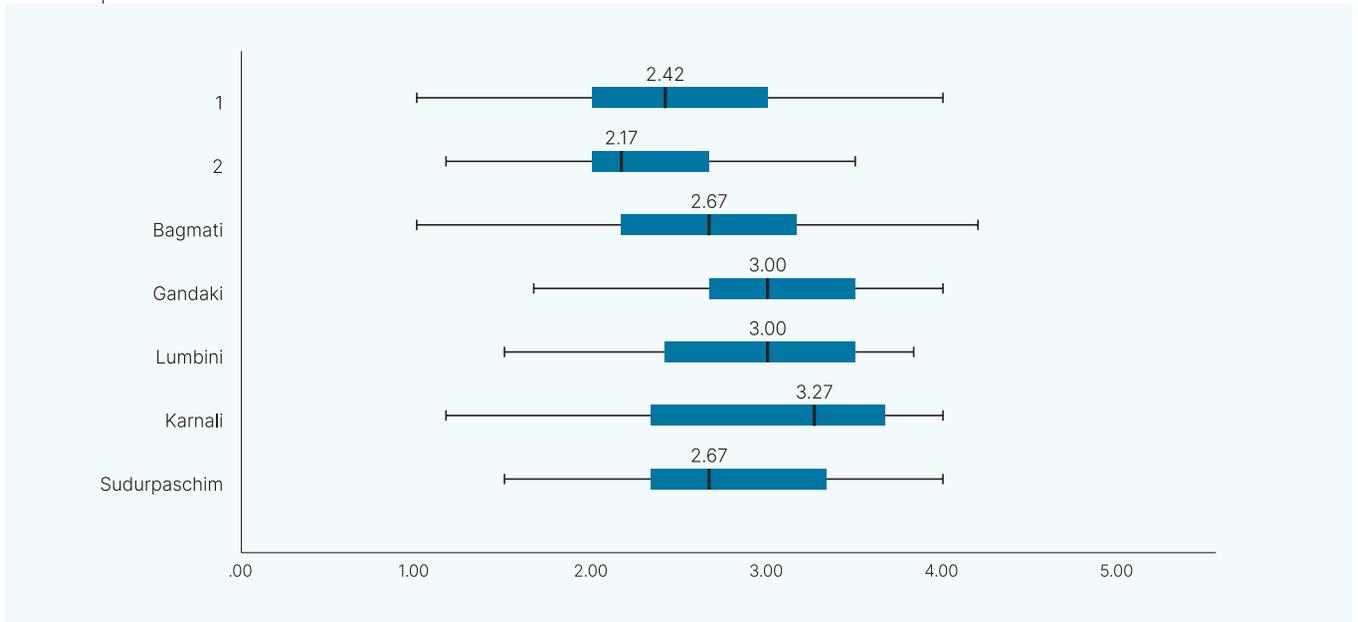
Civil society groups are going beyond relief provision to spearhead efforts to hold governments accountable for ineffective or undemocratic crisis responses. NGOs and other civil society groups voiced their concerns. More than one hundred fourteen citizens, including writers, social activists, researchers, and professionals, condemned the government for its lack of seriousness in responding to the crisis (SajhaPost, 2020). Similarly, a group of independent activists took their criticism from social media to the street (see box 3).

In a separate instance, an organization working to promote child rights in Kathmandu initiated mechanisms to track and monitor the activities of local governments to ensure their services reach children in the communities. Similarly, a profit-not distributing company working in the accountability sector initiated an online communication campaign to document government response to the pandemic and made the information available online through an e-newsletter.

