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Social Accountability in the Delivery of Social Protection

Nepal case study

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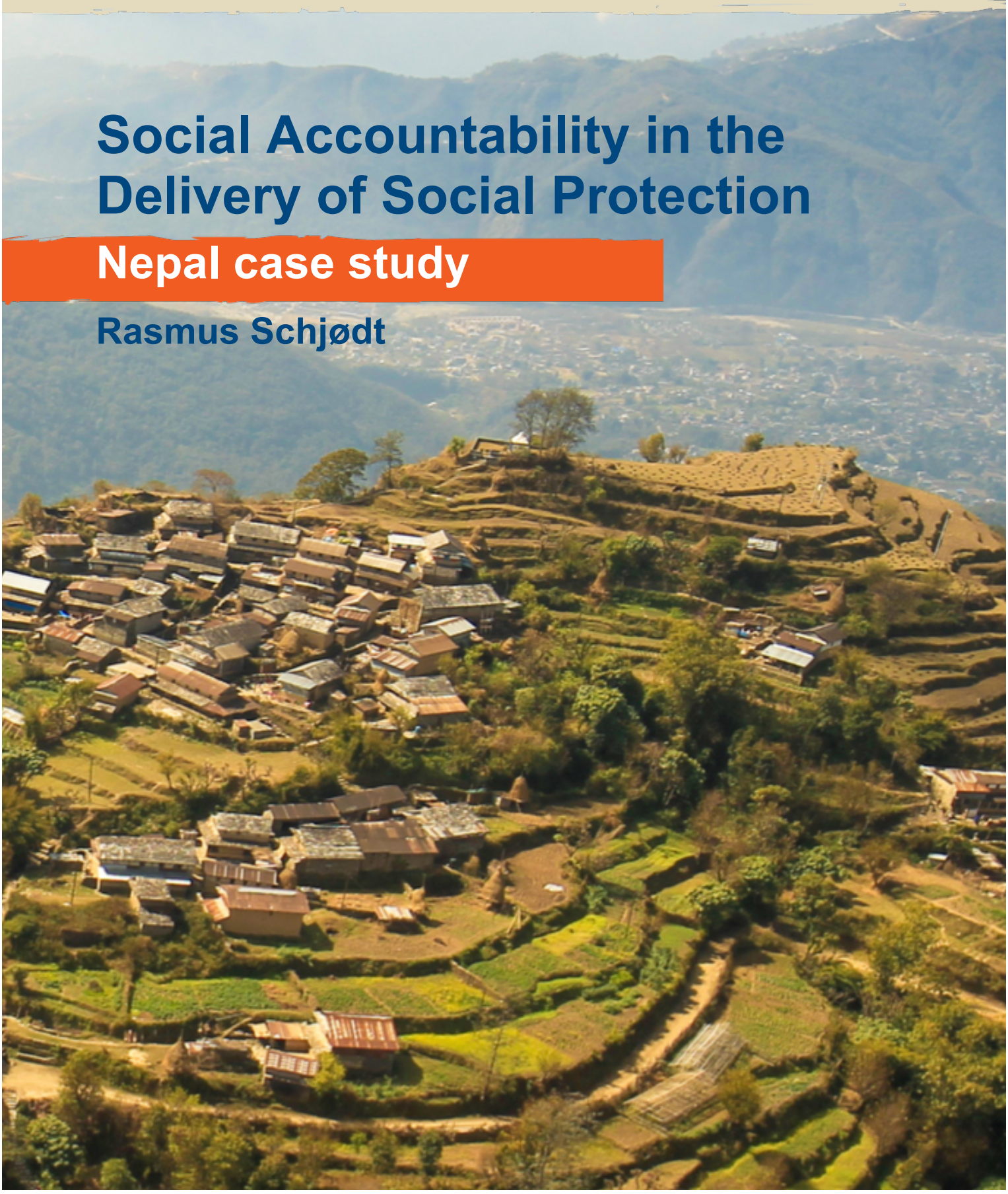

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Acronyms

CA	Constituent Assembly
CDO	Chief District Officer
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CPN-UML	Communist Party of Nepal – Unified Marxist Leninist
CSSP	Child-Sensitive Social Protection programme
DDC	District Development Committee
DFID	United Kingdom Government, Department for International Development
LDO	Local Development Officer
LGCDP	Local Governance and Community Development Programme
MoFALD	Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development
NC	Nepali Congress
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLSS	Nepal Living Standards Survey 2010/11
NPR	Nepalese Rupee
SSNP	Social Safety Nets Project
VDC	Village Development Committee

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a case study on social accountability in Nepal's social protection programmes. It is one of four case studies, which taken together form one of the outputs of a global policy research project that DFID has contracted Development Pathways to undertake. These four case studies will inform a final research report and a guidance note for practitioners.

The overall purpose of the global research project is to bring together existing evidence and generate new evidence on the effects that social accountability mechanisms have on the delivery of social protection services and on state-society relations. Through a review of existing literature and in-country qualitative research in Nepal, the present study seeks to assess the effects of two programmes on social accountability in social protection: The Child-Sensitive Social Protection Programme (CSSP), implemented by Save the Children, and the Local Governance and Community Development Programme (LGCDP), implemented by the Government of Nepal.

Nepal's main social protection programmes include the Old Age Allowance, the Single Women's Allowance (mainly targeted at widows), the Child Grant (for Dalit children and all children in Karnali Zone) and the Disability Allowance. The Old Age Allowance and the Single Women's Allowance have achieved very high coverage rates, while the Child Grant has a slightly lower coverage rate and the Disability Allowance a very low coverage rate.

Save the Children's CSSP has been implemented in Nepal since 2011 and has included a number of different activities aimed at strengthening accountability in the social protection programmes, including: activating and training legally mandated local monitoring committees; supporting local authorities to organise public hearings on social protection; supporting local authorities to establish computerised vital event registration; hiring social mobilisers to disseminate information and provide awareness-raising trainings; and, forming and training single women's groups.

The Government of Nepal's LGCDP is a country-wide local governance programme, which has included the establishment of local monitoring committees, Ward citizen forums (WCF), and placing social mobilisers with local authorities to increase awareness of available government services.

The findings of the research are presented in accordance with the conceptual framework of the research project, which comprise five components of social accountability: information, civic mobilisation, state-citizen interface, citizen action and state action.

Access to information: Because of the high coverage rates of Nepal's social protection programmes, information spreads relatively easily by word of mouth. In addition, our research found that CSSP and LGCDP social mobilisers, Ward citizen forums and women's groups have been effective mechanisms for disseminating information about programme

changes. Public hearings have also been a way for local officials to disseminate information, and there have also been various other channels of information, including radio spots. However, we also found examples of how information spreads unevenly through communities: Dalits and indigenous people have less information about the programmes and processes than high caste Hindus; older people have less information than younger people; persons with disabilities face additional challenges in accessing information; and people living further from Village Development Committee (VDC) offices have less information than those living closer to the offices. The main reason for the relatively high level of awareness seems to be related to the design of the social protection programmes, which are universal or categorically targeted, with simple eligibility criteria and high coverage. However, the CSSP and LGCDP have also played a key role in increasing awareness of the programmes through social mobilisers and Ward citizen forums.

Civic mobilisation: Even though there is a generally high level of information, the extent to which citizens mobilise to raise demands with officials is low. We found this to be mainly because of lack of confidence of citizens and lack of social cohesion in what is considered 'communities' (but may in reality be quite separate settlements). NGOs are mainly in a service delivery role, and while there are member-based local civil society organisations, they are often heavily politicised. Effective civic mobilisation is difficult to create through external initiatives such as the CSSP, or a state-run initiative like the LGCDP, and women's groups and Ward citizen forums have had limited success in enabling citizens to mobilise.

Interface: Public hearings, Ward citizen forums, social mobilisers and Local Social Protection Coordination Committee members all serve to enhance opportunities for interaction between citizens and officials, with especially the CSSP and LGCDP social mobilisers and Ward citizen forums playing an important role in expanding the space for interaction between citizens and state. However, more needs to be done to make these interfaces accessible for all citizens.

Citizen action: We found that people do generally react if they do not receive the benefits they feel they should, but often the lack of clear channels to voice grievances means that they give up if there is no immediate reaction from the state. There are barriers to action in the form of confidence, education, knowledge, language, discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and caste, old age, disability and the cost of travelling to district headquarters. As mentioned above, the CSSP and LGCDP initiatives do not seem to have been particularly effective in mobilising citizens to take action (with a few exceptions), and interfaces with local officials still need to be made more accessible to all groups.

State action: The responsiveness of the state is limited because of both limited incentives and limited capacity to respond. There is little incentive for key local officials to respond to people's demands and people do not have any means of pressurising them to act. The main tool for inducing local officials to act is for people to go through local political leaders, who are the key decision-makers, and can usually make local officials act according to their requests. The CSSP and LGCDP initiatives have aimed to improve both incentives and capacity: they have increased the incentives for local officials to improve programme

implementation, through increased awareness of citizens of their entitlements, and increased transparency of programme implementation through Ward citizen forums, social mobilisers, public hearings and Local social protection coordination committees.

The projects do seem to have subtly diluted the power of local officials and made them more accountable, even if the absence of 'hard' sanctioning opportunities has limited the impact. Improving capacity of local authorities has been an important part of both projects. However, overall, the CSSP and LGCDP programmes have not fundamentally changed accountability relations, and have also not been able to improve government capacity sufficiently to make local officials responsive to citizens. This would require addressing the root causes of these shortcomings, which depends on political action at the national level. To some extent, these limitations are also a result of the social accountability initiatives being just one of several components of the CSSP programme, which has as its overall objective to improve access to the social protection programmes, not to achieve systemic changes in accountability relations.

Despite the overall mixed results of the CSSP and LGCDP programmes, and the limited scope of the research, we can point to a number of interesting findings that may inform social accountability initiatives both in Nepal and elsewhere:

First, social protection programme design matters: Nepal shows how programmes with simple and transparent eligibility criteria and high coverage rates can work well even under conditions of limited accountability. The implication is that social accountability should not be seen as a separate initiative or component to be added on to social protection programmes, but as a feature of programme design, so that accountability is considered when designing social protection programmes, along with other programme objectives.

Second, face-to-face interactions between citizens and local officials are most effective for the gradual building of trust and for addressing minor day-to-day issues. However, this requires that local officials are present on a regular basis and also requires efforts to ensure that marginalised groups are not discriminated against.

Third, in countries like Nepal with very heterogeneous populations and unequal power relations, relations between the state and citizens have to be seen in connection with relations between different population groups. In these contexts, social accountability is likely to be closely linked to strengthening social inclusion and social cohesion.

Fourth, the CSSP is a good example of what can be achieved when NGOs work constructively together with local officials to strengthen accountability and implementation capacity. Local officials particularly appreciated the concrete benefits that the programme brings, such as improving their image among the population and the savings resulting from removing ineligible beneficiaries from the beneficiary lists.

Fifth, while the CSSP and LGCDP have been able to make progress on some issues, including awareness about programmes and payments, it is clear that the main

outstanding issues are related to lack of government capacity and weak accountability mechanisms within the state. Addressing these issues requires an integrated approach, linking issues encountered at the local level to national level advocacy.

Introduction

This report is a part of the research project *Social Accountability in the Delivery of Social Protection*, carried out by Development Pathways with funding from the UK Government. The project was carried out between September 2016 and September 2017 and involved a literature review and four case studies. Through a review of existing social accountability initiatives in social protection programmes, the research team, with input from DFID and the project's external advisory committee, selected initiatives in Nepal, Ethiopia, South Africa and India for case studies. The selection criteria for case studies included identification of social accountability initiatives perceived as successful, with interesting lessons to be learned, and with existing documentation. This report presents the findings from in-country research in Nepal.

Section 2 briefly describes the methodology of the research. Sections 3 and 4 provide important background information about the socio-economic and political context (Section 3) and the social protection system (Section 4). Sections 5 and 6 introduce the social accountability initiatives and describe the findings of the field research in the two districts of Sindhupalchok and Kavrepalanchok. Section 7 discusses social accountability in social protection in Nepal and the impact of the two programmes studied, based on both the background analysis and field work findings. Section 8 presents some of the main policy implications. Section 9 concludes.

Chapter 1: Methodology

Save the Children's *Child-Sensitive Social Protection* programme (CSSP) in Nepal was selected as one of the case studies, based on limited documentation showing that the programme has to some extent been successful in improving accountability. The CSSP has focused on increasing awareness about the Government of Nepal's life cycle social protection programmes, has organised public hearings, and has engaged in capacity building of local authorities, all with the aim of improving transparency and accountability in the implementation of Nepal's social protection programmes.

This report is based on 19 days of qualitative research in Nepal. The research team carried out a limited number of interviews with key stakeholders in Kathmandu, but prioritised spending as much time as possible in the two districts of Sindhupalchok and Kavrepalanchok. Research locations were chosen within these two districts, as the CSSP has, until very recently, only been implemented here. We decided to include locations in both districts in the research, as there was a possibility of interesting differences in methodology and results, since the project was implemented by a different local partner organisation in each district. It was also possible that we would be able to see differences arising from differences in context, including remoteness and differences in the ethnic composition of the population, and/or different attitudes to the project by the district authorities.

During the review of the literature on social accountability in Nepal, as well as key informant interviews in Kathmandu, we realised that social accountability initiatives under the Government of Nepal's nation-wide Local Governance and Community Development Programme (LGCDP) were also potentially important for the social protection programmes. The field research therefore also examined relevant initiatives under the LGCDP.

The CSSP has been managed by Save the Children in Nepal, but implemented by two local partner organisations: the Tuki Association in Sindhupalchok, and Nangshal Association in Kavrepalanchok. In each district, with assistance from Save the Children programme staff in Kathmandu, we requested that each of the two partner organisations submit a list of Village Development Committees (VDCs) where they have been working. Together with Save the Children we then selected two VDCs in each district, based on two criteria: a) We aimed to include both VDCs that were perceived by Save the Children programme staff to have been successful, in terms of improving accountability, and that had been less successful; b) we also sought to include VDCs both in close proximity to the district capital and/or easily accessible, and ones that were more remote and more difficult to access. Initially we decided to visit Devitar and Deupur VDCs in Kavrepalanchok, and Kadambas and Lishanku VDCs in Sindhupalchok. However, because of heavy rain, Lishanku VDC was inaccessible at the time of the research in Sindhupalchok and we focused instead on Petku VDC.

VDC secretaries, VDC assistants, social mobilisers and other community leaders assisted in organising focus group discussions and interviews in each VDC. We deliberately did not rely on CSSP staff to select or facilitate interviewees and did not base the selection of interviewees on their participation in CSSP activities. This means that the findings reflect the general knowledge and attitude of people towards the CSSP in the areas where the programme has been implemented, rather than the impact of the programme specifically on the people who have been directly involved.

We aimed to cover people from two to three different wards in each VDC, including both communities close to the main road and VDC office and those further away. Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- Gender
- Caste (including: high-caste Hindus, Dalits and ethnic minorities)
- Disability
- Social protection beneficiary status (including: non-beneficiaries, beneficiaries of the old age allowance, beneficiaries of the child grant, beneficiaries of the disability allowance and beneficiaries of the single women's allowance)

Interviews were conducted in Nepali by Nepali researchers, and were recorded and later transcribed into English for analysis. We relied mainly on key informant interviews and focus group discussions, with a few individual in-depth interviews. Focus group discussions were generally held separately with men and women and with high-caste Hindus, Dalits and ethnic minorities, although occasionally mixed groups were interviewed, for example, in cases where we could only mobilise a small group of beneficiaries in a location. Two international researchers from the research team – a social accountability specialist and a social protection specialist – participated in the first week of research in Kavrepalanchok District to ensure the relevance and quality of the research. The research tools were adjusted after the first day of field research. Table 1 shows an overview of the number of interviews conducted, while a complete overview is included in Annex 1. In total, 184 people participated in interviews and focus group discussions.

Table 1: Interviews conducted

Location	Key informant interviews	Individual In-depth Interviews	Focus Group Discussions			
			No. of FGDs	Participants		
				Male	Female	Total
Kathmandu	**8**	**-**	**-**			
Kavrepalanchok	**17**	**2**	**8**	**30**	**27**	**57**
Dhulikhel (District HQ)	3	-	-			
Devitar VDC	5	2	2	2	9	11
Deupur VDC	9	-	6	28	18	46
Sindhupalanchowk	**14**	**3**	**15**	**31**	**52**	**83**
Chautara (District HQ)	3	-	-			
Kadambas VDC	6	-	9	21	26	47
Petku VDC	5	3	6	10	26	36
Total	**39**	**5**	**23**	**61**	**79**	**140**

In addition to the qualitative field research, this report draws on a review of the extensive literature available on social protection and governance in Nepal.

The overall research project that this case study contributes to aims to answer four key research questions:

1) Where social accountability mechanisms have been used within social protection programmes, what are the intended direct and indirect outcomes (at household, community, state levels)?
2) What is the evidence of the impact of social accountability mechanisms in social protection programmes leading to improved service delivery outcomes; and strengthening state-society relations?
3) Under what conditions have different social accountability mechanisms in social protection programmes been associated with improved service delivery outcomes; and strengthening of state-society relations?
4) What can be learnt from other service delivery sectors about the use of different social accountability mechanisms?

This report seeks to answer questions one and two with respect to the social accountability initiatives that have been implemented as part of the CSSP and LGCDP programmes. It will also contribute new information that can help to answer question three.

The report employs the conceptual framework of the overall *Social Accountability in Social Protection* research project. This builds on a framework proposed by Grandvoinnet et al. (2015) and is set out in detail in Ayliffe et al. (2017). The framework breaks down the social accountability concept into two main elements of citizen and state action, supported by three 'levers': information, civic mobilisation and interface.

Citizen action is the central constitutive element of social accountability and may include demand-making (for information, justification, or sanctions); protests against injustice; or claims for better public goods.

