

# Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project (CS:MAP)

JANUARY 19, 2021

## FACT SHEET

### BACKGROUND

Nepal's 2015 Constitution embraces equality for all citizens, and guarantees avenues for their participation in decision-making in public, political, and economic life. The Constitution recognizes and establishes legal and institutional pathways to overcome gender, caste, ethnic, class, and other social barriers to equality. Civil society and media organizations play a central role in this process of consolidating democratic rights and freedoms, as they have since the First People's Movement in 1990.

Throughout the internal armed conflict, human rights actors worked through a wide range of media and civil society organizations to persistently claim and defend human rights protections, despite significant risks. Both during that period and more recently, citizens, human rights defenders, and leaders of civil society organizations faced arbitrary restrictions on freedom of expression, on their right to organize freely, and on the right to assemble and protest. Since 2018, these restrictions have emerged in the form of statutory or regulatory measures, or as security measures carried out in the name of social harmony and public order. In response, civil society and media organizations have advocated for federal compliance with international principles that limit rights restrictions to certain legitimate aims that can be applied only as strictly necessary and proportionate.

Since March 2020, the coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic underscored the importance of a robust civil society and media sector, and highlighted the critical part that Civil Society Mutual Accountability Project (CS:MAP) plays in strengthening the role of civil society and the media. The pandemic magnified Nepal's governance challenges. Those most vulnerable to the pandemic are those historically disadvantaged by discriminatory social norms, elite capture of public resources, and a lack of effective remedies for rights violations. In the COVID-19 context, these vulnerabilities manifest in the lack of equal access to information and essential services, in the additional burdens and violence experienced by women and girls as communities face increased economic pressure, and in the lack of accountability to marginalized and vulnerable groups in public health law and policy. In response, CS:MAP partners and supported leadership have addressed human rights concerns at all of these levels, particularly by facilitating and technically supporting targeted advocacy.

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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CS:MAP is a five-year, \$16 million project covering 58 municipalities in 34 districts of Nepal's three western provinces (Sudurpaschim, Karnali, Lumbini), as well as two earthquake-affected provinces (Bagmati and Ghandaki). CS:MAP aims to increase effective and inclusive governance, which federal restructuring is intended to enable. Since 2016, CS:MAP has provided organizational capacity and technical assistance to civil society and media organizations and leadership to enable them to advance public interests. CS:MAP supports partner efforts to protect and nurture a democratic and inclusive public sphere and accountable governance.

To achieve these goals, CS:MAP programming is organized across four objectives beginning with strengthened law and policy processes, including a focus on human rights protections at national and local levels (Objective 1). Two other objectives strengthen participation, leadership, and accountability: improved civil society and media collaboration on advocacy that can lead to local solutions, including representation of marginalized groups (Objective 2); and more and better public oversight of service delivery at municipal levels (Objective 3). Supporting the latter two objectives and reflected in many of the key achievements below is direct CS:MAP support to 14 subnational partners on organizational capacity and integrity (Objective 4). Human rights and GESI principles and programmatic strategies are integrated into each of these areas.

## CS:MAP KEY ACTIVITIES & ACHIEVEMENTS

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- **Participation and Accountability.** Support CSO and media engagement in promoting inclusive and accountable public services and resource use through participatory mechanisms from ward to municipal headquarters and district level.
  - More than 150 civil society-led public oversight actions at municipal level.
  - 21 functioning municipal committees for citizen participation established.
  - 5 municipalities adopted human rights standards to guide executive decision-making.
  - Strengthened accountability through CS:MAP-supported reporting by civil society (3 'shadow reports') and government to the UN Human Rights Council (Universal Periodic Review).
  - Good Governance Barometer scores improve across CS:MAP municipalities by 31.7% (2017 baseline).
  - Increase by 2019 in the use of ICT governance accountability tools (4%, 2017 baseline) and in the number of citizens participating in social accountability mechanisms (17.3%, 2017 baseline).
- **Public law and policy.** Provide technical support to CSO and media leadership regarding legal and policy dimensions of the right to freedom of expression and association, health, and education, as well as other public interests including agriculture and disaster risk reduction.
  - COVID-19 response guidelines adopted by 28 municipalities.
  - Adoption and implementation of municipal 'civic engagement' standards through the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA).
  - 15 laws and policies influenced by CS:MAP supported CSO and media partners.
  - 58 municipal laws and policies more GESI-responsive.
  - 140 applied policy research initiatives by CS:MAP-supported CSOs

- **Civil society leadership, capacity and public trust.** Support CSO and media leadership, capacity, and collaboration that advances the public values of inclusion, transparency, and accountability in governance.
    - Increased level of public understanding (17%) and confidence (13%) in the role of CSOs and media (from 2017 to 2019).
    - Uniform CSO self-governance standards adopted by civil society coalitions in 15 districts.
    - Training and orientation for more than 2,000 human rights defenders and students on human rights mechanisms of accountability.
    - Improved organizational performance and accountability related to GESI standards (by 32.9% in 2019 compared to 2017)
  
  - **Inclusive public sphere.** Enhance the role of the media in advancing public interests through support to radio, social media and other programming, with a focus on the leadership of youth and members of marginalized groups at local and national level.
    - More than 1,000 journalists oriented on ethical reporting during public health crisis.
    - More than a dozen separate initiatives led by CS:MAP-supported media organizations on evidence-based and ethical reporting.
    - More than 300,000 people reached through public outreach campaigns promoting civic engagement through social media, documentaries, TV shows and radio.
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