Collaboration with government

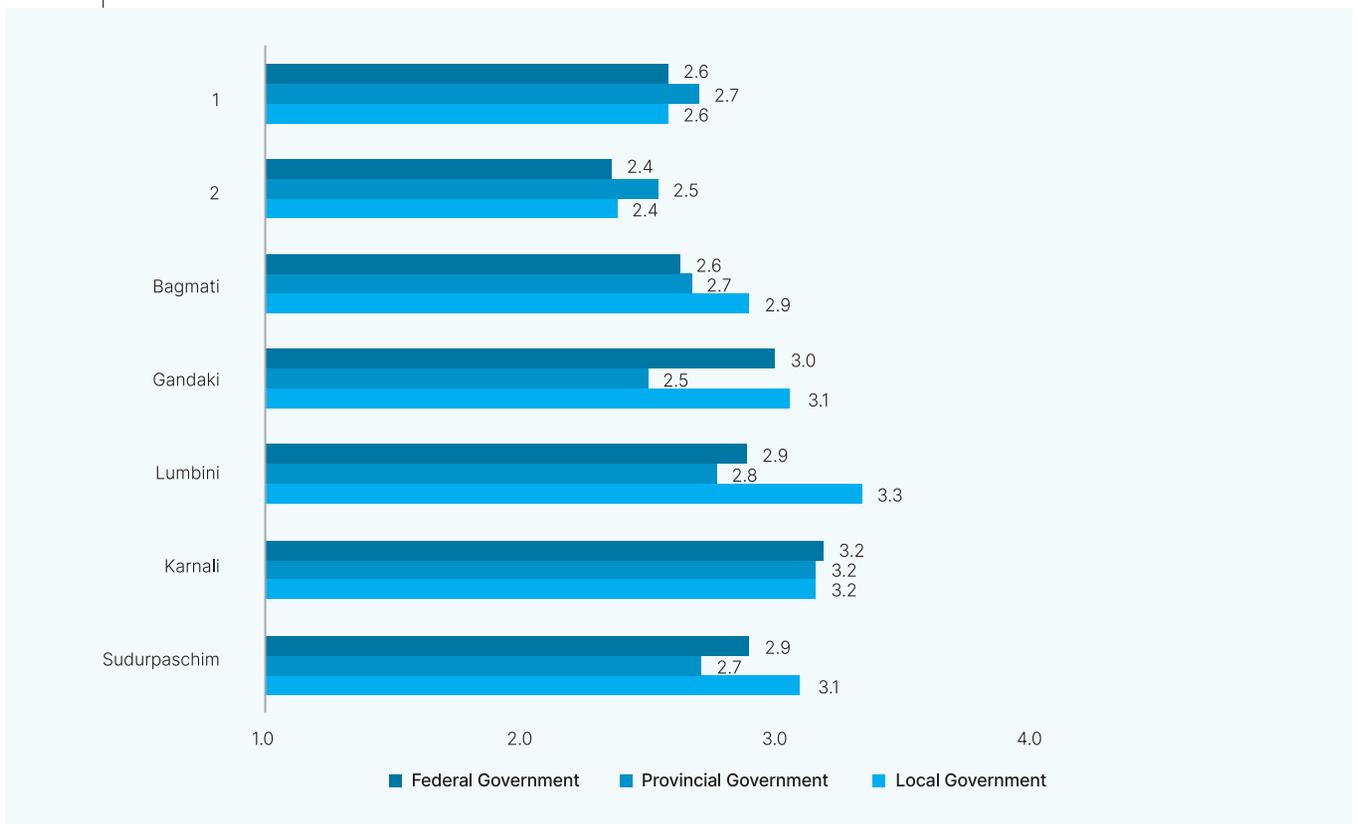
CSOs worked collaboratively with the different levels of government across the country. CSO leaders, in general, are not very satisfied with the government on their covid containment measures. On a scale of 1 to 5, the mean satisfaction score was 2.74, indicating a relatively lower level of satisfaction. There were differences in the level of satisfaction across provinces. For example, CSOs in province 2 reported the lowest level of satisfaction. On the other hand, CSOs from Karnali province expressed a better level of satisfaction.

FIGURE 23 CSOs' satisfaction with the government response.



In addition to the spatial differences, the study also observed differences in satisfaction with the responses of different levels of government. In general, CSOs expressed relatively more satisfaction with the local governments than the provincial and federal governments. This may be because of the direct engagement of CSOs with the local government and a relatively more straightforward working relationship with the local government.

FIGURE 24 Level of satisfaction on the performance of the government in containing COVID-19



Several organizations reported working hand in hand with the local government in providing relief materials and managing holding and isolation centers during the first wave of the pandemic. Several interview respondents mentioned their positive experience of working with local government. The recognition of CSOs' efforts at the local level was high. Many local governments have explicitly called for help from CSOs during the latest outbreak.