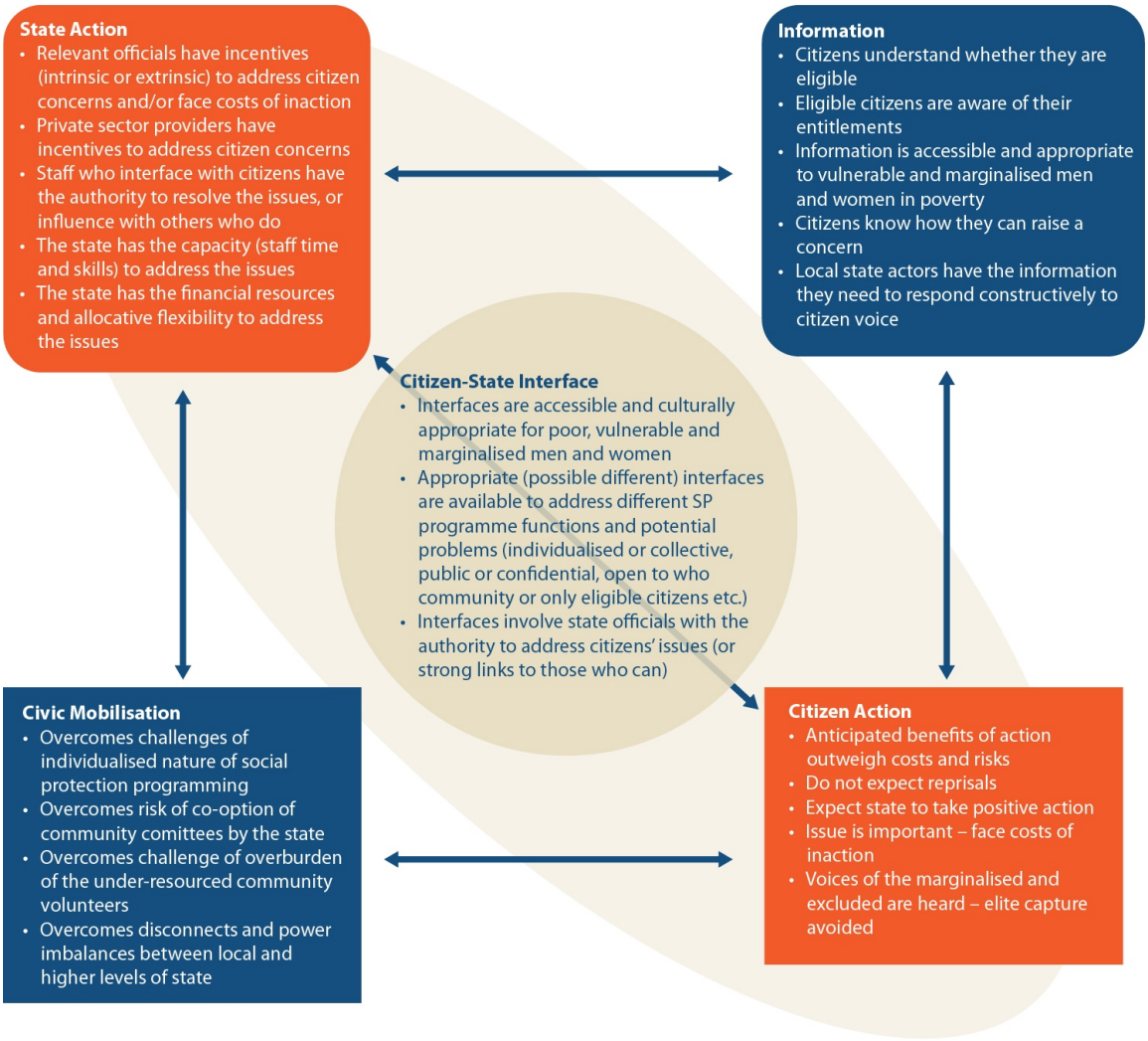
State action is the second primary element of social accountability and may take the form of a positive response, for example improved services and reduced corruption, or a negative response in the form of repression and a backlash.

Information flows are essential for an accountable and responsive state that engages citizens in decision-making. These flows need to take place in various directions – from citizens to the state, from the state to citizens, between the various parts of civil society, and within the state apparatus. However, information or the existence of state-society interface does not necessarily spur citizen or state action on an issue.

Civic mobilisation is often necessary to trigger and facilitate citizen 'voice', especially for vulnerable or marginalised individuals and groups. Similarly, it is necessary to bring citizens

and state actors together in an *interface.* Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework *(*Ayliffe et al. 2017).

Figure 1: Social accountability in social protection conceptual framework



Source: Ayliffe et al. 2017

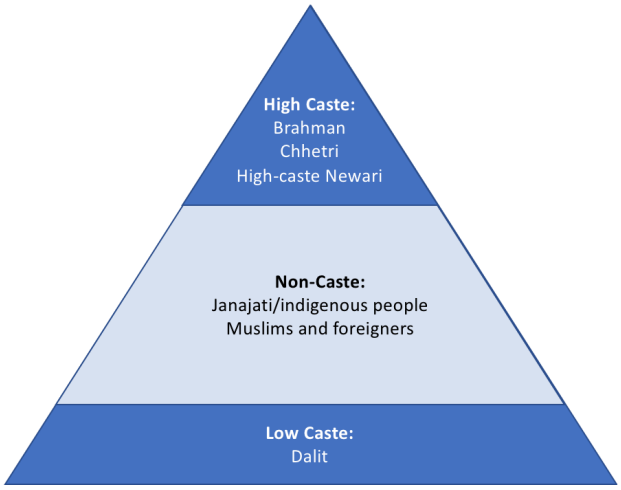
Chapter 2: Socio-economic and political context of Nepal

Nepal is a Least Developed Country, ranking 144 out of 188 countries on the 2016 Human Development Index (UNDP 2016). In 2011, a quarter of the population lived below the national poverty line, with 15 per cent below the international extreme poverty line of $1.90 a day (Adhikari et al. 2014; World Bank). According to the Multidimensional Poverty Index, which also considers nutrition, health and education, 44.2 per cent of the population live in poverty. Poverty is higher for women, Dalits, and those from particular ethnic groups (Langford and Bhattarai 2011 in Adhikari et al. 2014). Subsistence agriculture remains the main livelihood activity, with 76 per cent of the population engaged in agriculture (CBS 2011). Remittances are another main source of income: remittances have contributed more than 20 per cent of GDP since 2008/09 and about 10 per cent of the population work abroad at any one point in time (Ghimire and Upreti 2012).

2.1 Social structure

Since the unification of Nepal in 1768, Nepalese state and society has been constructed based on a hierarchical social system with high-caste Hindus at the top, as illustrated in Figure 1. Even though there is less caste discrimination today, and in fact several affirmative action initiatives have been adopted, most influential positions in society are still occupied by the Brahmin and Chhetri castes, together with the Newar, the indigenous group from the Kathmandu valley. At the bottom of the social hierarchy are Dalits, while Nepal's indigenous groups, Janajatis, occupy a position somewhere in between (Drucza 2016). The social hierarchy has very significant implications for the living conditions and opportunities of various population groups. For example, the poverty rate for Dalits is 42 per cent, compared to 23 per cent for non-Dalits, and Dalits own only one per cent of arable land (Drucza 2016). Figure 2 illustrates the traditional social hierarchy in Nepal.

Figure 2: Nepal's traditional caste hierarchy[1]



Source: Bennett and Sharma 2006:6, reproduced in Drucza 2016

[1] Dark blue shows the Hindu population groups (size of the triangles does not reflect population size)

The caste system was officially abolished in 1963, but still dominates social relations in many ways, and is important for understanding issues related to social accountability. For example, upper castes have been found to be twice as likely as Dalits to know their rights, understand government procedures and feel confident accessing services. They benefit more from social networks and have more local political influence (Koehler 2011 in Drucza 2016). Most indigenous groups speak languages other than Nepali, many of which belong to the Tibeto-Burman language group and therefore bear no resemblance to Nepali, which is an Indo-European language. Yet Nepali remains the language used in schools and in government. In addition to Dalits and Janajatis, some Madhesis, who occupy the flat Terai part of Nepal, are also subjected to systematic exclusion. Nepal's Muslim minority also have a much higher poverty rate than the general population, at 41 per cent. Exclusion in Nepal therefore works along multiple intersecting lines, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Dimensions of exclusion in Nepal

Social Category	Gender	Caste	Ethnicity	Language	Religion	Geopolitical
Dominant	Male	Brahmin, Chhetri	Indo-Aryan	Nepali	Hindu	Parbatiya (Hill dweller)
Subordinate	Female	Dalit	Sino-Tibetan	Other	Non-Hindu	Madhesi (Plains dweller)

Source: World Bank (2006)

Research on social exclusion in Nepal has found that 90 per cent of Brahmin, Chhetri and Newar reported never experiencing restrictions or intimidation in public. In contrast, all Dalits reported experiencing it to some degree and 20 per cent reported high levels of restriction or intimidation (Bennet 2005, in Adhikari 2014). Access to education also varies greatly between groups and literacy rates range from 92.8 per cent for Brahmins to 17.2 per cent among Madhesi Dalit women. There are also large differences in access to health for different groups, and on average Brahmins live 11-12 years longer than Dalits (Babajanian, 2012 in Adhikari 2014).

Nepal has a Gender Inequality Index rating of 0.497, ranking it 115 out of 157 countries (UNDP 2016). Women across all groups face discrimination. Women do more work than men, but earn less and have lower education and health indicators (Sharma 2009, in Drucza 2016). Women have less access to good employment opportunities and to education, with 44 per cent of women having no education at all (compared to 23 per cent of men) (Acharya 2014). This in turn affects their confidence and ability to voice their concerns towards the state: men try to influence service delivery institutions at 2.7 times the rate that women do, and are 4.8 times more likely to be successful in doing so (World Bank 2006, in Adhikari 2014).

People living with disabilities are usually overlooked when discussing exclusion in Nepal. However, disability is yet another line of exclusion that compounds other intersecting lines of exclusion. There is a lack of good quality data on disability in Nepal. As is common in many countries, existing prevalence data varies widely between different surveys, from

31.9 per cent reported in the World Health Survey 2002-2004 to only 1.94 per cent in Nepal's 2011 census. Data from 2001 shows that 68 per cent of people with disabilities have no education and 78 per cent have no access to earning an income (UNICEF and National Planning Commission 2001, in Morrisson et al. 2014).

Because of the complex mix of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, combined with the hierarchical caste system, social exclusion is a critical concept for analysing social accountability in Nepal. Social exclusion can be defined as 'the process through which individuals or categories of the population are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society in which they live'. It comprises three dimensions: exclusionary forces, structural disadvantage and limitations in capabilities (Kidd 2015).[2] Exclusion may be deliberate or unintended, open or subtle. Social exclusion can take many forms, and different forms of exclusion call for different solutions: those who are economically disadvantaged need redistribution of resources, while people discriminated because of their ethnicity or religion are most in need of recognition, for example through affirmative action (Kabeer 2009 in Drucza 2016). Relations of power and accountability between decision makers and disadvantaged individuals or communities underpin social exclusion. To a large extent, people's access to public services reflects their relative power, with those experiencing social exclusion less powerful than others (Kidd 2015). It is therefore important to consider, not just the extent to which social accountability initiatives can increase the access of excluded groups like Dalits and Janajatis to social protection, but also how social accountability initiatives can contribute to these groups being recognized and treated as citizens with rights by the state, thereby shifting the power relations between decision makers and excluded groups.

2.2 Political system

Nepal has a parliamentary system of government, with a President as the head of state. At the time of writing, there are 30 political parties and two independents represented in the Constituent Assembly, which functions as the country's legislative assembly. Although formally a parliamentary democracy, Nepal is in practice still in the process of changing from an autocratic monarchy to a more inclusive state. The many issues that need to be ironed out among the plethora of different ethnic, caste, religious, linguistic and geographically defined groups have led to severe political instability in the period following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that was signed in 2006 (Adhikari 2014). In 2015, a new constitution was finally adopted. The first elections for local government institutions, specified in the new constitution, took place on 14 May 2017, shortly after the research for this report was carried out. This section therefore mainly describes the system of governance at the time of the research in March 2017, since the research findings have to

[2] 'Exclusionary forces' often derive from prejudice held by more power members of society as shown in discriminatory practices such as institutionalised bias or marginalisation or cultural and social practices. 'Structural disadvantage' includes for example inadequate infrastructure, lack of government services and lack of good income earning opportunities. 'Limitations in capabilities' can have many sources, including disability, or ill health, but also factors such as self-confidence or illiteracy.

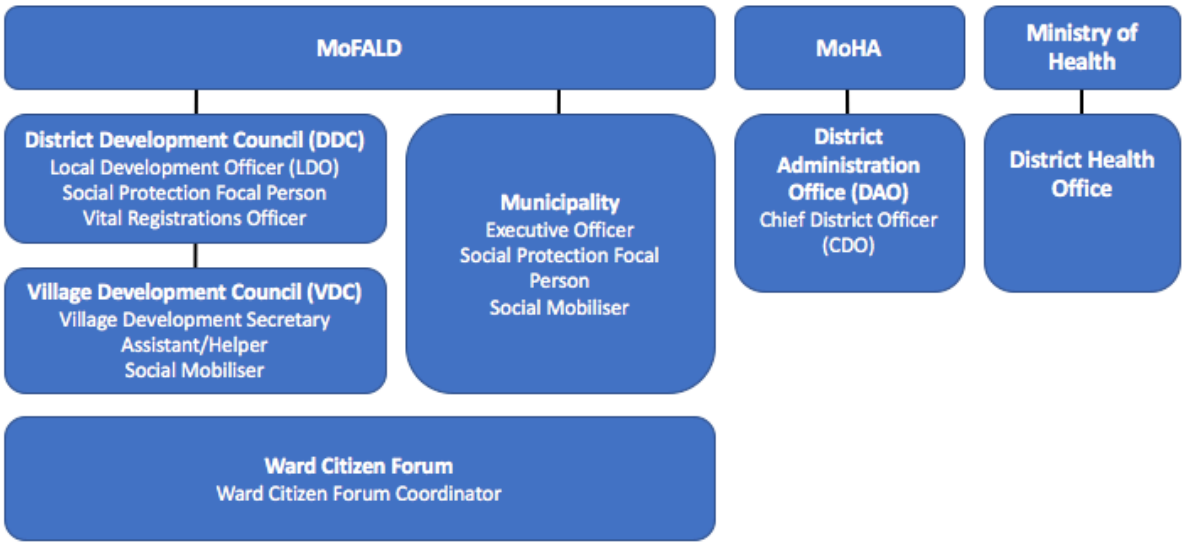
be interpreted within this unique context, although with a brief note on the changes that has taken place since.

At the sub-national level, Nepal was, before the recent local elections, divided into 75 districts and 130 municipalities. These 75 Districts were sub-divided into 3,157 Village Development Committees (VDCs). Each VDC was headed by a VDC Secretary who is a civil servant hired by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD) (TAF 2012). The Local Self-Governance Act 1999 and the Local Self-Governance Rules 1999 provided the legal basis for the local bodies and described a participatory decision-making process. An internal management manual prescribes procedures and conditions, including a requirement for all field offices to set up an information desk and display the Citizens' Charter describing services provided and costs where applicable (TAF 2012).

The local bodies were supposed to be accountable to the people they represent through an elected council with a committee as an executive body to implement the decisions of the council. However, at the time our research took place, local elections had not taken place for 20 years. This had led to a situation where the formal heads of local governments were unelected central government officials, while (also unelected) local political party leaders informally retained significant decision-making power. The VDC Secretary, the Chief Executive Officer of the municipality, and the Local Development Officer (LDO) at the District Development Committee (DDC) — all central government officials — carried out the functions of both the council and the committee. Various initiatives had been taken to try to remedy this situation and improve accountability of local officials prior to the local elections. In 2008, the government formed All Party Mechanisms (APMs) to function as local decision-making bodies, but they were dismissed in January 2012 amid charges of widespread misuse of local funds. Since then, Ward citizen forums have been formed in each Ward, with the aim to create a platform for citizens to come together to hold local officials accountable and to participate in the planning process. Ward citizen forums have 25 members selected by communities and are headed by a coordinator. Although they are official bodies, they do not have any budget or resources for administration, and there is no remuneration for the role of coordinator.

Figure 3 shows a simple diagram of the key institutions relevant to implementation of social protection programmes in Nepal at the time of the research, before the recent changes.

Figure 3: Key government institutions for social protection in Nepal



Source: Author, based on TAF 2012

The local bodies, in particular VDCs, were severely understaffed: each VDC Office, with only one VDC Secretary, one Assistant and one social mobiliser, was responsible for 48 functions in 11 different sectors. Local government staff did not receive adequate training, and they lacked decent housing and adequate resources for transport and administration.

There are pervasive issues of political patronage, and politicisation is prevalent throughout the Nepalese state and society. Alignment with a political party provides access to a network, which can provide protection in case of events where people need someone to speak in their favour. People also associate with a political party as a way of achieving access to jobs or contracts, and may often shift to another party if they do not receive the benefits that they expect from their membership (Drucza 2016). The bureaucracy is also highly politicised and one consequence of this is that patrons keep moving their affiliates into the most lucrative positions, which makes capacity-building difficult. The low capacity and lack of ownership and accountability due to frequent transfers of staff inhibits policy-making (Drucza 2016).

The new constitution of 2015 established Nepal as a federal state with three levels of government: federal, provincial and local. Following the adoption of the constitution, a Local Body Restructuring Commission was established to develop a proposal for effectuating the provisions of the constitution, and these have now been implemented during 2017. Under the new structure, Nepal is divided into seven provinces. Below these, the existing 75 DDCs have been transformed into 77 new District Coordination Committees, with much less power than the former DDCs. Below the districts, the thousands of old municipalities and VDCs have been replaced by 6 metropolitan cities, 11 sub-metropolitan cities, 276 municipalities and 460 rural municipalities ('Gaun Palik' in Nepali). These local level institutions are further sub-divided into wards, with an elected chairman and four members. The first elections for the new local institutions (cities, municipalities and wards) were held in three phases on May 14th, June 28th and September

18th 2017. This was followed by provincial and national elections in November and December 2017 for the new House of Representatives (lower house), National Assembly (upper house) and provincial assemblies.

The political settlement in Nepal transitioned to a 'competitive clientelist' system following the 2013 elections, with power shifting frequently between various coalitions of the three major parties and several smaller parties.[3] In this system '*power that is not formally institutionalised plays an important role in allocative decisions;*' a significant source of this power comes from incomes generated outside formal institutions (Khan 2010:48,53 in Drucza 2016). The result of this competitive clientelist system is short-term policy-making and weak implementation capacity, as resources are allocated as part of bargains to maintain coalitions (Khan 2010). The settlement is largely between elites, without much involvement of citizens (Levy 2014). While Nepal's political parties have members and strong networks at all levels of society and in all organisations and institutions, national level decision-making is the domain of a small elite. In reality, the political parties are *"a proxy for a very small number of elite Brahman/Chhetris who lead the various party factions, run the parties and often make last minute backroom deals between each other to settle on a range of major decisions, from the content of the Constitution, to who gets to be PM."* (Drucza 2016).

The fact that the dominant coalition is usually unstable and has to buy off outside actors (What Di John and Putzel (2009) call 'third party enforcers') is what explains the pervasive corruption in Nepal, and may also have an impact on the design of social protection programmes. Drucza (2016) describes how the fact that the senior citizen allowance is available at a lower age of eligibility and the Child Grant is universal in Karnali is not just because the region is Nepal's poorest, but also because of a strong regional Karnali lobby, represented by a number of wealthy upper caste Karnali residents in Parliament. The political settlement also means that the political parties are unlikely to have an interest in transferring more power to the bureaucracy, since this would mean fewer resources available for distribution to political supporters among the political elite.

While the nature of the political settlement is no doubt important for understanding governance in Nepal in general, it is less clear how important it is in relation to the implementation of social protection. It seems that it is mainly the competition between the different parties for votes that explains both the initial introduction of the first social protection programme and the continued expansion of social protection programmes. Social protection programmes, like most public programmes, have the potential to entrench local power structures if cash is leveraged for patronage or for vote-buying purposes. This is especially the case in weak states such as Nepal, where accountability mechanisms are limited (Harland 2011 in Drucza 2016). However, in practice, neither our own research for this report, nor the other research reviewed, indicate that social protection is widely used for patronage in Nepal.

[3] Political settlements refer to 'the balance or distribution of power between contending social groups and social classes, on which any state is based.' (di John and Putzel 2009: 4)

Another way that the political settlement may influence social protection administration is through the politicisation of the bureaucracy. Nepal's political parties maintain power by controlling the allocation of resources, including government positions, and as mentioned above, researchers have reported widespread use of favouritism based on party affiliations (Thapa 2010 in Drucza 2016). This means that in Nepal, accountability is mainly to a political patron and not downward to citizens (nor even upward to superiors in the bureaucracy). In terms of the civil service, Mishra (2014) claims that: *'The employee unions, egged on by political parties, play havoc with physical and ministerial location of staffing—much of which has to do with the distribution of corruption-high opportunities and direct rent seeking … [and they] bend and break the monitoring and supervisory system.'* This contributes to the issue of local officials who are often not present in the VDCs they manage and are frequently moved between posts.