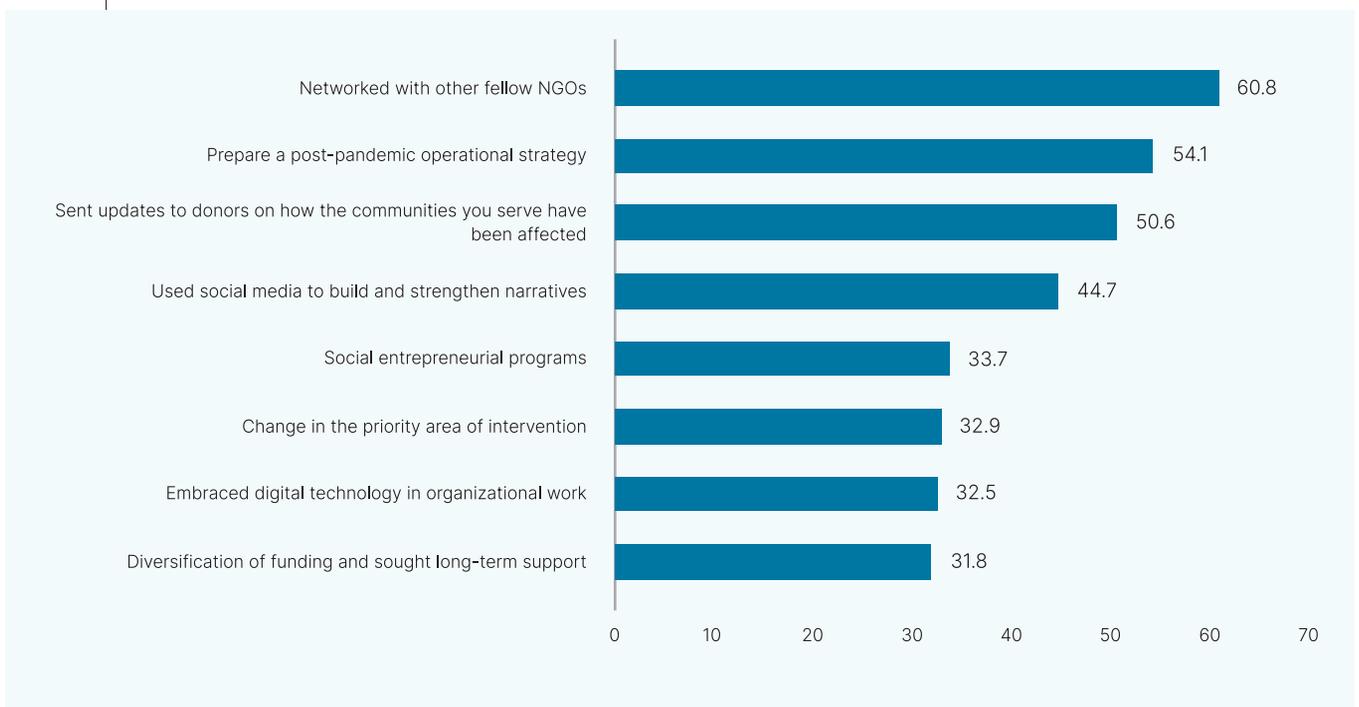
Emerging opportunities to CSOs due to COVID-19

The pandemic not only posed organizational challenges but brought some opportunities for the organizations. Six out of ten organizations networked with fellow CSOs and conducted several online meetings, and charted the course for their response. Some organizations have created loose networks among the organizations. At the same time, some unregistered independent civil society actors have come together to offer some innovative solutions during the pandemic (see box 2).

“Forty-two CSOs from all over Nepal have come together to discuss our contribution. We created a platform called a network of youths against covid. In that platform, we pitch what we want to do and seek support and collaboration for action. We are starting mental health-related online support. We received support from other organizations through the platform. Some members of the network have started isolation centers. Being in the network helps us realize the urgency and creates synergies among the organizations.” Advocacy oriented organization, Bagmati province

In addition to creating inter-organizational networks and collaborations, more than half of the organizations also prepared a post-pandemic operational strategy for their organization. Similarly, the adoption of social media for information dissemination and communication increased extensively. Eight out of ten survey participants used social media to share Coronavirus preventive measures.

FIGURE 25 Emerging opportunities for CSOs



Similarly, one in three surveyed organizations also accelerated the adoption of digital technologies for their work. Several organizations started using digital conferencing tools like zoom and began several of their activities online. Right from providing psychological counseling to conducting AGMs, CSOs used digital technologies.

Furthermore, there was a shift in the thought system on fundraising and sustaining the organization. One of the three responding organizations indicated that they had changed their intervention area. Similarly, organizations also diversified their funding, incorporated social entrepreneurial programs, and sought long-term funding mechanisms. These are some examples of how extreme events can speed up organizational change.