Nepal has a long tradition of civil society organization, including various traditional community organisations; modern community-based organisations such as user groups, mothers' groups, self-help groups, farmer cooperatives savings and credit organisations; and CSOs/NGOs. However, the effectiveness of civil society organisations in improving social accountability and carrying out advocacy work is limited by the pervasive politicisation of Nepalese institutions, which also extends to civil society (Bhatta, 2012). Most organisations have limited capacity for advocacy, and civil society is characterised by fragmentation and lack of coordination.[4]

Even though there is very limited rule of law for most of the population, the judiciary does play a role in holding politicians to account. The 1990 Constitution explicitly recognised the independence of the judiciary, and established the principles of extraordinary jurisdiction and judicial review of executive decisions. The 2015 Constitution has preserved these provisions. Since 1990, the Supreme Court has exercised greater independence, issuing judgments protecting personal liberty and human rights, and interpreting constitutional provisions. There is a range of legislation and policies of relevance to social accountability, including the Good Governance Act and the 2007 Right to Information Act, as well as operational guidelines requiring public audits, social audits and public hearings.

The Supreme Court has played an active role in expanding access to social protection in Nepal, even if the Government has not always followed its verdicts. In 2010, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the organisation Women for Human Rights (WHR) that the single women/widow's allowance should be available to widows or separated women regardless of age. However, the Government did not comply with this until 2012 (ADB 2010 in Drucza 2016). In 2012, the Supreme Court ruled that persons with disabilities should be provided with sufficient benefits to cover their expenses, which were set at NPR 500-3,000 per month for partially disabled people and NPR 3,000-5,000 for fully disabled people. However, at the time of writing, the Government has not yet acted on this (Drucza 2016).

[4] Source: http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2011/05/03/nepal-accountability-program-pran

Chapter 3: Nepal's social protection system

Whilst Nepal has a wide range of programmes that fall within a broad definition of social protection, our focus in this report is on the four main life-cycle cash transfer programmes that make up the backbone of a tax-financed social protection system: The Child Grant; the Old Age Allowance; the Single Woman/Widow Allowance; and the Disability Allowance. These programmes have been the main focus of the Child-Sensitive Social Protection Programme (CSSP).

The number of beneficiaries and total expenditure has increased significantly over time, from about 200,000 beneficiaries in 1995/96 to 2.27 million beneficiaries in 2015/16 (New Era 2016). The government's 2016/17 budget speech set forth several major improvements to the social protection system: all allowances were doubled; the government proclaimed the intention to gradually universalise the Child Grant; and the government committed to providing payments through bank accounts (Ministry of Finance 2016).

With the recent increase in benefit levels, the **Old Age Allowance** now provides NPR 2,000 (about GBP 15) per month to all persons aged 70 and above, with the exception of those who are already receiving a pension from the contributory system. Corresponding to about 32 per cent of GDP per capita, this is a comparatively high benefit level by international standards, and is the highest in the region, in both absolute and PPP terms (Knox-Vydmanov 2017). The age of eligibility is 60 years for Dalits and for all older people living in Karnali Zone. In 2015/16, the benefit reached 951,000 people.

The **allowance for single women and widows** now provides NPR 1,000 (about GBP 7.5) per month for all single women aged 60 and above and for all widows regardless of age. The benefit was introduced by the Nepali Congress-led government in 1996. In the financial year 2015/16, it reached 657,414 women.

The **Disability Allowance** provides NPR 600 (about GBP 4.5) to people aged 16 and above assessed with a partial disability and NPR 2,000 for people with a 'full' disability. People with disabilities are assessed and categorised into four groups depending on the type and severity of impairment. Each group receives a different coloured card: those with red cards, assumed not to be employable, can access the highest disability benefit; those with blue cards get access to the partial disability allowance. People with less severe disabilities are given either a white or yellow card, which does not provide access to a cash benefit, but does provide access to other benefits, including transportation discounts. There was previously a quota restricting the number of beneficiaries of the disability allowance, but as of 2015 all red or blue card holders are entitled to the benefit. Disability identification cards are issued by The Women and Children District Office following an assessment by a district level committee. It is estimated that only a small percentage of people with disabilities are currently receiving the grant, with the ILO estimating the coverage rate at six per cent (Khanal 2012), although exact figures are difficult to gather as data on people

with disabilities registered at the district level is not collated at national level. However, following the earthquake, efforts have been made to collect and verify the lists of all social assistance recipients in the 19 most affected districts, and data collected by UNICEF for eight districts found that beneficiaries represented between 0.15 per cent and 0.52 per cent of the total population.[5] In total, 62,184 people benefit from the disability allowance.

The **Child Grant** is provided to all Dalit children under the age of 5, up to a maximum of two children per mother. In Karnali Zone, the Child Grant is universal.[6] In the budget speech of 2015/16, the Government committed to gradually making the grant universal in the whole country, which has so far happened in three districts (Ministry of Finance 2016). The grant is available either to the mother of the children or to the guardian if the children are not living with the mother. The objective of the Child Grant is to improve child nutrition (Adhikari 2014). It was originally introduced by the then Maoist government in 2009. The Child Grant reached a total of 466,074 children in the financial year 2015/16.

Table 3 shows the benefit levels and number of beneficiaries of each of the main tax-financed social protection programmes. To these programmes come a number of scholarship programmes and public work programmes which also reaches a significant number of beneficiaries, as well as a cash transfer for 'endangered indigenous people', which reaches a limited number of 23,100 people from particular ethnic groups.[7]

The tax-financed cash transfer programmes are all administered by MoFALD and delivered through the DDCs, Municipalities and VDCs. Within MoFALD, the cash transfer programmes are administered by the Department of Civil Registration (DoCR). Because Nepal's social protection system is built around universal life cycle programmes, its administration is closely related to the registration of vital events, also managed by the DoCR (Palacios 2016). Enrolment is the responsibility of the VDC Secretaries. The VDCs forward the beneficiary roster to the DDC, which collates the VDC rosters under its purview into a document that indicates the number of beneficiaries for each programme and sends it to DoCR (Palacios 2016). Funds are then transferred from DoCR to the DDCs and on to the VDCs. Payments are done manually in cash by the VDC secretaries three times a year (although payments through banks, using branchless banking, is now being introduced in some districts). The operational set-up is described in more detail in Annex 3.

[5] Source: forthcoming research shared in draft form with the authors by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM).

[6] In 2017, the government started gradually universalising the Child Grant in other parts of the country, starting with the districts with the lowest Human Development Index score, so far in the districts of Mahottari, Bajhang and Achham.

[7] The Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities classified indigenous groups into five categories based on a set of socioeconomic indicators: 'endangered', 'highly marginalised', 'marginalised', 'disadvantaged' and 'advantaged.' Endangered groups have small population sizes and poor human development indicators. More than 90 per cent of endangered and highly marginalised groups live in remote rural areas and rely on subsistence agriculture or hunting and gathering. For more information, see: http://un.org.np/oneun/undaf/endangered (Drucza 2016).

Table 3: Nepal's tax-financed social protection programmes

	Benefit (NPR, month)	Number of individuals receiving the benefit[8]	Eligibility criteria
Old Age Allowance (1995)	NPR 2,000	951,000	Aged 70 and above (60 for Dalits and in Karnali Zone). Not receiving a contributory pension.
Single Woman/Widow Allowance (1996)	NPR 1,000	657,414	Single women aged 60 and above and widows of all age.
Disability Allowance	Partial: NPR 600 Full: NPR 2,000	62,184 (According to ILO: Partial: 31,324 Full: 30,860)	Partial: Cannot carry out daily functions without help from others. Full: Cannot carry out daily functions even with the help of others.
Child Grant (2009)	NPR 400	466,074	All children under 5 in Karnali; Dalit children under 5 in other parts of the country.
Total		**2,136,672**	

It is a common issue for cash transfer programmes to be given to existing staff to administer, without the necessary resources to deliver programmes effectively (Barrett and Kidd 2015). In Nepal, VDCs have the main responsibility for all tasks related to the delivery of the social protection programmes and there are clear signs of overloading of VDCs, especially as the volume of transfers has increased significantly since the system was established (KII3; Drucza 2016; Adhikari et al. 2014). The cash transfers are the only programme without additional funds allocated for communication and administration (Drucza 2016).

Put simply, the administration of a social protection programme can be assessed based on the extent to which it manages to provide the right amount of money to the right people at the right time. Based on the available evidence, Nepal's social protection programmes are overall performing relatively well on these three parameters, especially when considering the limited capacity of the state and the challenging geography of the country. Here I present the conclusion of an analysis of the performance of the four main programmes, with more details available in Annex 4.

Accordingly, we estimate in the following section: a) The number of eligible people excluded from the programmes; b) The number of ineligible people benefitting from the programmes (inclusion errors); and, c) Issues related to payments, including delays and discrepancies in the amount paid.

[8] In financial year 2015/16, source: Budget Speech 2016-17 (page 72), Ministry of Finance, Government of Nepal

a) Coverage/exclusion errors: A comparison of administrative data and population projections, indicate that coverage rates of both the Old Age Allowance and the Single Women's Allowance could be close to 100 per cent. The Child Grant also has a relatively high coverage rate, reaching almost 80 per cent of the target group. In contrast, the disability benefit reaches little more than 10 per cent of the potentially eligible beneficiaries. A recent expenditure and service delivery survey carried out by New Era (2016) confirms the existence of eligible people who are not receiving the benefits, but also shows that most of these were waiting for their application to be processed. According to the survey, the main issues of exclusion are related to persons with disabilities and the Child Grant for Dalit children: people with disabilities have difficulties obtaining the disability identification card and Dalits often lack birth certificates (New Era 2016).
b) Inclusion errors and leakage: Different surveys have found different levels of inclusion errors and leakage, and all numbers have a margin of error. Estimated inclusion errors (the proportion of beneficiaries who are ineligible) vary between two per cent and 37 per cent (World Bank, 2014; Drucza, 2016; New Era, 2016). However, the most recent survey with national coverage found inclusion errors of just 4.8 per cent (New Era, 2016). World Bank (2014) compared beneficiary numbers from a household survey with administrative data and found a potential leakage rate of 16 per cent. See more details in Annex 4.
c) Issues related to payments: the most recent expenditure tracking and service delivery survey found that only seven per cent of beneficiaries in the sample were being paid less than they were entitled to, and the difference was very small: the average benefit they received was on average only 3.6 per cent less than what they should have received (New Era, 2016). The survey found issues of payment delays, but also that payments broadly take place every four months as they are supposed to, and that 86.3 per cent of beneficiaries expressed satisfaction with the current payment mechanism (ibid.).

Chapter 4: Social Accountability initiatives

In the following analysis, we consider primarily activities implemented as a part of two programmes: Save the Children's Child-Sensitive Social Protection (CSSP) programme and the Government of Nepal's Local Government and Community Development Programme (LGCDP). This section provides a brief introduction to the two programmes.

4.1 The Child-Sensitive Social Protection (CSSP) programme

Save the Children's Child-Sensitive Social Protection Programme is a regional programme. It includes activities in Nepal, India (Rajasthan and Bihar) and Bangladesh, and at the time of writing is in the process of starting activities in the Philippines. Activities vary from country to country, but in each location part of the programme aims to strengthen social accountability for national social protection programmes. In Nepal, the CSSP has until recently been implemented in two districts of Nepal: since 2011 in Sindhupalchok District, and since 2014 in Kavre District. The project has been implemented through two local partner organisations: in Sindhupalchok the 'Tuki Association'[9], and in Kavre, 'Nangshal Association'.

As of the end of 2016, most activities have been phased out in Sindhupalchok and instead started in the districts of Dolakha and Mohattari, with some programme activities also planned for Jajarkot and Achham districts. The programme has a budget of 2.5 million euros for the five-year period 2017-2021 and is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland through Save the Children Finland (CSSP 2016). The CSSP in Nepal aims to: a) improve access of poor and marginalised households and their children to available social protection programmes; b) sensitise parents/caregivers to invest in the education, health and nutrition of their children; and c) work at the national level to influence social protection policy and programmes to be child-sensitive (Lath and Pun 2014). The first objective includes various initiatives to strengthen social accountability.

The CSSP Approach Paper describes several barriers to accessing social protection in Sindhupalchok prior to commencement of the programme, including: lack of awareness about the programmes and eligibility criteria among beneficiaries; inability of local officials to produce reliable data; lack of transparency in programme administration; direct and indirect costs of claiming benefits; challenges related to the registration process, especially for people who are illiterate; lack of feedback from the Government to applicants about the status of applications; and, lack of ability to provide information and organise public hearings and monitoring visits (Lath and Pun 2014).

To begin addressing these issues, the programme has implemented several activities. Main activities have included the introduction of the Child Endowment Fund (CEF), a new cash transfer programme for orphans; as well as awareness-raising and sensitisation of

[9] http://tuki.org.np/

parents/caregivers on children's education, health and nutrition. Here we focus only on the activities related to strengthening social accountability. According to the CSSP Approach Paper, the programme especially focused on three main strategies for strengthening transparency and accountability in the social protection programmes:

a) Supporting the DDC and VDCs to improve monitoring and disbursement of social protection schemes: this involved activating the Social Protection District Coordination Committee (SPDCC) and the Local Social Protection Coordination Committee (LSPCC), both of which are mandated in the Operational Guidelines, but rarely functioning in practice. Project staff provided training for committee members on social protection programme implementation and the official Operational Guidelines. In total, the project had revived 100 LSPCCs in Sindhupalchok by 2014.
b) Supporting VDCs to organise public hearings on social protection, as well as vital event registration camps and camps for disbursing social protection benefits.
c) Improving the capacity of local authorities, including through better information management. This included supporting the DDC and VDCs to establish computerised vital event registration and social protection data management: until 2014 the project had supported the establishment of a computerised vital event registration system and social protection beneficiary data in 62 VDCs. The digitisation of beneficiary lists led to the removal of a significant number of beneficiaries who were incorrectly benefitting from the social protection programmes.

In addition, the programme hired social mobilisers in each of the target VDCs to disseminate information and provide awareness-raising trainings. They formed single women's groups (essentially groups for widows), who were invited to participate in various awareness-raising and training activities, and linked these to district level Single Women's Federations, as well as groups for Dalit mothers. The programme supported VDC officials to start organising one-day camps to distribute the social protection benefits. Through the social mobilisers, the programme also directly supported beneficiaries to register for the social protection programmes, and had supported 2,990 people to access social protection schemes by 2014 (Lath and Pun 2014). At the national level, the CSSP has established a national social protection civil society network with 14 civil society organisations.

The CSSP has been assessed twice: by a Development Pathways team (Smith and Watson 2015), which looked at the programme in across Nepal, India and Bangladesh; and by OPM (2015), which looked at the programme in Nepal.[10] The research by Smith and Watson (2015) was based on qualitative interviews in four VDCs and the district headquarters in Sindhupalchok, and any assessment of the impact of the programme is based on perceptions of key informants and the people interviewed in the four VDCs. Smith and Watson (2015) found that the programme had resulted in more regular payments and

[10] This report has not been published, but an unfinished draft was provided to the author by Save the Children.

more trust of the Government among citizens. They noted that there had been an increase in the number of beneficiaries; that the single women's groups had been formed; and that Local social protection coordination committees had been revived. The project had worked with journalists to bring public attention to failures of the officials, and established a hotline for complaints. The vital events registration had been strengthened, and VDCs supported to hold social audits and public hearings on social protection (Smith and Watson 2015). OPM (2015) found similar impacts, although the strength of the evidence is unclear, as the draft report does not describe the methodology of the research.

In addition to these qualitative assessments, Save the Children and the two partner organisations have carried out their own quantitative baseline and endline surveys in the two districts, but these do not provide much information about the social accountability aspects of the programme. One of the few quantitative indicators related to social accountability shows that the percentage of beneficiaries surveyed who are aware of the amount they should receive, the timing of payments, and the name of the VDC Secretary increased from 14.5 per cent to 82 per cent in the two Districts between 2014 and 2016, demonstrating a significant increase in awareness about the social protection programmes.[11] In addition, the DoCR has expressed their appreciation of the support from the CSSP in establishing an MIS and online registration system as well as training for local officials (KII3).

4.2 The Local Governance and Community Development Programme (LGCDP)

The LGCDP is a country-wide local governance programme managed by MoFALD with technical and financial support from 14 development partners. It aims to "contribute towards poverty reduction through inclusive, responsive and accountable local governance and participatory community-led development" (MoFALD 2016). The first phase was implemented from 2008 to 2013. The second phase runs from 2013 to 2017 and covers all VDCs across the country. The second phase of the programme has a total budget of almost USD 1.4 billion (MoFALD 2016). The LGCDP includes four areas of work (expected outcomes):

a) Citizen empowerment: The defined expected outcome is that citizens and communities hold local officials accountable. This will be achieved by empowering citizens and community organisations, and by strengthening local government accountability mechanisms.
b) Capacity development of local authorities to make them more responsive to citizens' demands. This includes increasing the access to resources for local authorities, improved public financial management systems, increased institutional and human resource capacity.
c) Improved service delivery: improved access to quality infrastructure and services and strengthened planning, budgeting, monitoring, evaluation and coordination among local governance actors.

[11] CSSP Endline Report, 2014-16. Shared with the author by Save the Children.

d) Strengthened policy framework for sub-national governance.

Even though it has only implemented limited activities directly related to social protection, the LGCDP is important because of its scope, and because it includes a number of key innovations that can potentially improve social accountability, including for social protection programmes. The LGCDP includes the establishment of Ward citizen forums (WCF) and Citizen Awareness Centres (CAC) and placing so-called social mobilisers in VDC offices.

By 2016 the programme had established more than 30,000 Ward citizen forums with 759,568 members. According to the LGCDP, 23,400 of these are functioning well. 8,484 CACs has been established with a total of 209,264 members, 84 per cent of whom are female. Civil society organisations have been contracted to carry out compliance monitoring of local authorities in almost half of all VDCs and the majority of districts. DDCs have been supported to provide publicly available updated citizen charters and notice boards, and to establish a help-desk to function as a grievance redressal mechanism. A smaller number of local authorities have started to publish monthly income and expenditure reports. Up to the second trimester, 16 per cent of VDCs, 9 per cent of municipalities and 14 per cent of DDC related projects have completed public audits (MoFALD 2016).

Between December 2015 and March 2016, a total of 560 grievance cases were registered in VDCs, 5,140 cases in Municipalities and 244 cases in District Development Committees (DDCs). Between 94 and 100 per cent of these cases have been settled according to the LGCDP (MoFALD 2016). In addition, the Good Governance Promotion Section in MoFALD has registered 472 cases from the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), 70 cases from the National Vigilance Centre, 905 from the central government hotline 'Hello Sarkar', and 27 from MoFALD. Most of these cases are being processed. Actions have been taken against 25 people and prosecuted in special court (MoFALD 2016).

To strengthen public financial management, 1,196 VDCs have installed accounting software and more than 1,500 local level staff have been trained (however, only 217 of the VDCs are reported to have been using the software). In relation to social protection, the LGCDP has included the approval of a new Social Protection Operational Manual and Training Manual and training for a limited number of local government officials (two DDCs, two municipalities and six VDCs) (MoFALD 2016).

According to the LGCDP itself, the mid-term review of the programme highlighted that social mobilisation, which had been the emphasis to date, is unlikely to lead to lasting change unless local government structures are reformed (MoFALD 2016). In their review of the results of the LGCDP, the ADB found that there were many examples of the LGCDP strengthening social accountability, as also found by a 2012 evaluation, but also noted less success in improving public financial management, including continued delays in funding flows (ADB 2014).

The LGCDP has helped improve some of the issues surrounding service delivery in Nepal, including inaccessible and inequitable public services, skewed planning and project selection dominated by elite interests, and weak downward accountability by local governance bodies to the people they were supposed to serve. The ADB cites especially the social mobilisation component as very efficient in increasing public awareness and participation, despite using only four per cent of the total LGCDP budget. The ADB also notes that the LGCDP in its first phase did not adequately provide for better human resource management, training of staff and office infrastructure (ADB 2014).