BOX 3

Covid Connect Nepal

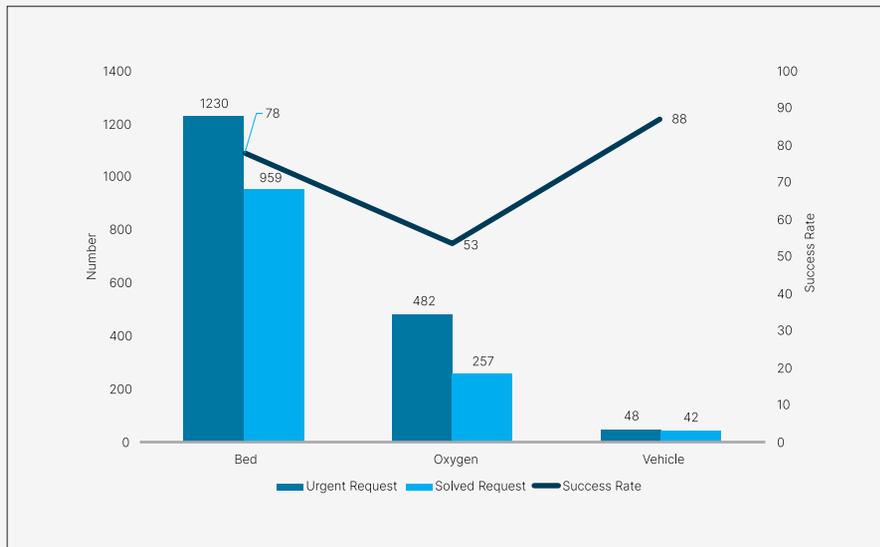
What started as an informal chat among a few friends on the eve of the government-imposed lockdown in April turned out to be a crucial platform for connecting people seeking COVID-19 support in Nepal. The platform was launched online one day after the restriction in mobility was imposed.

Eeda Rijal said, “We invited our friends and friends of friends to start the platform. We felt it was a panicking situation, and all we had was technology, so we sat down for seven hours and planned what the platform would look like.” talking about the inception process. She further adds, “it really evolved out of a problem, discussion, and the diversity of expertise of eight people. Our team has people from technology, business backgrounds, design thinking, social innovation, and the health sector. Covid connect is a result of our collective ideas.” highlighting the importance of diversity of skills.

| S.No. | Urgency | Bed Type | Full Name | Address | No. Requested | Requested On | Status |
|-------|---------|------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | High | Ventilator | DR Saranwar Karki | Jirivadi | 1 | Sat, 29 May 2021 12:44 PM | Completed |
| 2 | High | Ventilator | Kapendra Rai | solahumdu | 1 | Tue, 25 May 2021 09:25 AM | Completed |
| 3 | High | Ventilator | Suresh Kumar Shrestha | Yaku | 1 | Thu, 20 May 2021 10:48 AM | Completed |
| 4 | Low | Normal | Hemkala Poudyal | New Baranpohar | 1 | Sun, 16 May 2021 02:31 AM | Completed |
| 5 | High | Ventilator | Bismit | Katmandu | 1 | Sat, 15 May 2021 11:02 PM | Completed |
| 6 | High | Normal | Pradip Singh Magar | Tinchuli | 1 | Sat, 15 May 2021 03:41 PM | Completed |
| 7 | High | Ventilator | Rajendra | Rajpur | 1 | Sat, 15 May 2021 05:41 AM | Completed |
| 8 | High | Ventilator | LAXMI DEVI SHARDA | PODANE | 1 | Fri, 14 May 2021 09:07 AM | Completed |
| 9 | High | Ventilator | Suresh Chandra | Prithvina | 1 | Fri, 14 May 2021 08:33 AM | Completed |
| 10 | High | Isolation | Balwantrao Thapa | chardadi | 2 | Thu, 13 May 2021 11:12 AM | Completed |

The platform collects requests for hospital beds, oxygen, vehicle, and the need for food through social media, website, and phone calls. All these requests are then listed as requests on their web portal where people can offer help.

As their about us section reads, “We are a volunteer-run platform initiated to connect assistance providers and seekers and publish credible data and information about the COVID-19 status quo in Nepal.” Since their inception, the loose network of eight people has expanded to over 225 volunteers working around the clock handling 800 calls every day. Volunteers come from all different walks of life – from medical students to doctors to people with a background in technology, business, and public health.



Source: COVID connect dashboard (as of May 26, 2021); author generated chart

The platform has been able to arrange beds for 78 percent of the patients with urgent requests. Similarly, they had 88 percent success in arranging emergency vehicles to carry the patients to the hospitals during the lockdown. On the other hand, they have been able to cater to over half the requests for oxygens.

At first glance, it seems the work of the platform is providing the services alone. However, the platform also offers the feature for people to send mismanagement cases observed in handling COVID-19 cases anonymously. On top of the feature, over 120 volunteers from 18 different districts representing all the provinces are working round the clock to update the number of available ICU beds, ventilators, and general beds of over 260 hospitals every three hours in the country. They maintain a real-time status of over 1283 ICU beds and 606 ventilators as well.

The team has attempted to work with the government of Nepal to assist them in any possible ways. They had several rounds of meetings with the minister of health and population, senior bureaucrats at the MOHP, the prime minister's office, and the COVID-19 Crisis Management Center (CCMC). While they are optimistic about the possibility of working closely with the government, they have not had any solid joint efforts. Talking about the future of the platform, Rijal states, "...we are all professionals from different backgrounds, and we have our businesses and professions to engage. We want to hand the platform over to the government so that they can use it in the long run to manage future crises."

Recipe of success = Need of the hour X (power of social media + word of mouth + media coverage + diversity of team)

Website: <https://covidconnectnp.org>

Conclusion and looking forward

This study started with a threefold objective of exploring the impact of COVID-19 on civil society, the contribution of civil society in response and recovery during the pandemic and understanding the opinion of CSOs on the state of freedom of expression and association during the pandemic. The study selected civil society organizations as units of analysis to meet the objectives – predominantly NGOs, associations, federations, and profit not distributing companies as units of analysis. Two surveys were conducted among these organizations, the first one between April 14 – May 1, 2020, and the second one between December 1, 2020 – April 15, 2021. The question regarding the impact of COVID-19 was repeated in both surveys. A total of 482 CSOs participated in both surveys. This study, however, presents evidence mostly based on the 274 responses and ten semi-structured interviews that were conducted with the CSO representatives.

CSOs face formidable challenges and need support

Fourteen percent CSOs are at the risk of shutting down their doors permanently due to the pandemic. They have not been able to deliver their programs and services for almost a year since the beginning of the pandemic. This fact should concern citizens, government, and donors. Democracy and democratic ideals can only be strengthened in the presence of a strong and vibrant civil society. In addition, these organizations serve as service providers and have presented themselves as crucial actors in containing the proliferation of infectious disease either by reinforcing government-led efforts or by filling institutional voids left by the government.

Despite an important role they play, they are grappling with several concerns. Sev-

eral CSO leaders and volunteers have contracted the virus and some of them have lost their lives in the frontline. The state of psychological fear created by losing a colleague, the possibility of not being able to cover their operating expenses, the fear of laying off employees do not help CSOs during these difficult times.

Not only the organizational challenges have increased, the demand of their services and expectations from the members of their community as well as the local governments is on the rise. This has kept CSOs in a difficult position. CSO leaders are faced with the demand of being responsive, at the same time have to manage the organizational transitions.

Financial and technical support for CSOs is inadequate and scattered

Only four out of ten CSO received some form of funding to carry out covid response related activities. Out of all the projects approved in the last fiscal year, 10 percent of the projects were targeted for COVID-19 assistance which amounted only 1.3 percent of the total budget. There has been a slight improvement this fiscal year, where 22.5 percent of the approved projects amount 5.1 percent of the total approved projects. The relatively larger number of projects and a smaller share in amount is an indication of relatively smaller sized and fragmented projects for COVID-19. Such projects are important for immediate response. However, the long-term recovery would require greater investment and boost in the size of projects.

In terms of funding environment, fourteen percent more CSOs reported receiving funding from INGOs compared to their last fiscal year. However, at the same time seventeen percent less CSOs received funding

from the government during the pandemic compared to the last year's budget. While there was positive outlook towards donor when it came to adjustments of grants and awarding new response related activities. CSOs felt donor have not demonstrated sufficient commitment to their institutional growth and support. Only two out of ten organizations felt that their donors demonstrated any commitment to help the CSOs to strengthen their capacity to raise funds.

Only half of the responding organizations had their own website and only three out of ten organizations used messaging applications. These numbers are a testament of the reality of several CSOs and inherent challenge they face for digitalization and to take their work online. Only one out of ten organization felt that their donor demonstrated any commitment to invest in strengthening organization's digital capacity and infrastructure. A vibrant civil society cannot be envisioned without institutional capacity development and continuous support for organizational growth and development. Hence, donor community should focus on digital transformation of CSOs.

CSOs have contributed significantly during the pandemic

CSOs are providing essential humanitarian support to their constituencies. Several initiatives have spurred in response to COVID-19 across the country. **Top three activities include the distribution of sanitation kits, generating awareness and sensitizing communities.** Similarly, CSOs disseminated information about relief programs and other related programs with their beneficiaries. In addition, CSOs also provided psychological counselling to the needy people.

Approximately, USD 30 million worth of cash/kind donations have been made by CSOs during the first wave of pandemic. Over 156,000 sets of PPEs, over 76,000 testing kits, and hygiene kits in millions

have been supported. Similarly, in addition to these, several CSOs established and supported in managing isolation and holding centers and provided food and other subsistence materials to several needy communities. In addition, approximately, over 300,000 volunteers have contributed during the pandemic response and recovery. CSOs have prioritized the excluded and vulnerable communities in their response activities. Eight out of ten CSOs reported serving people from Dalit community. Similarly, six out of ten CSOs provided support to indigenous people.