Other reports have found that public perception of service delivery and local governance in Nepal has improved in recent years. Evaluations have found that 72 per cent of WCF members and 90 per cent of CAC members participated in VDC decision making in 2012, against only 33 per cent of WCF and 24 per cent of CAC members in 2011 (ADB 2014). The ADB assessment showed that 61 per cent of CBOs state that their complaints were heard by the local bodies, but only 38 per cent felt that their complaints were acted upon (ADB 2014).

Chapter 5: Social accountability in social protection in Sindhupalchok and Kavrepalanchok

This section presents the findings of the qualitative research in Sindhupalchok and Kavrepalanchok. It is structured in accordance with the conceptual framework of the overall *Social Accountability in Social Protection* research project. This builds on a framework proposed by Grandvoinnet et al. (2015) and is set out in detail in Ayliffe et al. (2017). The framework consists of the two main elements of citizen and state action, supported by three 'levers': information, civic mobilisation and interface (Ayliffe et al. 2017).

Citizen action is the central constitutive element of social accountability and may include demand making (for information, justification, or sanctions); protests against injustice; or claims for better public goods. *State-action* is the second primary element of social accountability and may take the form of a positive response, for example improved services and reduced corruption, or a negative response in the form of repression and a backlash (Ayliffe et al. 2017).

Information flows are essential for an accountable and responsive state that engages citizens in decision-making. These flows need to take place in various directions – from citizens to the state, from the state to citizens, between the various parts of civil society, and within the state apparatus. However, information or the existence of state-society interface does not necessarily spur citizen or state action on an issue. *Civic mobilisation* is often necessary to trigger and facilitate citizen "voice," especially for vulnerable or marginalised individuals and groups. Similarly, it is necessary to bring citizens and state actors together in an *interface* (Ayliffe et al. 2017).

Sindhupalchok and Kavrepalanchok districts are situated to the north- and south-east of Kathmandu respectively. Both are in the hilly region, although Kavrepalachok has valleys with flat lands and is a source of agricultural produce for the Kathmandu Valley, while Sindhupalchok has a less accessible geography, reaching to the high mountains. Livelihoods in both districts consist largely of subsistence agriculture with some livestock rearing, supplemented with labour migration, local construction work and petty trade (Smith and Watson 2015; KII7). In addition, Kavrepalanchok has some tourism. The majority of the population in Kavrepalanchok is Tamang, a Buddhist, Tamang-speaking indigenous group, with smaller groups of high-caste Hindus, Dalits and other indigenous groups, including the Rai ethnic group. Most VDCs in Sindhupalchok contain a mix of indigenous groups and high-caste Hindus, with smaller group of Dalits and Newar. The largest groups are the Tamang and Sherpa indigenous groups. As mentioned above in section 3, the population composition is important in relation to social accountability, as there are significant social exclusion issues for both Dalits and indigenous groups.

5.1 Information

Information flows are essential for an accountable and responsive state. Effective social accountability requires information that is accessible and is used effectively. In relation to social accountability in social protection specifically, several factors are important when it comes to information (Ayliffe et al. 2017):

- All citizens must be able to understand whether they are eligible for the social protection programme or not;
- those who are eligible must be aware of their entitlements, including how much they should receive and when and how to receive the payments;
- since social protection beneficiaries are often highly vulnerable, information must be accessible and appropriate to poor, vulnerable and marginalised individuals and groups, including people with disabilities and older people, and to both men and women;
- citizens must know how they can raise a concern if the state does not fulfil its obligations; and
- for social accountability to improve service delivery, local officials must have the information necessary to be able to respond to citizens in a positive way.

The level of information about the social protection programmes is generally high, as a result of simple eligibility criteria and high levels of coverage. The only exception is the disability benefit, which has more complex eligibility criteria and much lower coverage.

Our research confirmed the findings of previous research, which showed that the level of information about the social protection programmes is generally high in Nepal (Ligal and Shrestha 2012). While many respondents expressed frustration with not having enough information, when probed, most did in fact know the basic processes of the social protection programmes, including payment months, amounts and eligibility criteria. People complained about not having any information, but without necessarily knowing what additional information they would like to have.

Since the eligibility criteria are simple and easy to understand, people are aware of who is eligible to benefit from the programmes, with only very few of those interviewed not able to cite the eligibility criteria correctly. The exception is the disability benefit, which has much lower coverage, meaning that people are less likely to know somebody benefitting from it. It also has more complex and much less transparent eligibility criteria, with access depending on a disability assessment undertaken in the district capital. As a result, most people are not clear about who are eligible to benefit from the programme (KII5). Several people with various issues, for example back pain, asked us during interviews whether they would be eligible for the disability benefit (FGD 5). All of the 16 people with disabilities interviewed expressed having experienced some degree of difficulty in accessing the programme: they had only heard about it coincidently from friends or family members long after having acquired their disability and expressed confusion about the different

categories of disability, the process of applying for the benefit and the authorities responsible (IIDI1, IIDI3, FGD9, FGD13, FGD14, FGD22) . An older couple, where the wife had registered for the disability benefit with the assistance of Nangshal Association, had no information about the programme and had missed out on payments for three years, despite living within a kilometre of the VDC Office (IDI1).

Information spreads mainly by word of mouth

Interviewees mentioned multiple sources of information about the social protection programmes. Most people reported receiving information that originated from the VDC Secretary, but were delivered through word of mouth from other people in the communities and from family members. Several mentioned the VDC Assistant, social mobilisers (both CSSP and LGCDP) and Ward citizen forum coordinators as sources of information. Older people in particular mentioned receiving information through their children. Fewer people mentioned FM radio as an important source of information. The establishment of the Ward citizen forums as a part of the LGCDP, seem to have improved access to information.

"It is easy now as the Ward citizen forum, through its members, provides information to all the people of the ward. There are no people's representatives and we don't have public FM and newspapers. When the money comes, a committee meeting is held. Then the VDC informs the Ward citizen forum to let the people know about it. The good thing in the village is that people themselves spread the word to each other, saying 'allowances are there, so let's go.'" (KII20)

Information about payment dates largely travels through the villages by word of mouth: *"My mother tells me [about the payment date] and she goes to collect money on my behalf. My aunt also tells me and my mother about the grant distribution date and they go together to collect the grant."* (disability allowance beneficiary, FGD14)

Since they do not have resources for monitoring, local officials also get their information by word of mouth, including through Ward citizen forums and for example from neighbours of people who have died and should therefore no longer receive the Old Age Allowance. In Devitar VDC, the VDC Secretary said that he relied on the LGCDP social mobiliser (who is Tamang and from the area) for information (KII8). In other VDCs the VDC Assistant was the one who provided information to the VDC Secretary, as the former is usually from the local area. In Sindhupalchok, a VDC Assistant reported receiving information from the Ward citizen forum coordinators.

But information spreads unevenly through communities, with vulnerable or marginalised groups less likely to be informed

Even though information levels are generally high and the word of mouth mechanism for spreading information seems to be fairly effective, it is also clear that information spreads

unevenly through communities, with some groups and individuals receiving incomplete or inaccurate information.

We found that **Dalits and indigenous people** have much less information about the programmes and processes than high-caste Hindus.[12] One indigenous community leader who was a member of the Ward citizen forum said that he had not even been present when he was selected to be a member, and often he was not informed about the meetings of the Forum, which is led by a Brahmin (FGD7). The same person related how his community had several times been given incorrect information about development projects and once about the payment dates for the social protection allowances (FGD7).

A group of Dalit women had many questions for us about the social protection programmes' eligibility criteria and process for applying, especially about the disability benefit, with several people unsure about whether they would qualify for benefits: *"I hadmy child's birth certificate made, but the VDC did not notify that I have to present it to them; my friend told me later that I would not get the benefits if I don't submit the certificate to the VDC. Then I submitted it later."* (Dalit woman, FGD2) There are clear animosities between the different groups, with high-caste Hindus often prejudiced against the Dalits and indigenous groups, and Dalits and indigenous groups resenting high-caste Hindus for discriminating against them and having easier access to resources. This is exacerbated by the fact that Dalits receive the Child Grant and have a lower age of eligibility for the Old Age Allowance.

"The VDC officials treat people of their own caste fairly. However, with us they become angry and speak in a different tone. They treat us as a lower caste… Their [high-caste] work is prioritised and ours is delayed. That is discrimination." (Dalit woman, FGD2)

"Beneficiaries from the higher castes are very aware [of the social protection programmes]. We always communicate and prioritise the Dalits, but they are never happy no matter what we do. They are uneducated and always drunk when they come to the office." (Brahmin VDC Assistant, KII15)

As previously mentioned, **language** is also a factor of exclusion in Nepal. In both Sindhupalchok and Kavrepalanchok, the majority of the population are from the Tamang ethnic group and speak Tamang, while VDC Secretaries are most likely to speak Nepali. For Tamang people who do not speak Nepali, there is therefore a language barrier, as all communication materials are in Nepali. In this situation, local social mobilisers (either from CSSP or LGCDP) from the Tamang community can play an important role as interpreters (KII5, KII9).

[12] This has also been found by other research, including in the beneficiary survey by Ligal and Shrestha (2012), which found that men are more aware than women, and that Dalits and the disabled are less aware than older people and single women. Beneficiaries residing with their families and spouses were found to be more aware than those living alone.

Older people are a particularly vulnerable group, since many are illiterate and/or do not speak Nepali. They are consequently more likely to not have adequate information or to rely on others for information and are less likely to voice their concerns. Many older people rely on their children for information, since the younger generations are better educated, speak Nepali and are generally more involved in community affairs outside the home. Older people without children, or whose children are not in touch with them, are consequently at risk of being left out of information loops (KII29).

Similarly, **persons with disabilities** are more likely to miss out on information or to have to rely on intermediaries. For example, one person related how there had been information meetings at the VDC Office for single women and older people, but not for people with disabilities, since it is too difficult for them to get to the office (FGD14). Others were confused about the eligibility criteria and were not clear about why they were not eligible (FGD22). However, it does not have to be difficult to include people with disabilities. For example, one respondent with a disability said that she is a member of a mother's group who meets at her house to enable her to participate (IDI3). Access to information also depends on geography, with those living closer to the VDC Office (and main roads) having much easier access to information than those living in more remote locations. For example, beneficiaries living too far away are unlikely to participate in the public hearings (KII11).

Whenever several lines of exclusion intersect, people are likely to have even less access to information. For example, older Dalits or indigenous people are doubly marginalised. An old woman from the Rai indigenous group was not sure why she received less than the other women – it turned out it was because she was receiving the widow allowance, not the Old Age Allowance, for which she was not yet eligible (FGD6).

social mobilisers hired by the CSSP and LGCDP programmes seem to play an important role in awareness-raising by making information more accessible to people. The Ward citizen forums also play an important role in disseminating information, and there are some indications that women's groups have also functioned as an effective way to disseminate information.

As mentioned above, the CSSP baseline and endline survey showed a significant improvement in the level of information among social protection beneficiaries: the percentage of beneficiaries surveyed who are aware of the amount they should receive, the timing of payments, and the name of the VDC Secretary increased from 14.5 per cent to 82 per cent in the two districts between 2014 and 2016. The CSSP has focused especially on improving information about the social protection programmes, including by hiring social mobilisers, organising women's groups and publishing beneficiary lists, and according to programme staff this has been effective in increasing access to the programmes (KII29). This was corroborated by some interviewees. In Petku VDC in Sindhupalchok, single women said that the awareness raising work of Tuki Association had been very effective, and that everybody in the area was aware of the social protection programmes as a result: *"This was taught to us by the lady from the Tuki Association. For*

one year, they went from village to village and gave us lunch and taught us about the grants. That's where we came to understand about it. We didn't even know what sort of grants arrived for whom before. We just took the grant and went our way. The lady from Tuki told us that there are eight types of grants. How else would we know about that?" (Single Woman, FGD18)

According to Nangshal Association, their awareness-raising activities in Kavrepalanchok have led to more interest in the social protection programmes among both beneficiaries and VDC Secretaries: *"Because of the awareness raising, there is more focus on who should and shouldn't benefit from the programmes. And since beneficiary lists are made public it reduces inclusion errors."* (KII5)

This was also corroborated by some beneficiaries, although in general people mentioned several different sources of information and often several different NGOs working on awareness-raising, making it difficult to attribute any change in awareness specifically to the CSSP and LGCDP: '*Nangshal came here. They formed a group, and that is how we came to know about the benefits. There was another organisation called Action Nepal who also informed us about the child benefits."* (Dalit woman, FGD5).

One Dalit community leader in Kavre said that things had improved a lot compared to the past due both to various NGO training programmes, in particular for women, and a general increase in education levels: *"Earlier, it was difficult: we did not know things, we were dominated and discriminated earlier, we did not get the opportunity, and we did not know about politics and had no knowledge about the benefits provided by VDC, DDC, NGO and INGOS. It was impossible because there was discrimination, but now our children have studied at least till 12th standard, and they are now working in different organizations. Now, we also can compete politically, and discuss about discrimination, reservations and inclusiveness. We know how things are. Our women are also empowered in groups and there is much training they get to build their capacity"* (Dalit community leader, KII18).

Some members of women's groups reported first hearing about the grants from the CSSP social mobilisers: *"We asked the VDC secretary about it and he also said that the grant is coming for us. But firstly, it was [the CSSP social mobiliser] who informed us. She suggested to us to hold meetings of single women and discuss about the social grant."* (member of single women's group, FGD11)

Single women's groups established by the CSSP in Sindhupalchok also seemed to work as a way to disseminate information: *"Before, most people were unaware, but these days, even the well-off ones are concerned about it. In the Single Women Committee and Local Social Protection Coordination Committee, they tell them to go and register for their claims"* (KII30).

Besides more traditional awareness-raising activities, Nangshal Association has also printed school materials with information about the social protection programmes, so that children are also aware of them (KII5). The activities under the LGCDP, including social

mobilisers and the establishment of Ward citizen forums and CACs are also likely to have contributed to increasing awareness about programmes and the increased number of beneficiaries. The LGCDP social mobiliser in Devitar VDC related that she participates in Ward citizen forum and CAC meetings, where she informs people about the registration period and how they should apply to receive the allowances. She also makes house visits to inform people about the programme's eligibility criteria (KII7).

5.2 Civic mobilisation

Civic mobilisation is usually necessary to enable citizen 'voice', especially for marginalised individuals and groups. In general, the effectiveness of social accountability initiatives depends on having civic mobilisers in place with the capacity to mobilise citizens and state officials. In strengthening civic mobilisation for social protection programmes, there is a need to:

- Overcome challenges related to the individualised nature of social protection programming, (people may not have an incentive to come together around what are usually individual grievances);
- Avoid co-option of community committees by state actors;
- Avoid relying on overburdened and under-resourced community volunteers; and
- Overcome disconnects and power imbalances between local and higher levels of the state. (Ayliffe et al. 2017).

The main mechanisms for strengthening civic mobilisation that have been introduced by the CSSP and LGCDP programmes are the establishment and capacity development of single women's groups by the CSSP and the establishment of Ward citizen forums by the LGCDP, as well as the hiring of social mobilisers by both programmes.

Women's groups have in some cases been a mechanism of civic mobilisation, but not all groups are functioning

Both Nangshal, Tuki Association and various other organisations have been active in organising women's groups and awareness-raising on social protection and other issues (KII10). In Sindhupalchok, Tuki Association has established single women's groups in each of the district's 79 VDCs, as well as a district network of single women's groups (KII29, KII30). In Petku VDC, there is a women's group meeting monthly in each of the nine wards and members of the Local Social Protection Coordination Committee utilise these groups to disseminate information and ensure that all eligible people are enrolled in the social protection programmes (KII38).

Our research does not provide conclusive evidence about how effective the single women's groups have been for mobilising women around social protection. One group member said that people in her group were not fully engaged and that they never took collective action, but that she knew that other groups in other VDCs were more active and would for example go to the VDC Secretary together to complain about delays in payments (IIDI2). It was clear that not all of the women's groups are functioning, as there has not

always been interest among the women to participate: *"Yes, there was a single women's group. We met and saved for 2-3 months. We were about 7-8 members but members didn't come to participate in the meeting. We kept waiting but they did not come. They said they were busy and have problems."* (FGD02)

Several other women said that they were too busy to participate in a group, and, at least in the two VDCs we visited in Kavre, it seems to have been a challenge to establish the groups. One group in Sindhupalchok also said that, since the CSSP social mobiliser had left, they were not united in the group, were not meeting, and were not able to go together to raise demands towards the VDC Secretary (FGD11).

However, when they are functioning, the groups can be an important way to increase women's confidence. For example, one woman with a disability related how her courage has increased as a result of participating in a mother's group (IDI3). According to one VDC Assistant, after the establishment of women's groups, it is now much easier for women to access information and to approach the VDC Office (KII15). In one ward in Kadambas VDC in Sindhupalchok, a group of men mentioned the women's group as the only group in the area that is involved in ensuring transparency in the allocation of the VDC budget, by ensuring that the prescribed part of the budget is allocated for women and children (FGD17).

In Petku VDC, the single women's group is very well organised, with a chair person who has been running the group since its inception and who has good relations with the VDC Secretary. This group has about 35 members, meets regularly once a month, and also functions as a savings and loans group. The women described in detail how they worked for a long time before being able to successfully receive part of the funds that are earmarked in the VDC budget for vulnerable groups. They have used these funds as a revolving fund for members of the group, who have invested in various livelihood projects. However, they also described how it causes difficulties for them that the VDC Secretary frequently changes, and that new rules have made it much more difficult for them to access the funds, by requiring more comprehensive project proposals. The group members also described how there had been a conflict internally in the group, and with a female local leader of one of the political parties, and how this had prevented them from accessing the funds recently (FGD18).

Ward citizen forums function as an effective means of disseminating information, but we found few examples of the Forums functioning as a platform for mobilising citizens to keep officials accountable

The idea behind the Ward citizen forums established under the LGCDP is to bring communities together, so that by taking collective action they have more power to put pressure on local officials to be responsive to citizens (KII23). Based on our field work, one of the main problems with the assumptions behind this idea is that communities are not homogenous, but rather are characterised by very unequal power relations between different groups and individuals. The assumption that 'communities' will mobilise to hold

officials accountable therefore does not hold in reality. For example, Ward 3 in Deupur VDC in Kavre District consists of disparate settlements of Brahmins, Dalits and the indigenous Rai. However, the Ward citizen forum is not inclusive of the Dalits and Rais: the Ward citizen forum coordinator is a Brahmin and the one Rai Forum member described how he had not been part of the meeting where members were selected, and how meeting times were often not well communicated to him.

Similarly, while there are well-educated Dalits in the ward who have information about the Ward citizen forum (KII18), the group of Dalit women we spoke to in the same ward did not have full information about the social protection programmes, and were not aware of the existence of the Ward citizen forum (FGD5). According to one former Ward citizen forum coordinator, Dalits and indigenous people often find it more difficult to find the time to participate in meetings, as they have to go to wherever they can find work. High caste Hindus have more land, while Dalits have to *"work daily to survive"* (KII32).

While it was common for interviewees to not be familiar with the concept of the Ward citizen forum, they would sometimes know the coordinator as someone's wife or daughter-in-law from their neighbourhood who is knowledgeable about the social protection programmes. People therefore perceive it as 'going to the neighbour who knows things and can help', rather than 'going to the coordinator of the Ward citizen forum'. In this way, the decentralised system uses the informal social relations in communities to bridge the gap between citizens and the state.

In practice, Ward citizen forum coordinators may become more closely tied to the existing power holders – the VDC Secretary and the local political party leaders – than to the 'community' they are supposed to represent. The Ward citizen forum may then function as a mechanism for disseminating information from decision-makers to citizens, and sometimes local development priorities in the other direction, but it will not serve as a tool of citizen empowerment and social accountability – in particular, not for the marginalised groups.