CSOs are cynical on the state of freedom and expression

The national freedom expression was 3.2 on a scale of 1 to 5. There were minor differences across provinces. Respondents from province one, two, Bagmati, and Karnali perceived better freedom of expression compared to Lumbini, Gandaki, and Sudurpaschim province. Similarly, Urban CSO leaders felt better freedom of expression compared to their rural counterparts. Furthermore, smaller and medium sized organization leaders felt better freedom of expression compared to the leaders of larger organizations. As expected, organizations working in the advocacy were more critical to the state of freedom of expression compared to service delivering organizations.

Governments around the world have imposed emergency laws in response to the pandemic. While it is important to mitigate the threats of the virus, these governmental efforts are stronger, legitimate, and more effective when they respect human rights. 141 countries have measures that affect assembly, similarly 56 countries have measures that affect expression and 59 countries affecting privacy. States often use emergency powers because they offer shortcuts and such power often tend to stay long and could be hard to revert.

CSOs are not satisfied with governments' covid containment measures

CSO leaders expressed a lower level of satisfaction with the COVID-19 spread containment measures. **On a scale of 1 to 5, the mean satisfaction score at the national level was only 2.74 indicating a relatively lower level of satisfaction.** However, there were differences in the level of satisfaction across provinces. For example, CSOs in Province 2 reported the lowest level of satisfaction compared to CSOs from Karnali. CSOs expressed relatively more satisfied with the local governments compared to province and federal government. This may be because of the direct engagement of CSOs with the local government and a relatively easier working relationship with the local government.

Recommendations

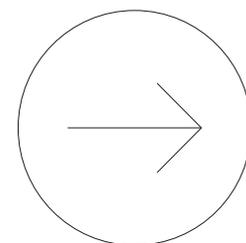
Amidst the chaos, institutions supporting CSOs should make flexible assistance a priority. The time ahead of us is probably the best time for the aid providers to walk their talk. Aid making institutions have spoken about flexible funding for local civic groups for a long time. However, in reality, only a tiny group of funders have held to their promises. The time to overcome old habits of requiring projectized assistance, cumbersome administrative requirements, and limited timeframes may be now. Aid providers should take on board the depth of disruption and listen to grantee partners and, together, explore how they can best help CSOs face the crisis, trusting they know

best what is needed in their own contexts.

Another critical priority is to help civic groups connect effectively to government pandemic responses when needed and possible—or at least not be actively attacked and harassed by government actors. As they negotiate new assistance packages relating to the pandemic, funders should push governments to incorporate civic actors as implementing partners. Similarly, public and private sector actors should create bridges for civil society to connect to larger pandemic-related support packages. CSOs should actively monitor these new assistance packages throughout the procurement and implementation processes.

CSOs should identify the primary risks face the organizations face due to mobility in restrictions; their reserves, and impact on program participants and staff from missed work or reduced funding. The CSOs should communicate transparently and honestly about the expected impacts on their stakeholders and organizations. They should speak honestly with their employees about their needs during this time. They should also create a culture of support and emphasize the need for open communication about employee needs. If cash flow becomes a problem, they should be honest with funders about their requirements.

Coordinate with the broader community, including other CSOs, funders, staff, and local government, to understand how to support each other through this period of turmoil. CSOs should keep their long-term mission at the forefront of decision making.



Appendix

TABLE 9

Sample characteristics

| | Frequency | Percent | | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------|-----------|---------|---|-----------|---------|
| Survey Round | | | Organization type | | |
| 2020 | 208 | 43.15 | Association and Federation | 4 | 1.46 |
| 2021 | 274 | 56.85 | Non-Governmental Organization | 264 | 96.35 |
| Province | | | Profit Not Distributing Company | 6 | 2.19 |
| 1 | 47 | 17.15 | Respondent Job title | | |
| 2 | 40 | 14.60 | Board Member | 30 | 10.95 |
| Bagmati | 76 | 27.74 | Board President | 113 | 41.24 |
| Gandaki | 18 | 6.57 | Executive Director/Chief Executive Officer | 62 | 22.63 |
| Karnali | 35 | 12.77 | Management Team Member (e.g., Development Director, Program Director, Program Manager etc.) | 40 | 14.60 |
| Lumbini | 37 | 13.50 | Other | 29 | 10.58 |
| Sudurpaschim | 21 | 7.66 | Highest level of president's education | | |
| Urban/Rural | | | PhD | 7 | 2.55 |
| Rural | 32 | 11.68 | Master's Degree | 92 | 33.58 |
| Urban | 242 | 88.32 | Bachelor's Degree | 99 | 36.13 |
| Gender | | | Plus 2 | 43 | 15.69 |
| Female | 90 | 32.85 | SLC | 19 | 6.93 |
| Male | 181 | 66.06 | Less than SLC | 14 | 5.11 |
| Other | 3 | 1.09 | Total | 274 | 100.00 |
| Number of Staffs | | | | | |
| < 25 | 219 | 79.93 | | | |
| 25 - 50 | 32 | 11.68 | | | |
| > 50 | 23 | 8.39 | | | |