However, the particular function of the Forum is likely to depend on the personal relations between the various people involved, and it is possible that Ward citizen forums can play a different role in some VDCs/Wards. For example, in Petku VDC, the Ward citizen forum coordinators had been encouraging older people to form groups and had informed them about the VDC budget allocation for older people and encouraged them to ask for their share of the VDC block grant budget. In Kadambas, the Ward citizen forum coordinators had also been advocating on behalf of people in their communities, but were sometimes ridiculed for doing so. In general, there seemed to be less problems with conflicts in the communities in the two VDCs we visited In Sindhupalchok. In Kadambas VDC, people said that the Ward citizen forum was inclusive and functioned as a way for people to come together to discuss any issues, both related to social protection programmes and development projects (FGD9).

Finally, Ward citizen forums have also been utilised as a way for DDCs to validate beneficiary data: *"We have published the book [with beneficiary lists] dividing it into 10 clusters. All the Ward citizen forums has the copy of the book and they will discuss it, facilitated by the social mobiliser. The discussion helps to validate the data."* (KII26)

In sum, our research found some indications that the formation and training of women's groups can be an effective way to increase the confidence of women to engage with the state. However, it is not necessarily easy for outsiders to establish sustainable groups, which are not always a priority for the women. It can be difficult for women from low-income groups to set aside the time to participate in groups, especially if there is no immediate gain from doing so. Similarly, it can be difficult for Dalits and indigenous groups to set aside time to participate in the Ward citizen forums. In addition, the Ward citizen forums are not always inclusive of Dalits and indigenous groups, but tend to be dominated by high-caste Hindus. In their current form, they may function as an effective means of disseminating information, but we found few examples of the forums functioning as a platform for mobilising citizens to hold officials accountable.

5.3 Interface

As described in Ayliffe et al. (2017), an 'interface' can be understood as "a complex locus of interaction between state and citizen actors". In other words, interface refers to the process of interaction between state and citizen actors, not necessarily to a specific institution or mechanism. Often the process of bringing state and citizens together, and the processes that lead up to and follow the interface, is as important as the outcome. As Ayliffe et al. (2017) note, the effectiveness of the interface is likely to depend on the type of the interface and the degree to which most people are aware of its existence. It also depends on how credible and accessible the interface is, and whether there are interlocutors who can mediate effectively between citizens and state officials. In relation to social protection, for interfaces to be effective, they have to be:

- Accessible and culturally appropriate for poor, vulnerable and marginalised men and women;
- Available to address different social protection programme functions and potential problems (individualised or collective, public or confidential, open to the whole community or only eligible citizens etc.);
- Able to involve state officials with authority to address citizens' issues (or strong links to those who can).

In the Nepalese context, it is particularly important to increase positive interaction between marginalised groups and local government officials and political party leaders (Drucza 2016). Since cash transfers are delivered manually by VDC Secretaries, the transfers themselves offer a *'sighting of the state'* and payments provide a form of interface between beneficiaries and officials (Drucza 2016; Corbridge et al. 2005). It is worth noting that this will change significantly with the planned introduction of payments through branchless banking.

The main interfaces we have examined through the field work are: public hearings, Ward citizen forums and face-to-face interaction between citizens and VDC and DDC officials. According to the DDC in Kavre, they receive complaints through public hearings, from VDC Secretaries, from community leaders and from individual citizens directly. Influential people often come together with local political party leaders, while women often complain through women's groups (KII6). According to the DDC, people seem more willing to complain now (KII6).

"People have the right to question the actions of government officials. These days people are very clever and are always questioning and complaining and officials really have to be accountable." (DDC Official, KII6)

Key intermediaries facilitating interaction between citizens and the state include local political party leaders, leaders of women's groups, Ward citizen forum coordinators and other people who are respected in the communities, such as for example teachers or chairs of School Management Committees.

Public Hearings have been well attended and have been an effective means of disseminating information, but have not necessarily been effective as an accountability mechanism.

In Kavre, as a part of the CSSP, Nangshal Association has helped organise 1-3 public hearings in 25 VDCs. The hearings usually include 100-300 participants in each VDC, mainly including beneficiaries of social protection programmes, but also the VDC Secretary, media, local political party leaders and other key community members, such as for example health workers or teachers. Information about the hearing is disseminated through Ward citizen forums, Community Awareness Centres and social mobilisers. A hearing usually takes 3-4 hours and any participant is free to voice their concerns. For VDC Secretaries, it is relatively easy to organise public hearings in connection with payments as a way of disseminating information and receiving feedback, and it is not unlikely that they will continue to do so even without financial support from the CSSP (KII14). However, it is clearly a shortcoming that the central government does not allocate any funds to the VDC offices for organising public hearings.

The public hearings seem to have been well attended and have been an effective means of disseminating information, but have not necessarily been effective as an accountability mechanism. In all the VDCs visited, the public hearings have followed the Operational Guidelines, with VDC Secretaries reading out information about the number of beneficiaries and amount of funds allocated to each of the social protection programmes. In this way, they serve to create transparency about how many new beneficiaries are added and how many are removed each year. However, one annual meeting of a couple of hours, with several hundred participants, is unlikely to provide an effective interface. One key informant suggested that public hearings should be held in each ward, followed by a

hearing at the VDC. This would enable a much higher degree of transparency and involvement of marginalised groups (KII18).

Other interviews confirmed that there had been very little discussion and few complaints raised during the public meetings. However, it is of course possible that some meetings in other VDCs have been livelier. According to Nangshal Association, they experienced many issues being raised in the first round of hearings in 2014, but only a few in 2015 and 2016 (KII5).

We came across a few examples of people voicing complaints at public hearings that were subsequently resolved: The LGCDP social mobiliser in Devitar VDC provided an example of a person with a disability who asked in the meeting how to get the disability card (KII7). However, the social mobiliser also related that the public hearing mainly functioned as a convenient way for the officials to provide information to people in a group (KII7). In the public hearings in one VDC in Kavre, there were complaints about the earthquake support, which has less clear eligibility criteria, but none about the social protection benefits (KII13).

In Sindhupalchok, the DDC are organising public hearings in VDCs where they perceive more issues, but because of lack of staff, they can only manage about four hearings a year. According to the DDC focal person in Sindhupalchok, the questions raised in the public hearings are usually people asking about when they will be able to receive the benefits (KII26). He provided an example of how the public hearings can provide an opportunity for people who may be excluded from a programme to raise their issue directly with the district officials with the authority to provide a solution – in this case a woman who had problems registering for the widow's allowance because she did not have the marriage certificate from her second marriage (KII26).

The public hearings can also provide a venue for officials to receive information from citizens. The DDC focal person in Sindhupalchok related two examples where citizens had alerted him to potential issues – in one case a social mobiliser who was incorrectly receiving the Old Age Allowance (KII26).

There are likely people who find it difficult to attend the public hearings. For example, people may be excluded because they live too far from the VDC Office, because of caste or ethnicity, gender or education: *"We don't know about any meetings or gathering happening like this. We are kept behind because we don't know, those of us who are not educated. People from other wards, they know everything, because they are educated people there. We don't know much about anything."* (Female Dalit beneficiaries, FGD5)

Furthermore, some of these groups, including women, are unlikely to ask any questions or raise concerns in public meetings, even when they are present. We found that many women do not ask questions because they are afraid of being ridiculed. Changing this is no doubt a matter of a slow and gradual process of empowerment, since most of these people have only started interacting with the state quite recently. For people to be present in public meetings is a first step. Building confidence to raise questions and concerns can

happen, as described above in the case of the single women's group in Petku VDC, in groups that bring similar people together.

Face-to-face interactions between citizens and local officials is the main interface, but is made difficult by the fact that the key official – the VDC Secretary – is often not present

Since there is no formal complaints mechanism in Nepal's social protection programmes, people have to go directly to meet the VDC Secretary if they have any complaints, questions or requests. In cases where the VDC Secretary is not available, or not able or willing to address people's concerns, or when people wish to complain about the VDC Secretary, they have to travel to the district headquarters to meet a DDC official. High-caste Hindus are often satisfied with this, and with the VDC Secretary's performance, while Dalits and indigenous people are hesitant to go, and complain of being discriminated against and treated badly by officials. However, it is a general issue that the VDC Secretary is not present in the VDC most of the time: *"The VDC Secretary has to manage 3 or 2 VDCs. So, he comes once in 4-5 days. When he comes, there is a big crowd. Many people are unable to put forward their issues."* (LGCDP social mobiliser, KII35).

social mobilisers will let people know when the VDC Secretary is present, since his signature is needed for most things, including birth and marriage registrations (KII35). In some cases, the VDC Assistant or social mobilisers function in practice as the main point of contact for citizens, also because they are usually locals. For example, in Kadambas VDC, a group of Dalit women related how they would only speak to the VDC Assistant, saying about the VDC Secretary that he *"shows up very rarely"* or that *"I don't even know him"* (FGD15). The accessibility of the VDC also depends on how big an area the VDC covers. In large VDCs, especially in the mountains, it may be very difficult for people from some wards to come to the VDC office (KII33).

Ward citizen forums can function as intermediaries between citizens and the state, but they are not necessarily inclusive of marginalised groups.

As mentioned above, Ward citizen forums function mainly as a way of disseminating information, rather than as an interface. The Forum Coordinators participate in prioritising development projects and in approving the VDC budget together with the local political party leaders and the VDC Secretary (KII12), and they have expanded the group of people involved in decision making (KII10). However, in case of grievances or concerns they do not have any ability or incentive to act, and Ward citizen forum coordinators described simply referring people who asked for assistance to the VDC Secretary (KII10).

Members of Ward citizen forums are formally elected by the 'communities' but it is not clear who participates in the elections in practice and how they take place. In general, people expressed that those selected as members are those deemed best able to represent the community, i.e. those who have more education, and *"who is outspoken and can speak Nepali fluently"* (KII9). The selection of members is facilitated by the social mobiliser and the aim is for it to happen by consensus, but it can also be done through

election. According to the official guidelines, the members should include marginalised groups, including Dalits, women and people with disabilities (KII10).

"It's usually Brahmin and Chettri who attend these meetings. Usually Dalits, Janajatis and day labourers will feel that if they go to work they will earn something, but if they go to these meetings they will get nothing." (Former CSSP social mobiliser, KII33).

According to one Ward citizen forum coordinator, the forum functions mainly as a way of disseminating information, for example about payment dates. For individual issues, people will generally go directly to the VDC Secretary. However, some people, generally those with less education, do not feel confident to approach the VDC Secretary, and may come to the Ward citizen forum coordinator instead, especially in cases where people know that the coordinator has good personal relations with the secretary. Several Ward citizen forum coordinators related how people often ask them to accompany them to the VDC Secretary, even for very simple issues such as to register births, because they do not feel confident to go on their own (Male Brahmin Ward citizen forum coordinator, KII11). However, as noted above, the hierarchy in local governance is clear, with the VDC Secretary and political party leaders the main decision makers, and Ward citizen forum coordinators playing a secondary role.

"The ward citizen forum is not qualified enough to challenge the parties. If there was a qualified person, the parties would step back. When there are people who are not enthusiastic and capable, how will there be competition? … If a coordinator is educated, can do politics, knows the development issues... and work with NGOs and INGOs for development projects, then she or he would be able to make a difference." (Male Dalit community leader, KII18).

Political leaders in Kadambas VDC in Sindhupalchok expressed that the Ward citizen forums do play a role in monitoring the use of funds in the VDC, together with political party leaders and Consumer's Committees (in the case of development projects). However, according to the local social mobiliser in the VDC, while the Ward citizen forums do convey priorities from each ward to the VDC, it is the political party leaders who, together with the VDC Secretary, decide the budget allocations (KII33).

We also heard one example of a Ward citizen forum conveying a request from citizens to the VDC Secretary, with the result that the payment approach was changed to make it more convenient for beneficiaries: *"When all beneficiaries go to collect money, it becomes a bit of a mess. And at the same time, there are elderly people who cannot walk up to the VDC Office. So, we organised a Ward citizen forum meeting where we decided that there should be a convenient distribution centre so that it will be easier for senior citizens to go and get the allowances without hurdles. Now, the allowances are distributed at Chudamani's house, which is convenient for beneficiaries."* (Rai Ward citizen forum member, FGD7)

'Chudamani' is a local political leader from the Maoist party. The example shows how the political leaders function in practice as part of the state, as well as how the Ward citizen forums can function as ways to convey requests about service delivery from citizens to officials. This was also confirmed by local officials (KII31). However, the same person told us how he often felt marginalised from the forum because of his ethnicity and lack of education.

"A meeting gets called and all of us go, but then the meeting is cancelled. Later a few of them sit together and decide. They just bypass us... The Danuwar community [a Rai indigenous group] is not educated so they look at us differently." (Rai Ward citizen forum member, FGD7).

The role of the Ward citizen forum coordinators may be affected by the fact that they seem to often be relatively young people, as these are the people who have more education and can speak Nepali well (in the case of the indigenous communities). However, this also means that they are not powerful people in the communities, and unlikely to be able to stand up against the political party leaders and VDC Secretaries.

An issue inhibiting the importance of the Ward citizen forums is that there are no resources allocated to them and no training provided to coordinators on their roles and responsibilities: *"I have been selected as a coordinator. However, I do not know what being the coordinator is all about or what my role is. I do not have a single booklet regarding the Ward citizen forum and its mandates. I think I should have at least a booklet to understand my responsibilities."* (Ward citizen forum coordinator, KII28).

A side effect of this is that only people who have the time and resources to commit to an unpaid position, which often entails a relatively heavy work load, will be able to take up the role as Ward citizen forum coordinator. This excludes Dalits and other people who cannot afford to miss daily wages (KII33).

Intermediaries such as political party leaders, social mobilisers or community leaders play an important role in disseminating information and assisting citizens in approaching officials.

Political party leaders are important intermediaries, although one could argue that they should be considered part of the state. Several political party leaders described how they are in constant contact with the VDC Secretary, and have helped to register beneficiaries for the social protection programmes and to distribute payments, often giving the impression that they see themselves as part of the state. They described how people often come to them for help because they are part of the decision-making process and close to the VDC Secretary (KII11): *"We are involved in budget distribution and we make sure that allocation is done in a right way. We come here for meetings regularly and help those who have problems with the social security allowance."* (Political party leaders, KII27)

One of the issues facing Dalits is that they lack representation with the political party leaders. And even if they have people with connections, it may be difficult for them to act on behalf of the Dalit community. One group of Dalit women described how there was one person who could speak out for their community, but that they also understood the restrictions he was facing in doing more for them.

social mobilisers are usually locals who have been hired by either the CSSP or the LGCDP at the VDC level. They work closely with both the VDC Secretaries and communities, and play an important role in linking officials and citizens. For example, in Devitar VDC the LGCDP social mobiliser related how she was the VDC focal point for social protection; that people would come to her to ask about eligibility criteria of the social protection programmes and that she identifies people who are not benefitting and helps them fill out application forms. According to her, there has been a large increase in the number of beneficiaries since she started awareness-raising (KII7). This was the general opinion expressed in all four VDCs.

In Sindhupalchok, the DDC focal point also related that the social mobilisers play an important role as an interface between citizens and the DDC: *"The nearest known government person in the villages is the social mobiliser. Everyone knows the social mobiliser. social mobilisers distribute the allowances by going to the beneficiaries' houses. They also regularly go to the people with different types of information and surveys."* (KII26)

Social mobilisers may also be more accessible and more service-minded than VDC Secretaries: *"I had to get 4,000 for my daughter but [the VDC Assistant] shouted at me saying that my daughter would not get any benefits and I returned home. I went the day after they distributed the benefits. [LGCPD social mobiliser] said my daughter should get the benefit and she checked the file and I got 4,000 and other benefits."* (FGD5)

Community leaders such as teachers may also function as intermediaries, since they are more accessible to people than the VDC Secretaries (KII9). For example, a woman described how she first asked the local teacher for advice and then went with her brother-in-law to the DDC to get an earthquake victim card, since she did not feel confident that her request would be granted as quickly if she went on her own: *"If I need something quick, I ask him [the teacher] to call the VDC secretary. For example, I needed an earthquake victim card, so that my children would get scholarships. I thought if I ask the VDC Secretary myself he might delay."* (FGD2)

Local officials said that they would often receive phone calls from citizens. However, most people do either not have a phone, do not have the numbers of the officials, or would not dare to call officials directly, so for most people this is not an accessible interface.

The DDC social protection focal point in Sindhupalchok related how social mobilisers, members of the Ward citizen forums, the VDC Secretary and people from NGOs have the

mobile numbers of a few of the officials at the DDC, and that other people would get the number from these people. He would often receive calls directly to his mobile phone from social mobilisers, and even directly from citizens: *"For instance, we are late in distributing the allowance this time, so they call here and ask, 'why has the allowance not being distributed'? We have given our numbers to social mobilisers, we tell them to call us if they have any complaints or suggestions. Even during public holidays, they call us and we respond to their queries."* (KII26)

This was supported by a former social mobiliser: *"In many issues of documentation problems, grants problems, we assisted them and gave them the number to the social security department in the DDC office. We'd tell them that their complaints will be heard there. Many people did call there."* (Former CSSP social mobiliser, KII30)

The VDC Assistant in Kadambas VDC also related how he would receive many enquiries about the delays in payments, both from people coming to the office and people calling him on his phone (KII31). Some beneficiaries also spoke about calling the VDC Assistant to ask about payment days, or calling the VDC Secretary on his personal mobile phone when they need his signature on a document. However, even though we do not have records of how many people are able to use the option to call officials by phone, from the interviews it is clear that most people do either not have a phone, do not have the numbers of the officials, or would not dare to call officials directly. It is not clear how many use this opportunity to call the DDC directly, and no records are kept about complaints or issues raised (KII26).

Social protection coordination committees have been revived as a result of the CSSP. They are not widely known in the population, but do function as a local horizontal accountability mechanism.

While the district and local social protection coordination committees are not interfaces as such – they do not have a broad contact surface with the general population – they can be conceived of as social accountability mechanisms that induce a degree of horizontal accountability between different elite representatives. For example, local social protection coordination committees play an important role in strengthening accountability as they review beneficiary lists before payments.

"In the past, there were a lot of incidences where the old age grants for the deceased continued to come and VDC secretaries used to take that money for themselves. After the establishment of the committee, this has decreased a lot." (Committee member, Kadambas, KII33)

These committees were only functioning pro forma before the CSSP started. A former CSSP social mobiliser related how the VDC Secretaries would previously just put names down and get signatures of the committee members to comply with the monitoring requirements (KII30). In some VDCs this seems to still be the case: in Petku VDC, the VDC Assistant said that "*this is just made for the sake of making. At times, we call them before*

we distribute the allowances and show them the names and ask if it is okay. They sign in the minutes and go. They do not have much understanding." according to him, this is because the committee members perceive things to be working well in the VDC and hence do not see the need for close monitoring (KII39).

It was also clear from our interviews that the existence of these committees is not well known in the broader population. Even though there are provisions in the official guidelines for participation of beneficiaries in the local committees, this does not seem to happen in practice. It seems that the members of the LSPCCs vary significantly, but most of the time include the VDC Secretary, local political party leaders and the nine ward citizen forum coordinators, as well as sometimes four beneficiary representatives (KII30). In Devitar VDC in Kavre, the committee has 13 members and have been meeting for the last four years (KII8). In Kadambas VDC in Sindhupalchok, the committee used to include beneficiary representatives until this year, but now only includes the political party leaders and ward citizen forum coordinators (KII31).

While Nangshal has not been successful in reviving the District Social Protection Coordination Committee in Kavre, Tuki Association has had more luck with this in Sindhupalchok: the director of the organisation described the Committee as one of the most important actors for ensuring the accountability of local officials. In Sindhupalchok, the Committee is operational and includes members from the DDC, DAO, District Women and Children's Office, Journalists Association and Disabled People's Organisations (KII26). According to Tuki Association, they participate in the District Committee as an NGO representative and their staff participate in the Local Social Protection Coordination Committee in the VDCs where they are present (KII30).

The Tuki Association Director also described the media as an important actor for ensuring the accountability of local officials: *"The media are also there with us when we are monitoring, so if they see any discrepancies in the service delivery they will report it. Also, one can report about these incidents at the district level coordination committee meeting, so one will easily know which individual for which area didn't receive the said grant and why."* (KII29)

According to the director, LGCDP and CSSP social mobilisers play an important role in bringing information to local social protection coordination committees who can then bring the information up to district social protection coordination committee (KII29).

5.4 Citizen action

Citizen action is the central constitutive element of social accountability. Citizen action can include demands for information, justification or sanctions; protests against injustice or demands for better public goods. There are a number of drivers of citizen action (Ayliffe et al. 2017). First, the anticipated benefits of taking action have to outweigh the costs and risks involved. People have to feel that they can raise their concerns without expecting reprisals and to have an expectation that the state will take positive action. Secondly, the

issue must be sufficiently important to people to warrant action – i.e. there must be a cost associated with inaction. In addition, the voices of the marginalised and excluded need to be heard and elite capture avoided.

People generally enquire about payments delays, but do not take further action.

In general, there is reason to believe that some issues are more salient than others. For example, the issue of ghost beneficiaries is unlikely to be as important to people as delays in payments. People may even be hesitant to report inclusion errors out of fear of causing offense to the people benefitting. However, even in the case of payment delays most people expressed that this was not a particularly serious issue for them. In several cases, interviewees mentioned that they did not take action, for example in the case of payment delays, because they trusted that the VDC Secretary was doing the best he could and that he would distribute the money as soon as he received it (KII9).

On the face of it, this seem to be an expression of trust in the VDC Secretary. However, it could also be an expression of a culture of deference to authority, which seem to be particularly prevalent among older people. When asked whether they had taken action in response to payment delays, the majority of people interviewed said that they had asked the VDC Secretary or Assistant about the delay (mostly in person, by going to the office, although one person described calling him on the phone), and had been told that the funds had not yet arrived from the district. If people have the general experience that the money is most often delayed, but is paid eventually, and if most people believe that the delays are caused by delays in transfers from the district to the VDC, it is perhaps natural that they do not take further action about the issue.

"Yes, we have asked the VDC Secretary about it. We are told that it has not come yet from the district. The secretary certainly has not kept the money in the house. He cannot distribute it until he gets money from the district." (FGD9)

However, others expressed a feeling of futility in complaining to the local officials and political party leaders, as they were unlikely to listen.

People do not connect the benefits with concepts of 'rights' or 'entitlements' despite the fact that the allowances are provided as rights.

We consistently heard that people do not connect the benefits with concepts such as 'rights' or 'entitlements'. The main terms used to describe the benefits were that the government took 'pity' on poor people, that the government was 'generous', or that the benefits were provided as a sign of respect (KII5, IIDI2). The only exception to this was the single women's group in Petku VDC, which was very active and where the training provided by Tuki Association seems to have had an impact on the way the women expressed themselves about the grant (FGD18). However, as described above, this absence of a perception of rights does not mean that people do not raise questions if the payments do not arrive on time.

Language, culture and lack of education presents barriers for citizens to feel confident to approach officials.

In Nepal, it is not just the power distance between ordinary citizens and government officials and others in positions of power that is a barrier. For indigenous people, there are also language and cultural barriers. Many people also cited lack of education as a barrier for citizens to feel confident to approach officials, and lack of education combined with cultural differences can make it difficult, especially for indigenous people, to articulate their concerns: *"We are from the Danuwar community. We talk straight to the point with a loud voice. So, when we talk in a straight forward manner, people in the meetings think that I am drunk, though I am not."* (Rai Ward citizen forum member, FGD7)

We found anecdotal evidence of an increase in the confidence and ability of women's groups to take action.

Several people mentioned a change in the confidence of women to approach the local officials: *"Before no women used to go to VDC office but these days it's not the same situation. Because of the awareness and empowerment programs of different social organizations, women became aware of their rights, the laws, and where to go when they have problems, and that they should also participate in decision-making."* (KII9). In Kadambas VDC in Sindhupalchok, a former Ward citizen forum coordinator related how there had been a big change in the last 6-7 years in the confidence of women to speak in public and to approach local officials, because of frequent trainings facilitated by the Women's Self-Dependency Centre (Mahila Atma Nirbharta Kendra, MANK) – a local NGO. In Sindhupalchok, both the former CSSP programme manager from Tuki Association and people from the single women's group related how they had managed to get access to the VDC budget by putting pressure on the VDC Secretary.

"The VDC decided to allocate 10 per cent from its development budget for women, but the single women's group was not covered by it and we didn't see any single women demanding it, but nowadays the single women have started demanding that single women should also receive the allocated budget." (Tuki Association programme manager, KII37).

In sum, there is anecdotal evidence of an increase in the confidence and ability of women's groups to take action, but we found mixed evidence of the confidence and ability of citizens in general to raise demands and lodge complaints. While most people stated that they had asked the VDC Secretary about payment delays, others were hesitant to raise questions – some because they believed the VDC to be doing the best they could, others because they did not believe that officials would be responsive. Especially people with lower education and Dalits and indigenous groups expressed that they were hesitant to raise demands and complaints.

5.5 State Action

State action is the second primary element of social accountability and positive state action is a prerequisite for realising social accountability. Identified potential determinants of state action in the area of social protection include:

- Relevant officials have incentives (intrinsic or extrinsic) to address citizen concerns and/or face costs of inaction;
- private sector providers have incentives to address citizen concerns;
- staff who interface with citizens have the authority to resolve the issues, or influence with others who do;
- the state has the capacity (staff time and skills) to address the issues; and
- the state has the financial resources and allocative flexibility to address the issues.

Since the absence of state action is often the key barrier to effective social accountability initiatives, it is important to consider exactly when and why officials respond to demands or requests and when and why they do not. In relation to social protection in Nepal, the key state actor is the VDC Secretary, who is the first and main point of contact with the state for citizens. Secondarily there are various actors at the district level who play an important role in social protection: DDC officials are the next level for complaints about VDC Secretaries; the District Administration Office is responsible for issues related to citizenship certificates; and the District Office of Women and Children is responsible for disability assessments together with the District Health Office.

There is low accountability of local officials, both upwards and downwards, with little incentive for VDC Secretaries to respond to people's demands, and no formalised mechanisms for feedback from the state to citizens.

In general, it seems that there is little incentive for VDC Secretaries to respond to people's demands, and people do not have any effective means of pressurising them (KII2; KII4): *"The main issue is a lack of accountability. With local elections there were more accountability, with at least some checks and balances between competing parties and between politicians and officials. Now the VDCs are not accountable to people – there is no downward accountability."* (KII4)

As noted previously, this issue is exacerbated by weak upward accountability, as it is very difficult to fire officials. Several people mentioned that the main form of punishment is to 'move undesired people to undesired locations'. In that way, remote areas that are underserviced to begin with are also burdened with ineffective or incompetent officials (KII4, KII9).

Even well-connected NGOs such as Nangshal Association may find it challenging to persuade local officials to take action: *"There was a case of a VDC secretary who was never at his post but delegated all his work to the assistant. We complained to the DDC and in other forums, but nothing happened."* (KII5)

According to Nangshal, VDC Secretaries are usually working, but some have 'attitude problems'. In those cases, Nangshal may organise meetings and try to coordinate with the DDC, but *"even officials at the DDC sometimes have attitude problems."* (KII5) It seems that it is generally easier for local officials to ignore complaints than to act on them.

Often the informal nature of interactions and accountability at the local level mean that people may not receive clear information about why their queries may not be answered. For example, one focus group participant related how he first applied for the disability allowance seven years ago, and has complained many times about not getting it, but without result (FGD1).

Despite this, we did find a few examples of state action in response to complaints from citizens.

The DDC focal point in Sindhupalchok District related how they had in one case taken action against a VDC secretary, following complaints from citizens that the social protection benefits had not been distributed. The case was reported by the DDC to the CIAA, where the secretary was in the end cleared of corruption because he paid back the money he had initially used for his personal use (KII26). It is likely that this type of action only happens in the most serious cases.

In one example of a VDC responding to complaints from citizens, the VDC Assistant in Kadambas VDC related how they received many individual complaints from people with disabilities in the two categories that are not eligible for the disability benefit. In response, the issue was discussed in a VDC all-party meeting, and it was decided to allocate part of the VDC budget to provide a small grant once or twice a year to these people (KII31).

State responsiveness is likely to vary depending on personal connections and group affiliation, with lower responsiveness towards marginalised groups.

As in all clientelist political settlements, governance in Nepal is ruled more through personal networks than through the rule of law, and how responsive the state is to citizens is therefore likely to vary depending on whether the particular state official knows the particular citizen. It is very likely that the incentives for officials to respond varies depending on who is making a request. High-caste Hindus generally perceived the state to be more responsive to their demands than Dalits and indigenous people. They often live closer to the VDC office, are better educated and have stronger social networks and connections with local political party leaders.

"We don't know anyone there [at the DDC]. If we know no one, then they just listen and do nothing, What I feel is that we either need power or money to get things done. Otherwise nothing happens. There is no law. That is my experience." (Male Rai, FGD7)

The same person related how he had tried to register his sister-in-law for the disability benefit. The VDC Secretary told him that he could register her name if he got the approval of the political party leaders. These told him that they would help, but nothing happened and his sister-in-law passed away without ever receiving the benefit. His perception was that their lack of responsiveness was because he is not an important person in the political parties, and because the Rai community in general is excluded from influence.

"Even if we are in the political party, we do not hold good positions. We do not have any influential leaders from the Danuwar community in any political parties. We are ordinary party members but we cannot influence or make any decisions." (Male Rai, FGD7)

A Dalit community leader explained that among the older generations there is still a lot of discrimination against the Dalits, and older high-caste Hindus may refuse to eat together with Dalits in a public meeting. However, the younger generations are more tolerant, and Dalits with more education or knowledge are more respected (KII28).

Local political party leaders have significant power and can induce officials to act. They are not themselves accountable to citizens, but competition between political parties locally may create incentives for responsiveness.

The main resource for inducing local officials to be responsive to citizens is the local political party leaders, who are the key decision-makers, and can usually persuade the VDC Secretary to act according to their requests. The main sanction available is that local leaders can obstruct the Secretary's work, and may use their political connections to have the Secretary moved to an undesirable posting (IIDI2).

Political party leaders are not themselves accountable to the population. However, according to one interviewee, the competition between leaders from the different parties means that they are keen to make a good impression, including by helping people to access social protection programmes:

"There is a competition among politicians and they are keen to help people left behind in order to get votes… Because of political competition, no one is left behind." (KII18)

"Before only one party used to work so they could do anything. But now all the parties look after the work the VDC do. Before if an old man died the VDC didn't used to register his death and used to eat up the grant which he gets." (Local political party leader, KII34).

Overall, the limited accountability does not seem to have significant consequences for the implementation of the social protection programmes.

In general, it seems that the limited accountability affects the more flexible general development budget (block grants to the districts and VDCs with flexible use), more than the social protection programmes. For example, one group of working age men related

how their area was being overlooked because development projects were allocated according to political influence:

"Only small projects happen in this ward. Bigger projects go to Kadambas, because of political reasons. It's because all the smart and eloquent leaders are in Kadambas, they keep the big projects to themselves. Then, a little lower status is in Jeetpur. There are more Maoists there. They can talk and demand more. So, they take all the drinking water and such projects. We only get the projects that are left over by them" (FGD17).

Local authorities have very limited capacity, which affects their ability to respond to citizens' demands and is a direct cause of payment delays.

It is clear that not just incentives, but also the capacity to respond to citizen demands, is an issue in Nepal. In general, our interviews confirmed that the VDC Secretaries are overburdened with work and have very few resources. In Devitar VDC, the 2015 earthquake destroyed the VDC office, and the Secretary is now working out of a small rented room in the house of the LGCDP social mobiliser. While the office has a VDC Assistant, he is illiterate and in practice the LGCDP social mobiliser therefore functions as the Secretary's Assistant (KII8). Both the CSSP and the LGCDP have strengthened the capacity of local offices by hiring social mobilisers and, in the case of the CSSP, assisting in the development of an electronic MIS and providing computers to local officials. However, this has not been sufficient to solve the issues of low capacity.

According to the DDC in Sindhupalchok, fully half of VDC Secretary positions have not been filled by MoFALD and consequently many Secretaries must cover several VDCs. As explained by the senior programme officer with responsibility for the social protection programmes in Sindhupalchok District, this is a major factor in creating the problem of payment delays in the first place, as the lack of manpower means that the VDC Secretaries are not able to submit updated beneficiary data to the District in time. Consequently, the District cannot submit the data to MoFALD and MoFALD cannot distribute the funds in time (DDC official, KII26).

"One thing is for sure the number of VDC Secretaries that is needed and the amount of time a VDC secretary needs to spend in a VDC is not enough. So, this is one problem and as a result of this, because a VDC secretary is not always present in the VDC [it] is not that easy for people to go and complain to him. One VDC secretary looks after 3-4-5 VDC so he is never available in any VDC for longer times and this problem still exists." (Tuki Association Director, KII29)

There are also many issues that VDC Secretaries do not have the mandate to address.

Furthermore, for many of the issues that people experience – such as the delays in payments and issues with errors in the age recorded on the citizenship certificate – there is little the VDC Secretary can do, since citizenship certificates are issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs through their district office. And even the district Chief Development Officer

(CDO) will usually be unable or unwilling to, for example, change a person's age on the certificate. According to the VDC Secretary in Devitar VDC, Kavre, he has to be careful when providing recommendations for new citizenship certificates and, as he does not know the local people, it is difficult for him to ascertain whether someone is actually a resident or not (KII8).

5.6 Summary: outcomes of social accountability mechanisms

Information levels

Because coverage rates of most of the social protection programmes are high, most people will know somebody benefitting. And since the eligibility criteria are simple and easy to understand, most people are aware of who is eligible to benefit from the programmes. The exception is the disability benefit, which has much lower coverage and therefore people are less likely to know somebody benefitting from it. It also has more complex and much less transparent eligibility criteria, with access depending on a disability assessment done in the district capital. As a result, most people are not clear about who is eligible to benefit from the programme.

Because of the high coverage rates, information spreads relatively easily by word of mouth. In addition, CSSP and LGCDP social mobilisers, Ward citizen forums and women's groups have been effective mechanisms of disseminating information about programme changes. Public hearings have also been a way for local officials to disseminate information, and there have also been various other channels of information, including radio spots. However, we have seen examples of how information is spread unevenly through communities: Dalits and indigenous people have less information about the programmes and processes than high caste Hindus; older people have less information than younger people; people with disabilities face additional challenges in accessing information; and people living further from the VDC Office have less information than those living closer to the office.

In sum, the main reason why awareness is high seems to be related to the design of the programmes, simple eligibility criteria and high coverage. However, the CSSP and LGCDP also seem to have played a key role in increasing awareness of the programmes through social mobilisers and Ward citizen forums.

Civic mobilisation

The experience of establishing and strengthening women's groups seems to have been mixed, with some functioning and others not. However, in at least one VDC, the women's group has been effective for mobilising single women. Ward citizen forums do not seem to be a particularly effective mechanism of civic mobilisation. First, communities are not homogenous, but rather are characterised by very unequal power relations between different groups and individuals. The assumption that 'communities' will mobilise to hold officials accountable therefore doesn't hold in reality. In addition, ward citizen forum coordinators are in practice not able to provide a counterweight to local political party leaders and VDC Secretaries. Overall, civic mobilisation remains a challenge, because of

lack of confidence of citizens and lack of cohesion in 'communities'. NGOs are mainly in a service delivery role, and there is a lack of strong member-based civil society organisations. This is something that is difficult to create through external initiatives such as the CSSP, and of course impossible for a state-run initiative like the LGCDP.

Interface

Public hearings seem to have been well attended, and have again been an effective means of disseminating information, but not effective as an accountability mechanism. One annual meeting of a couple of hours, with several hundred participants, is unlikely to provide an effective interface, and it seemed that there had been very little discussion and complaints raised. Public hearings need to be more frequent and accessible to enable people to raise concerns effectively. Ideally, they would involve external facilitators, as envisioned in the social audits mandated in the Operational Guidelines. However, this requires more staff and resources.

Face-to-face meetings with local officials are generally the preferred interface. Approaching the VDC and DDC officials is more difficult for women, for older people, for Dalits and indigenous people, for people living far from the VDC Office and the district capital, and for people with disabilities. These groups in general prefer to be accompanied by people who are either more influential, such as political party leaders, or who are simply more educated and knowledgeable and better able to formulate their requests. Telephone hotlines seem unlikely to be of use for most people, who do not have phones or do not have the numbers of officials. Only the most influential people in the communities would be able to use them.

Public hearings, ward citizen forums, social mobilisers and local social protection coordination committee members all serve to enhance opportunities for interaction between citizens and officials, with especially the CSSP and LGCDP social mobilisers and ward citizen forums playing and important role in expanding the space for interaction between citizens and state. But more can be done to make the interfaces accessible for all citizens.

Citizen Action

People do react if they do not receive the benefits they feel they should, but often the lack of clear channels to voice grievances, which means that they give up if there is no immediate reaction from the state. There are barriers to action in the form of confidence, education, knowledge, language, discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and caste, old age, disability and the cost of travelling to the district capital to deal with issues that cannot be solved at the VDC level. As mentioned above, the CSSP and LGCDP initiatives do not seem to have been particularly effective in mobilising citizens to take action (with a few exceptions), and interfaces with local officials still need to be more accessible to all groups.

State Action

The responsiveness of the state is limited because of both limited incentives and capacity to respond. There is little incentive for VDC Secretaries to respond to people's demands and people do not have any means of pressurising the Secretary. The main tool for inducing local officials to act is for people to go through the local political party leaders, who are the key decision-makers, and can usually make the VDC Secretary act according to their requests. For most issues that people experience – delays in payments and issues with citizenship – there is little the VDC Secretary can do. The very limited capacity of VDC offices also limits how responsive VDC Secretaries can be to citizens.

The CSSP and LGCDP initiatives have worked to improve both incentives and capacity: they have increased the incentives for local officials by increasing awareness of citizens and transparency of programme implementation through ward citizen forums, social mobilisers, public hearings and local social protection coordination committees. The projects do seem to have subtly diluted the power of the VDC Secretaries and made them more accountable, even if the absence of 'hard' sanctioning opportunities is still an obstacle. Improving capacity of the DDCs and VDCs has been an important part of both projects. A lot of this is simply about adding additional staff – the social mobilisers – but Ward citizen forum coordinators are also taking on a lot of work on a voluntary basis (which is a problem – they should be compensated). But the development of an MIS and digitisation of beneficiary lists can also improve processes and ease the work load of officials.

However, overall, the CSSP and LGCDP programmes have not fundamentally changed accountability relations, and have also not been able to improve government capacity sufficiently to make local officials responsive to citizens.

Chapter 6: The impact of CSSP and LGCDP on service delivery and state-society relations

According to the Nangshal CSSP programme manager, in Kavrepalanchok there are some VDCs where the programme has perfomed well and others where it has not worked at all. In general, it depends on how active people are and if the political party leaders are willing to pressure the VDC Secretary to respond to requests from citizens. In general, it seems that the CSSP has had more of an impact in Sindhupalchok where it was implemented for longer and where the DDC has been very cooperative.