TABLE 10

Province wise descriptive statistics of involved human resources

| Province | Mean | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|------------------------------------|--------|----------------|---------|---------|
| Number of female volunteers | | | | |
| 1 | 39.91 | 218.037 | 0 | 1500 |
| 2 | 5.38 | 6.975 | 0 | 30 |
| Bagmati | 207.46 | 1719.53 | 0 | 15000 |
| Gandaki | 6.94 | 6.539 | 0 | 22 |
| Karnali | 4.11 | 8.714 | 0 | 50 |
| Lumbini | 54.59 | 286.712 | 0 | 1750 |
| Sudurpaschim | 19.19 | 32.506 | 0 | 140 |

| Province | Mean | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|---|-------|----------------|---------|---------|
| Number of male volunteers | | | | |
| 1 | 79.64 | 509.821 | 0 | 3500 |
| 2 | 8.9 | 17.37 | 0 | 100 |
| Bagmati | 11.29 | 27.617 | 0 | 200 |
| Gandaki | 6.56 | 7.221 | 0 | 25 |
| Karnali | 6.49 | 13.874 | 0 | 80 |
| Lumbini | 28.68 | 136.757 | 0 | 836 |
| Sudurpaschim | 17.05 | 20.711 | 0 | 70 |
| Number of sexual and gender minorities volunteers | | | | |
| 1 | 0.55 | 1.332 | 0 | 5 |
| 2 | 2.28 | 6.786 | 0 | 40 |
| Bagmati | 1.95 | 7.099 | 0 | 45 |
| Gandaki | 1.33 | 4.753 | 0 | 20 |
| Karnali | 0.57 | 1.703 | 0 | 7 |
| Lumbini | 2.62 | 9.722 | 0 | 58 |
| Sudurpaschim | 6.57 | 14.02 | 0 | 60 |
| Number of female paid staffs | | | | |
| 1 | 1.57 | 2.491 | 0 | 10 |
| 2 | 4.35 | 8.725 | 0 | 45 |
| Bagmati | 6.79 | 15.636 | 0 | 122 |
| Gandaki | 6.33 | 6.971 | 0 | 24 |
| Karnali | 4.63 | 9.941 | 0 | 50 |
| Lumbini | 5.86 | 9.235 | 0 | 35 |
| Sudurpaschim | 12.52 | 15.41 | 0 | 65 |
| Number of male paid staffs | | | | |
| 1 | 1.72 | 2.716 | 0 | 13 |
| 2 | 5.88 | 10.988 | 0 | 54 |
| Bagmati | 6.62 | 15.01 | 0 | 85 |
| Gandaki | 6.11 | 7.169 | 0 | 25 |
| Karnali | 6.43 | 14.541 | 0 | 80 |
| Lumbini | 6.16 | 10.526 | 0 | 53 |
| Sudurpaschim | 12.62 | 12.816 | 0 | 43 |
| Number of sexual and gender minorities paid staffs | | | | |
| 1 | 0.34 | 0.867 | 0 | 4 |
| 2 | 0.8 | 1.99 | 0 | 9 |
| Bagmati | 0.89 | 3.839 | 0 | 30 |
| Gandaki | 0.72 | 2.421 | 0 | 10 |
| Karnali | 0.34 | 0.725 | 0 | 3 |
| Lumbini | 0.14 | 0.481 | 0 | 2 |
| Sudurpaschim | 1.52 | 2.228 | 0 | 6 |

TABLE 11

Descriptive statistics of distributed relief materials and coverage

| Province | Mean | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------------|---------|---------|
| PPE | | | | |
| 1 | 14.15 | 73.79 | 0 | 500 |
| 2 | 15.63 | 40.69 | 0 | 220 |
| Bagmati | 26.51 | 127.258 | 0 | 1075 |
| Gandaki | 16.83 | 29.997 | 0 | 100 |
| Karnali | 46.17 | 253.17 | 0 | 1500 |
| Lumbini | 24.05 | 61.776 | 0 | 300 |
| Sudurpaschim | 166.33 | 282.905 | 0 | 1025 |
| Testing Kits | | | | |
| 1 | 13.83 | 64.65 | 0 | 400 |
| 2 | 30 | 160.448 | 0 | 1000 |
| Bagmati | 1.43 | 6.494 | 0 | 50 |
| Gandaki | 1.17 | 4.26 | 0 | 18 |
| Karnali | 3.8 | 20.937 | 0 | 124 |
| Lumbini | 16.27 | 83.435 | 0 | 500 |
| Sudurpaschim | 95.24 | 333.506 | 0 | 1500 |
| Masks | | | | |
| 1 | 1846.81 | 3096.341 | 0 | 10000 |
| 2 | 1801.25 | 2554.144 | 0 | 10000 |
| Bagmati | 5760.05 | 16874.056 | 0 | 100000 |
| Gandaki | 2963.5 | 5013.964 | 0 | 20000 |
| Karnali | 2211.2 | 4384.939 | 0 | 20000 |
| Lumbini | 10029.62 | 34064.039 | 0 | 200000 |
| Sudurpaschim | 11224.9 | 16682.004 | 0 | 61766 |
| Sanitizer | | | | |
| 1 | 153.13 | 398.229 | 0 | 2500 |
| 2 | 548.4 | 1256.47 | 0 | 5000 |
| Bagmati | 1207.28 | 5847.93 | 0 | 50000 |
| Gandaki | 1064.33 | 3985.571 | 0 | 17000 |
| Karnali | 965.03 | 3512.954 | 0 | 20000 |
| Lumbini | 578.05 | 1193.5 | 0 | 5000 |
| Sudurpaschim | 4336 | 11089.474 | 0 | 50000 |
| Hand washing station | | | | |
| 1 | 5.96 | 14.029 | 0 | 60 |
| 2 | 8.45 | 20.011 | 0 | 100 |
| Bagmati | 23.08 | 109.338 | 0 | 800 |
| Gandaki | 86.06 | 300.618 | 0 | 1276 |
| Karnali | 7.74 | 29.5 | 0 | 150 |
| Lumbini | 143.59 | 820.87 | 0 | 5000 |

| Province | Mean | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|---|----------|----------------|---------|---------|
| Sudurpaschim | 342.57 | 661.79 | 0 | 2000 |
| Soap | | | | |
| 1 | 389.6 | 921.38 | 0 | 5000 |
| 2 | 1161.43 | 2449.127 | 0 | 10000 |
| Bagmati | 14192.07 | 114655.826 | 0 | 1000200 |
| Gandaki | 284.06 | 479.103 | 0 | 1500 |
| Karnali | 930.69 | 2108.355 | 0 | 10000 |
| Lumbini | 2047.95 | 8271.179 | 0 | 50000 |
| Sudurpaschim | 6124.95 | 11494.52 | 0 | 50000 |
| Sanitary Pads | | | | |
| 1 | 171.51 | 493.511 | 0 | 2500 |
| 2 | 643 | 1809.035 | 0 | 10000 |
| Bagmati | 540.12 | 1750.953 | 0 | 10000 |
| Gandaki | 47.78 | 129.14 | 0 | 500 |
| Karnali | 685.86 | 3378.962 | 0 | 20000 |
| Lumbini | 170.16 | 459.35 | 0 | 2460 |
| Sudurpaschim | 907.1 | 1165.144 | 0 | 3856 |
| Number of Municipalities covered | | | | |
| 1 | 1.53 | 1.792 | 0 | 9 |
| 2 | 4.53 | 10.306 | 0 | 61 |
| Bagmati | 4.08 | 9.568 | 0 | 50 |
| Gandaki | 2.72 | 2.562 | 0 | 10 |
| Karnali | 2.17 | 4.274 | 0 | 25 |
| Lumbini | 3.3 | 3.901 | 0 | 20 |
| Sudurpaschim | 4.62 | 5.869 | 0 | 22 |
| Rural Municipalities covered | | | | |
| 1 | 1.64 | 2.221 | 0 | 12 |
| 2 | 3.1 | 9.626 | 0 | 61 |
| Bagmati | 4.96 | 14.241 | 0 | 100 |
| Gandaki | 3.56 | 3.399 | 0 | 13 |
| Karnali | 3.97 | 9.373 | 0 | 55 |
| Lumbini | 2.81 | 3.332 | 0 | 10 |
| Sudurpaschim | 6.05 | 8.249 | 0 | 30 |
| Districts covered | | | | |
| 1 | 1.11 | 0.89 | 0 | 5 |
| 2 | 1.48 | 1.783 | 0 | 11 |
| Bagmati | 3.95 | 8.163 | 0 | 44 |
| Gandaki | 3.72 | 3.786 | 0 | 12 |
| Karnali | 1.63 | 2.39 | 0 | 13 |
| Lumbini | 1.78 | 1.946 | 1 | 12 |
| Sudurpaschim | 1.9 | 2.528 | 1 | 12 |

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