It should be noted that the scope of this research project has been limited to qualitative research in four VDCs in the two districts of Sindhupalchok and Kavrepalanchok, and it is therefore not possible for us to provide solid evidence of impacts in general. An accurate and comprehensive assessment of the impact of the social accountability initiatives of the CSSP and LGCDP would have required detailed information pertaining to the research questions, for example through monitoring and evaluation data, which is not available. The following can therefore at most provide indications of the perceptions of the people involved of the effects of the programmes in the specific VDCs visited.

6.1 Impacts on coverage of social protection programmes

People consistently reported that all eligible persons were benefitting from the social protection programmes (although this is manifestly incorrect, at least when it comes to the disability benefit). However, since there is no data available at the VDC level about the target population of the social protection programmes, it is not possible to assess the coverage rates.

"After Nangshal's support almost everybody is getting the benefit. It is much better after the intervention. They provided information and helped people register on the programmes." (KII10).

However, our interviews also confirmed the findings of the latest expenditure tracking and service delivery survey by New Era (2016): that a significant number of people are excluded from the Old Age Allowance because of incorrect dates of birth recorded on their citizenship certificates. The CSSP and LGCDP have not been able to address this issue, which requires the establishment of clear procedures for age verification and correction of citizenship age – issues that will have to be addressed through national policies. As it is, there is confusion about the mandate of VDC and DDC officials to revise citizenship age and officials expressed that they are very hesitant to do so.

It is not clear whether the perceived increase in coverage is a result of strengthened accountability or simply because part of the CSSP has also been to help beneficiaries register. The programme's social mobilisers have worked to identify potential beneficiaries and have directly assisted them in registering for the programmes, for example by helping

to fill out application forms. This is particularly the case for people with disabilities, where household surveys were carried out to identify people with disabilities and help them obtain the disability cards and register for the disability allowance, including paying for transport to the district headquarters for the disability assessment.

However, based on the number of beneficiaries of the disability benefit compared to international estimates of prevalence rates, it seems clear that people's idea about what it means that 'everybody' has disability cards is probably not realistic. There has also not been any effort to improve the disability assessment process or to make the disability assessment more accessible, beyond paying the transport costs of potential beneficiaries. It is still difficult for people with disabilities to travel to the district headquarters for the assessment. One older man described how he had to hire a person to carry his wife to the district headquarters in Kavre, and that they had to go several times because there were too many people waiting for the assessment and the relevant officials were not present (FGD9). This example highlights the limitations of local social accountability initiatives which are not linked to higher-level advocacy work to address these kinds of policy-level constraints.

Overall, there seems to have been effective coordination between the district authorities and the CSSP, especially in Sindhupalchok. A common cause of exclusion is related to birth certificates, citizenship certificates and marriage certificates. In Sindhupalchok, the DDC has worked with the DAO to improve access to citizenship certificates by organizing camps to distribute the certificates, and people who had difficulties travelling to the district headquarters were helped by CSSP. Based on key informant interviews in the district it seems that the CSSP has played a significant role in increasing the focus of officials on improving the processes related to the social protection programmes (KII26).

social mobilisers, women's groups and Ward citizen forums seem to have contributed significantly to spreading information about the eligibility criteria and application processes, even though there are still differences in the level of information experienced by high-caste Hindus, Dalits and indigenous groups, and between older and younger people and people living close to and far from the VDC Office. Not all women's groups are functioning, but those that do are likely to provide valuable support to women and contribute to building their confidence to approach local officials.

6.2 Impacts of the CSSP and LGCDP on inclusion errors and leakage

While Ayliffe et al. (2017) expected the individualised nature of social protection programmes to be a disadvantage in terms of civic mobilisation, our research shows that it may be an advantage in terms of the risk of fraud. In Nepal, local political party leaders play an important role in local governance, but they are usually more interested in securing control over development projects than in the social protection programmes (KII5). With the development funds, contracts can be given out as political patronage and there is prestige in controlling access to funds and the focus of the project. This does not seem to happen to the same extent with the social protection programmes: because these

are individual entitlements, local political party leaders would quickly become unpopular if they started siphoning off money for their supporters (KII4). And because Nepal's social protection programmes generally have high coverage rates and clear eligibility criteria, people are aware of who should and should not receive the benefits. The CSSP has strengthened this by supporting VDCs to publish beneficiary lists on the office walls and by providing information through social mobilisers.

Nevertheless, as described above, there are signs of some leakage in the programmes, for example from 'ghost' beneficiaries. The support CSSP has provided to the DDC and VDCs to digitise beneficiary lists has reduced this leakage. In Kavre, the total number of beneficiaries were reduced from 29,000 to 26,000 (about 10 per cent) because of the CSSP's work to help the DDC digitise the beneficiary lists (KII6). Similarly, in Sindhupalchok, the programme resulted in 865 names (3.76 per cent of beneficiaries) being removed from the beneficiary lists. The social mobilisers played a key role in validating the beneficiary lists, with training from CSSP and the DDC (KII26).

According to one political party leader, in Deupur VDC, the Local Social Protection Coordination Committee used to meet only before the distribution of payments. Now they meet afterwards as well and have a better opportunity to control that the right people are paid and how much is not distributed (because of deceased beneficiaries for example). This was confirmed by a member of the Committee (KII16, KII20). A former CSSP social mobiliser also related how the public hearings had helped discover people who were receiving benefits from more than one VDC (KII13). A former CSSP programme manager from Tuki Association related how involving the media had also played a role in increasing accountability by exposing people unrightfully benefitting from the programmes (KII37).

6.3 Impacts of the CSSP and LGCDP on payment issues

People consistently stated that payments are made at the correct three times a year, but always with delays and not at particular dates or weeks. People also expressed that they receive the right amount of money. According to Nangshal Association, after they started supporting VDC's to organise public hearings, payments are done more regularly (KII5), but we do not have data to document this. Similarly, according to Tuki Association, after the CSSP started in Sindhupalchok in 2011, the 12 initial target VDCs started making payments three times a year in accordance with the guidelines (KII37). There are still delays in payments, but this is caused by delays in the transfer of funds from the Ministry.

Our interviews confirmed that payments are made three times a year in the two districts, contrary to what research has shown in other parts of the country, where payments are often done less frequently than stipulated in the guidelines. The vast majority of beneficiaries could accurately describe when they were supposed to receive the payments, and how much it had been delayed, and most had asked the VDC Secretary or Assistant about the delays. Payment delays are still the norm, but this is almost certainly caused by delays in transfers from DoCR, and as described above, this is ultimately caused by the lack

of capacity at the VDC level, which delays the submission of updated beneficiary lists to the DDC.
In Sindhupalchok, the DDC said that they ran a campaign for 4-5 years with support from the CSSP which was very successful in improving the regularity of payments. However, they had to stop it because of the shortage of VDC Secretaries. This again suggests that localised social accountability initiatives are constrained by more systemic issues that require national level action to address.

6.4 The impact of the CSSP and LGCDP on state-society relations

According to Nangshal Association, government officials appreciate the CSSP because it helps them develop a better image among the population (KII5). This preoccupation with the image of the VDC secretaries were also remarked upon by the secretaries themselves, as well as by the DDC in Kavre (KII6). The VDC secretaries we interviewed seemed clearly concerned about their image among the population, but also indicated that they thought they were being perceived in an unfairly negative light by most people: *"There have been a few cases of misuse of funds by VDC Secretaries elsewhere, so people always think we misuse the funds, this makes it difficult to earn the trust of the people."* (KII8)

We found in our research that most social protection beneficiaries believed that the VDC Secretary or VDC Assistant would not embezzle the funds, and that he would deliver the funds once he received it from the district. We also found a clear difference in the level of trust expressed by beneficiaries of the social protection programmes and non-beneficiaries without any opportunity for direct contact with local officials. In general, it seems from our research that there is a tendency for people with more information to also have more trust in officials. Conversely, people who do not have adequate information seem more likely to mistrust the VDC secretary and political party leaders.

In Nepal in particular, as Drucza (2016) points out, the relationship between citizens may be as important as the relationship between citizens and the state, and citizens may well interpret state action in terms of their specific group. Dalits and indigenous groups in Nepal often, rightfully, perceive the state as being closer to high caste Hindus and to be discriminating against others. We found differences in the perception of the performance of and trust in VDC Secretaries between the different groups, with Brahmins being more satisfied than Dalits and indigenous people. As one high-caste Hindu said, *"Maybe we have good relations with the VDC Secretary because we are from the same sub-caste"* (Brahmin widow, FGD3). However, for Dalits, even though they are dissatisfied with the way they are treated by the state, the process of interacting with the state may itself be transformative, as a sort of 'citizenship as complaining' (Corbridge 2007 in Drucza 2016).

Based on our research, we are not able to say anything about whether the LGCDP and CSSP has had an impact on state-society relations. However, we can identify some potential pathways through which the programmes may have had an impact. First, social accountability initiatives may influence state-society relations simply by increasing the level of information that citizens have about eligibility criteria and process of services

delivered by local officials. The 'sightings of the state' offered by the social protection programmes seem to improve the perception of citizens of the state. As both LGCDP and CSSP have improved access to information about the social protection programmes, as well as expanded the 'sightings of the state' through social mobilisers and ward citizen forums, it is conceivable that they have had an impact on state society relations through this pathway.

Secondly, social accountability initiatives may affect the 'sightings of the state' by modifying the encounters between the state and citizens in more specific ways. For example, by facilitating public hearings in connection with payments, these interactions between citizens and the state are slightly modified to add an element of transparency, information and opportunity for voicing complaints to the process of delivering services. One key informant similarly suggested that the relationship between the local officials and citizens would improve if the officials were able to carry out awareness-raising activities (KII18). However, it is unclear to what extent the public hearings that CSSP has facilitated have had this effect in practice.

Thirdly, the CSSP has worked with local officials to improve service delivery, including the regularity of payments, which is likely to have improved the perceptions of citizens of the local officials. However, this work has only had limited success because of the capacity gaps at the local level, which presents a barrier to improving service delivery.

Chapter 7: Implications of local context and social protection programme design

Probably the most remarkable aspect of Nepal's social protection programmes is that the system manages to provide benefits to a large number of people, despite very low state capacity, and absence of accountability mechanisms, and a manual cash-based system of registration and payments. While there are persistent issues of payment delays and some indications of leakage and ghost beneficiaries, coverage rates of the Old Age Allowance, Single Women's Allowance and Child Grant are high and most people are satisfied with the payments system (See the description above in section 4). Based on the existing literature and the field research, this section analyses some of the likely causes of this, including the potential impact of social accountability initiatives. We consider first the implications of the local power relations in the two districts and the importance of the design of Nepal's social protection programmes for social accountability. Subsequently we discuss the extent to which the social accountability mechanisms under the CSSP and LGCDP programmes have influenced local accountability in the social protection programmes.

7.1 Implications of local level power relations

It is important to consider the implications of the local level power relations that shape local governance in Nepal for the prospects of social accountability. Power relations at the local level do not necessarily mirror those at the national level. Since vertical accountability mechanisms are weak, local governance is to some extent divorced from the national level politics, even though the national political parties are represented in all locations. Local level governance in Nepal was at the time of the research defined by several unique institutional features (although these have now changed, as described in section 3). Firstly, there was an absence of local elections, despite the provision for them in the constitution. This means that local DDC and VDC officials were not supposed to be decision-makers: they were supposed to be implementing decisions made by elected local councils. This has important implications for the way governance worked at the local level:

- Local political party leaders in practice made decisions, even though they did not have any formal decision-making power. The all-party mechanism established in lieu of local elections was formally dissolved in 2012, but in practice local political party leaders were still involved in most local decisions.
- The VDC Secretary had more autonomy from their superiors at the DDC (and the DDC from the Ministry) than you would normally expect from local officials. This translated into weak vertical accountability mechanisms.
- At the same time, the VDC Secretary was not in a particularly strong position, as they were not from the local area, did not have legitimacy among the local population and often did not even speak the local language.

Since there was a disconnect between citizens and the VDC Secretaries, intermediaries played an important role. These include local political party leaders, social mobilisers,

Ward citizen forum coordinators, civil society organisations and the media. To understand accountability at the local level we therefore need to ask two questions:

a) What is the power balance between these intermediaries and the VDC Secretaries?
b) What is the relationship between the intermediaries and citizens: how inclusive are they and how well do they represent the interests of various groups of citizens? This is particularly important given the dynamics of inequality and exclusion mentioned above.

Key decision makers included the VDC Secretary and local political party leaders from the three main parties. Outside of that core group of decision makers were the VDC Assistant and social mobilisers, who may not have much decision-making power, but often play an important role in registering beneficiaries, disseminating information and distributing payments.

Similarly, the ward citizen forum coordinators of each of the nine wards were connected to the political party leaders and involved in some decisions. High-caste Hindu citizens who are not involved in decision-making also have easier access to information and are better able to approach power holders who are generally from their own caste/ethnic groups and speak the same language. On the contrary, Dalit and indigenous citizens have less access to information and are less able to approach government officials. As mentioned above, local political party leaders in practice made decisions, even though they did not have any formal decision-making power. This was confirmed by our research.

"Local political party leaders also play an important role and often form groups around specific projects. If one party dominates it will take the lead, while in other areas there may be a negotiation between different parties. This happens a lot around development projects, where there is money to be made or other types of benefits from controlling access and focus of the project." (KII4).
Local political party leaders were involved in the implementation of social protection programmes, including monitoring and assisting local officials in organising payments. They have an incentive to ensure that citizens see them as part of the state and that they can take credit for the effective distribution of social protection payments. However, social protection funds do not lend themselves easily to allocation to political supporters:
"Political leaders don't influence social protection, they mainly influence the development projects. The difference is that there are clear guidelines and eligibility criteria for the social protection programmes, but not for the development budget." (Ward citizen forum coordinator, KII10).

Note that 'development projects' refer to the funds that the VDC received for development purposes, some of which were flexible funds in the form of block grants. These were often allocated to various forms of infrastructure projects, where there were many opportunities for kickbacks or patronage in the forms of allocation of construction

contracts etc. It was also easier for political party leaders to take credit for specific local projects, compared to the centrally implemented social protection programmes.

Even though local political party leaders did not represent the population and were not themselves accountable to citizens, they may function as a form of accountability mechanism by keeping checks on both the VDC Secretary and each other: *"There are checks and balances between the different political parties. If one political party is leading a project, the others will keep him accountable."* (VDC Secretary, KII14).

It is conceivable that, in the same way that the competitive clientelist national political settlement has led to expansion of social protection, competition between parties at the local level may also lead to better implementation of programmes. Indeed, this was the opinion of one community leader, as mentioned above: *"There is a competition among politicians and they are keen to help people left behind in order to get votes… Because of political competition, no one is left behind."* (KII18)

VDC Secretaries had a lot of autonomy and were generally not subjected to strong oversight from their superiors at the DDC. They were also not restricted by any formal downward accountability mechanisms. On the other hand, the VDC secretaries were not in a particularly strong position to fulfil their mandate. They were understaffed, and were centrally appointed officials who were often shifted between different areas. This means that they did not have strong local networks and did not have legitimacy with the local population. They may not even have been able to understand the local language and culture of the majority of the population in some areas. They therefore depended on political party leaders and other local power holders to spread information and mobilise people. Without support from local influential people it would be very difficult for them to carry out their job.

In a way, the weak state in Nepal, at least in some situations and some local areas, can create a more equal power relation between local officials and local power holders than would have otherwise been the case. The local elections that took place in 2017 are likely to have fundamentally changed these power relations. Contrary to the previous situation, in the new structures, unelected officials are subordinate to the local elites in the political parties. While the previous situation allowed some kind of power balance between unelected local officials and local political party leaders, decision-making power is now placed more decisively with the local political elites after local elections. On the other hand, the hope is that local elections will function as an accountability mechanism.

Depending on the specific area, there may also be other local community leaders. These might be traditional leaders, but are often also literate people or people with more education than the majority, including for example teachers. Local civil society organisations can also hold power as a result of their network among the local population and local power holders. For example, Tuki Association has gained the trust of the population in Sindhupalchok by providing assistance to people for decades. However, it seems that civil society organisations are generally not involved in decision-making, but

usually restrict themselves to delivering services, and, at least in the two districts visited, there were no strong civil society movements.

In Nepal, the issue of civic mobilisation is very much related to social exclusion, and improving service delivery and improving state-society relations depend to a large extend on increasing social inclusion. This suggests a need to empower excluded groups and create venues where different castes and ethnic groups can meet. It also requires that both the state and civil society organisations create an inclusive work force that does not consist only of Brahmins, Chhetris and Newars, to ensure that the perspectives of marginalised groups are not overlooked. Finally, respondents consistently highlighted the importance of education for empowering marginalised groups, with many saying that social exclusion is already diminishing as a result of better education of the younger generations.

7.2 Implications of the design of Nepal's social protection programmes

Drucza (2016) identifies several existing design features that lead Nepal's cash transfers to better facilitate the process of inclusion, including that: they are provided unconditionally; they are manually delivered by government officers; payments provide an opportunity for beneficiaries to get together across class and other differences; and, they are utilising a combination of universal and categorical targeting.

As noted in Ayliffe et al. (2017), *"Social accountability and rights-based approaches are tightly linked, as social accountability helps citizens to hold officials and service providers to account for failure to provide these entitlements."* The fact that Nepal's social protection programmes are entitlements, with eligibility criteria that are transparent and easy to understand, makes it relatively straightforward to monitor their implementation and for citizens to know if they are not receiving what they are entitled to (with the possible exception of the disability benefit). This is therefore a case of 'thin' accountability, as described in Ayliffe et al. (2017 p. 27).

As one social mobiliser said, the political party leaders cannot do anything about the social protection programmes, as the budget is allocated based on the beneficiary lists, and the eligibility criteria are fixed and transparent according to the guidelines (KII33). This is contrary to other development projects, which are subject to political infighting about project priorities.

In addition, the transparent eligibility criteria of most of the benefits mean that intermediaries such as ward citizen forum coordinators, social mobilisers, women's groups and civil society organisations can easily provide guidance to potential beneficiaries about their eligibility. This is contrary to other programmes, such as for example the earthquake relief provided in Nepal after the 2015 earthquake, where eligibility criteria are not clear, and where intermediaries are therefore not able to explain to citizens why they are not on the beneficiary lists. The disability benefit is similar in that the eligibility criteria are not as

clear, and that local officials and intermediaries do not have a mandate to reverse the decision of the District Health Office (KII35).

Strengthening social accountability in Nepal depends just as much on increasing trust between the different groups in society (of which government officials are also members) as working to bridge the gap between citizens and the state. The design of social protection programmes can play an important role in strengthening social cohesion: on the one hand, the mix of universal and categorically targeted programmes in Nepal mean that there is no stigma attached to being a beneficiary. Universal programmes may have a more positive effect on social cohesion than targeted programmes – as found by Pavanello et al. (2016) and others. On the other hand, the fact that Dalits have a lower age of eligibility for the Old Age Allowance and that they receive the Child Grant contributes to exacerbating the existing animosities between Dalits and other groups.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and policy implications

Despite the overall mixed results of the CSSP and LGCDP programmes, and the limitations of this research project, we can point to a number of interesting findings that can inform social accountability initiatives both in Nepal and elsewhere.

First, **social protection programme design matters**: Nepal shows how programmes with simple and transparent eligibility criteria and high coverage rates can work well even under conditions of limited accountability. The implication is that social accountability should not be seen as a separate initiative or component to be added on to social protection programmes. Rather, accountability should be seen as a dimension of programme design, so that accountability is considered when designing social protection programmes, along with other programme objectives. This means ensuring that eligibility criteria are simple and transparent and that adequate resources are allocated for communication and administration. It is likely to be much more effective to support social protection programmes that are designed in a way that makes them amenable to social accountability, rather than focusing on the design of any specific social accountability mechanism in programmes that are designed in ways that are not amenable to accountability initiatives.

Because Nepal's programmes are individual entitlements, with clear and transparent eligibility criteria, it is difficult for local power holders to get away with putting their own supporters on the programme and excluding others. Local political party leaders are more interested in the general development funds, which they can direct to their supporters and which they can also take credit for in a way that they cannot with the social protection benefits. In a context of universal social protection programmes with simple and transparent eligibility criteria, efforts to improve information flows and build government capacity to deliver services are likely to be effective in improving service provision and state-society relations.

Second, the CSSP is a good example of what can be achieved when NGOs work constructively together with local officials to strengthen accountability and implementation capacity. Local officials particularly appreciated the concrete benefits that the programme brings, including the opportunity to improve their image among the general population, and the savings resulting from removing ineligible beneficiaries from the beneficiary lists. Building relations with district officials has been important for making payments more regular. According to Tuki Association, the organisation did initially face resistance to the programme from some officials, since they perceived the role of NGOs to be service delivery, and not to get involved in the delivery of government programmes. However, the organisation was able to demonstrate the advantages of the programme to local officials and develop a very positive working relationship with them. The LGCDP is an example of a large-scale government programme that has improved information and flows and interface between citizens and the state.

Third, while the CSSP and LGCDP have been able to make progress on some issues, including awareness about programmes and payments, it is clear that the main outstanding issues are related to lack of government capacity, and weak programme management and accountability mechanisms within the state. Social accountability initiatives are unlikely to be able to achieve significant changes without addressing basic issues, such as for example lack of staff in VDC Offices. This requires an integrated approach, linking issues encountered at the local level to national level advocacy. It also requires the state to set aside resources for strengthening accountability. For example, social audits need to be properly facilitated by independent facilitators and take place regularly. Information and awareness-raising activities need funding and staff to be effective. Local authorities need resources dedicated to administration to be able to respond effectively to citizen's demands.

Fourth, in countries like Nepal with very heterogeneous populations and unequal power relations, relations between the state and citizens have to be seen in connection with relations between different population groups. It seems that even for Dalits and indigenous people, the effect of their marginalisation is usually not outright exclusion from the programmes, but rather that it is more difficult for them, and may take longer, to solve any issues, for example for widows to get citizenship certificates. This happens because they have less information about the processes, they are more hesitant to approach local officials, and local power holders are less inclined to take their issues seriously. The implication is that in contexts of very heterogeneous populations, social accountability is likely to be closely linked to strengthening social inclusion and social cohesion.

Fifth, face-to-face interactions between citizens and local officials are most effective for the gradual building of trust and for addressing minor day-to-day issues. However, face-to-face interactions require that local officials are present on a regular basis. They also require efforts to ensure that marginalised groups are not discriminated against. Efforts to form groups of beneficiaries, as well as making sure that there are accessible and effective intermediaries available, are often necessary to empower vulnerable people to raise their concerns with officials. In addition, it is necessary to consider barriers in the form of language, culture and simple logistics and costs involved in traveling to the place of the relevant officials.

Finally, social accountability projects should incorporate strong evaluation mechanisms from the beginning: because of the lack of a strong monitoring and evaluation framework for the CSSP, we are not able to present very strong evidence of the impact of the programme. Especially for NGO programmes with limited scope, their relevance depends to a large extend on being able to document 'what works' to inform government decisions about whether to adopt elements of the programme as a part of larger scale reforms. Proper documentation should therefore be considered a key part of the programme and be properly resourced.[13]

[13] The CSSP has taken steps to ensure documentation, but because of the objectives of the programme, most of the indicators are focused on measuring changes in child wellbeing rather than accountability.

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Annex 1: Overview of interviews conducted

Kathmandu

Reference	Type	Location (ward, VDC, district)	Date	Participants
KII1	KII	Kathmandu	February 16. 2017	Jasmine Rajbhandary, Senior Social Protection Specialist, World Bank (F, Newar) Jyoti Pandey, Social Protection Specialist, World Bank (F, Brahmin)
KII2	KII	Kathmandu	February 16. 2017	Dilli Guragai, Director, Child Rights Governance and Child Protection, Save the Children International, Nepal Country Office (M, Brahmin)
KII3	KII	Kathmandu	February 17. 2017	Anil Kumar Thakur, Director General, Department of Civil Registration (DoCR), Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (M, Madeshi)
KII4	KII	Kathmandu	February 17. 2017	Thakur Dhakal, Social Policy Specialist, UNICEF Nepal (M, Brahmin)
KII22	KII	Kathmandu	March 1. 2017	Manish Prasai, Administrative Manager, National Federation of the Disabled Nepal (NFDN)
KII23	KII	Kathmandu	March 1. 2017	CP Sigdel, SML Specialist, LGCDP PCU, MoFALD Birendra Parajuli, Accountability and Oversight Specialist, LGCDP PCU, MoFALD
KII24	KII	Kathmandu	March 2. 2017	Anjalee Maiya Thakali, Deputy Coordinator, PRAN (World Bank)
KII25	KII	Kathmandu	March 2. 2017	Bishwa Pun, Programme Manager, CSSP, Save the Children International, Nepal Country Office Hemanta Dangal, Programme Coordinator, CSSP, Save the Children International, Nepal Country Office Basanti Sunar, MEAL Officer, CSSP, Save the Children International, Nepal Country Office

Kavrepalanchok

Reference	Type	Location (ward, VDC, district)	Date	Participants (F: female; M: male)
KII5	KII	Dhulikhel, Kavrepalanchok	February 21. 2017	Programme Officer, Nangshal Association (F, Brahmin)
KII6	KII	Dhulikhel, Kavrepalanchok	February 21. 2017	Programme Officer (M, Brahmin) and Vital Registration Officer (M, Brahmin), District Development Committee, Kavrepalanchok Districts
KII7	KII	Devitar VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 22. 2017	social mobiliser, Devitar VDC (F, Tamang)
KII8	KII	Devitar VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 22. 2017	VDC Secretary, Devitar VDC (M, Brahmin)
KII9	KII	Ward 7, Devitar VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 22. 2017	Head Teacher (M, Tamang)
FGD1	FGD	Ward 7, Devitar VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 22. 2017	Social protection beneficiaries (3 women, 2 men)
KII10	KII	Ward 7 and 8, Devitar VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 24. 2017	Ward citizen forum coordinator, Ward 7 (M, Tamang), Ward citizen forum Member, Ward 8 (F, Tamang)
FGD2	FGD	Devitar VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 24. 2017	5 female beneficiaries of the single woman/widow's allowance (Chhetri, Tamang, Dalit)
KII11	KII	Devitar VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 24. 2017	Political party leader (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (M, Brahmin)
IIDI1	IIDI	Ward 9, Devitar VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 24. 2017	Disabled woman (F, Tamang)
IIDI2	IIDI	Devitar VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 24. 2017	Member of single women's group (F, Tamang)
FGD3	FGD	Ward 9, Deupur VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 25. 2017	Beneficiaries of the single woman/widow's allowance
KII12	KII	Ward 8, Deupur VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 25. 2017	Ward citizen forum coordinator (M, Brahmin)
FGD4	FGD	Ward 8, Deupur VDC, Kavrepalachok	February 25. 2017	Male beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries
KII13	KII	Deupur VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 25. 2017	Former CSSP social mobiliser (F, Brahmin)
KII14	KII	Deupur VDC, Kavrepalanchok	Feburary 26. 2017	VDC Secretary (M, Brahmin)
FGD5	FGD	Ward 3, Deupur VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 26. 2017	Dalit beneficiaries (F:9, M:1)
KII15	KII	Deupur VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 27. 2017	VDC Assistant (F, Brahmin)
FGD6	FGD	Ward 3, Deupur VDC,	February	Rai female beneficiaries

		Kavrepalanchok	27. 2017	
FGD7	FGD	Ward 3, Deupur VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 27. 2017	Rai male beneficiaries/non-beneficiaries
KII16	KII	Deupur VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 27. 2017	Local political leader (UML) (M, Brahmin)
KII17	KII	Deupur VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 28. 2017	LGCDP social mobiliser (F, Newar)
FGD8	FGD	Deupur VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 28. 2017	Brahmin Male Non-beneficiaries
KII18	KII	Deupur VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 28. 2017	Dalit Activist (M, Dalit)
KII19	KII	Deupur VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 28. 2017	Ward citizen forum coordinator, Ward 3 (F, Brahmin)
KII20	KII	Deupur VDC, Kavrepalanchok	February 28. 2017	Local Social Protection Coordination Committee member (M, Brahmin)
KII21	KII	Dhulikhel, Kavrepalanchok	February 28. 2017	Nangshal Programme Officer (F, Brahmin)

Sindhupalchok

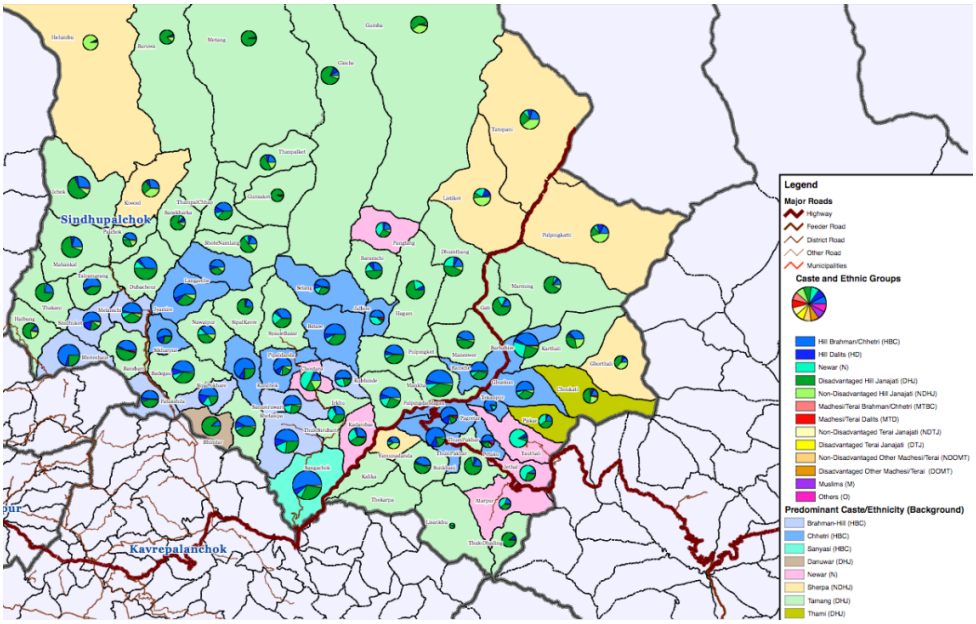
Reference	Location (Ward, VDC, District)	Date	Participants (M-Male, F-Female)
KII26	Chautara, Sindhupalchok	March 2.	Raju Shrestha, Senior Programme Officer, DDC Sindhupalchok (Male, Newar)
KII27	Kadambas VDC, Sindhupalchok	March 3.	Two local political party leaders (Male, Bahun)
KII28	Kadambas VDC, Sindhupalchok	March 3.	Ward citizen forum coordinator for Ward 2 (Male, Tamang)
FGD9	Kadambas VDC, Sindhupalchok	March 3.	Male beneficiaries, Old Age Allowance and Disability Allowance (M:6, 4 Tamang, 2 Dalit)
FGD10	Kadambas VDC, Sindhupalchok	March 3.	Female beneficiaries, Old Age Allowance and Single Woman/Widow Allowance (F:6, 1 Sanyasi, 3 Dalit, 2 Tamang)
KII29	Chautara, Sindhupalchok	March 30.	Gyanendra Poudel (Male, Brahmin), Director of Tuki Association
KII30	Chautara, Sindhupalchok	March 30.	Bishnu Nepal (Female, Brahmin), social mobiliser, Tuki Association
KII31	Kadambas VDC, Sindhupalchok	March 31.	VDC Assistant (Brahmin)
FGD11	Kadambas VDC, Sindhupalchok	March 31.	Female Beneficiaries (Single Women), F:5 (Chettri)
FGD12	Kadambas VDC, Sindhupalchok	March 31.	Female Beneficiaries (Old Age Allowance), F:4 (Dalit)
FGD13	Kadambas VDC, Sindhupalchok	March 31.	Male Beneficiaries (Old Age and Disability), M:5 (Chettri, Dalit, Newar)
KII32	Kadambas VDC, Sindhupalchok	March 31.	Ward Citizen Forum Coordinator (Brahmin)
KII33	Kadambas VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 1	Former CSSP social mobiliser (Female,

			Brahmin)
FGD14	Kadambas VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 1	Beneficiaries (Disability Allowance), M:3, F:3, Newar and Dalit.
FGD15	Kadambas VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 1	Female Beneficiaries (Child Grant), F:4, Dalit
FGD16	Kadambas VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 1	Female non-beneficiaries (single women), F:4, Tamang/Dalit.
FGD17	Kadambas VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 1	Male non-beneficiaries, M:7, Dalit/Lama
KII34	Kadambas VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 1	Ward citizen forum coordinator (Chhetri)
KII35	Petku VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 2	LGCDP social mobiliser (Chhetri)
KII36	Petku VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 2	Dalit Leader (Dalit)
FGD18	Petku VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 2	Female Beneficiaries (Single Women), F:5 (Chhetri/Gurung)
IIDI3	Petku VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 2	Person with a disability (F, Chhetri)
KII37	Petku VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 2	CSSP Programme Coordinator (Chhetri)
FGD19	Petku VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 3	Female beneficiaries (Old Age Allowance), F:7, Dalit/Gurung
FGD20	Petku VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 3	Male beneficiaries (Old age allowance), M:7, Dalit/Janajati
FGD21	Petku VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 3	Female Beneficiaries (Child Grant) F:6, Dalit
FGD22	Petku VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 3	Non-beneficiaries (People with disabilities), F:2, M:3, Tamang/Gurung
KII38	Petku VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 3	Member of Local Social Protection Coordination Committee (Chhetri)
IIDI4	Petku VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 3	Female non-beneficiary (single woman), Chhetri
FGD23	Petku VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 4	Female non-beneficiaries, F:6, Brahmin/Chhetri
KII39	Petku VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 4	VDC Assistant (Chhetri)
IIDI5	Petku VDC, Sindhupalchok	April 3	Male non-beneficiary

Annex 2: Maps of Kavrepalanchok and Sindhupalchok

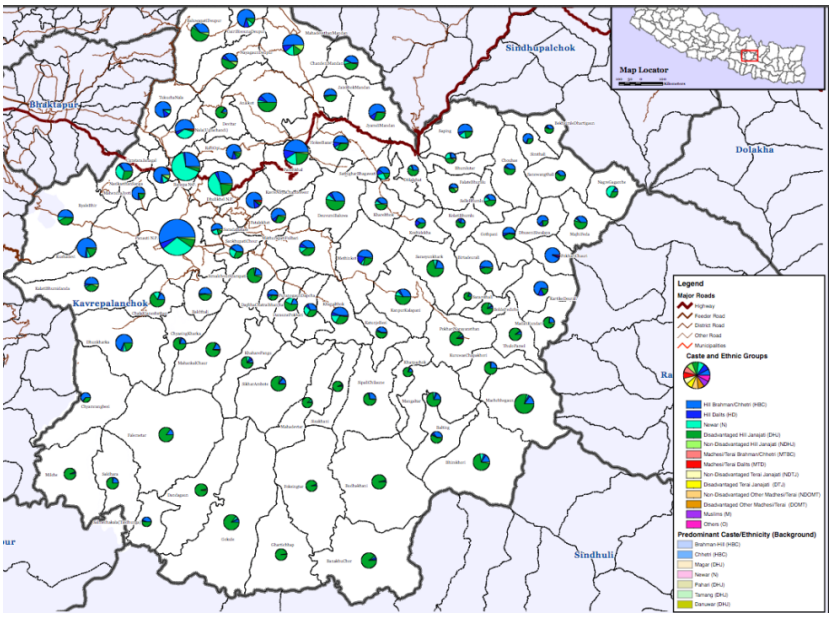
The map in Figure 12 shows the ethnic composition of each VDC in Sindhupalchok Districts. Most VDCs contain a mix of indigenous groups and high-caste Hindus, with a smaller group of Dalits. The green areas show VDCs where the largest group is the Tamang; yellow areas show VDCs where Sherpas are the largest group; and blue areas show VDCs dominated by high-caste Hindus and the pink areas are where the majority of people are Newar. Figure 13 shows a similar map for Kavrepalanchok, which is also dominated by Tamang, but with most VDCs having a mix of different indigenous groups and high-caste Hindus with smaller groups of Dalits.

Figure 4: Map of ethnic and caste composition of VDCs in Sindhupalchok District



Source: UN, http://un.org.np/sites/default/files/Sindhupalchok_Caste_Ethnicity_A3.pdf

Figure 5: Map of ethnic and caste composition of VDCs in Kavrepalanchok District



Source: UN, http://un.org.np/sites/default/files/Kavre_Caste_Ethnicity_A3.pdf

Annex 3: Operational set-up of Nepal's social protection programmes

Institutional arrangements and human resources

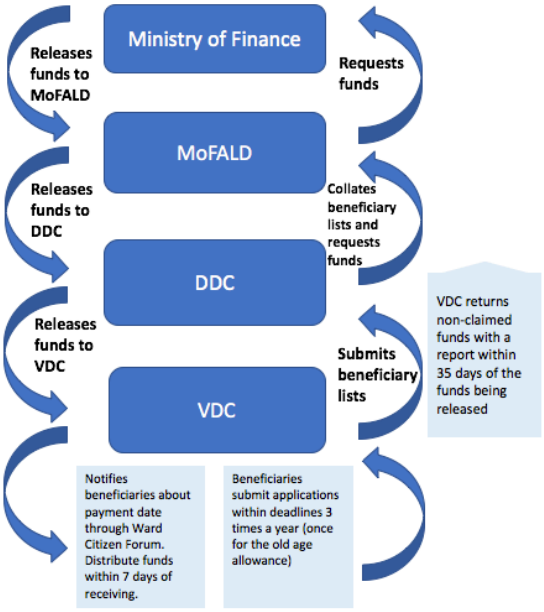
The tax-financed cash transfer programmes are all administered by MoFALD and delivered through the DDCs, Municipalities and VDCs. Figure 7 depicts the process of submitting beneficiary lists upwards in the system and funds downwards (for some Municipalities the link is directly with MoFALD). Besides these key institutions, the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, through the District Women and Children Office and the Ministry of Health, through the District Health Office are important in relation to the disability benefit, as they provide the disability assessment and the disability cards. Similarly, the Ministry of Home Affairs, through the District Administration Office, is important as the issuer of citizenship certificates.

Within MoFALD, the cash transfer programmes are administered by the Department of Civil Registration (DoCR). The DoCR was recently promoted from a Section to a Department with the aim of strengthening the administration of the cash transfer programmes. Because Nepal's social protection system is built around universal life cycle programmes, their administration is closely related to the registration of vital events, also managed by the DoCR. The Department is headed by a Director-General with the rank of Joint Secretary. It has a degree of autonomy, although it is still subject to oversight by MoFALD (Palacios 2016).

Enrolment is the responsibility of the VDC Secretaries. The VDCs forward the beneficiary roster to the District Development Committee (DDC), which collates the VDC rosters under its purview into a document that indicates the number of beneficiaries for each programme and sends it to DoCR (Palacios 2016). Funds are then transferred from DoCR to the DDCs and on to the VDCs. Payments are done manually in cash by the VDC secretaries three times a year.

It is a common issue for cash transfer programmes to be given to existing staff to run without the necessary resources to deliver programmes effectively (Barrett and Kidd 2015). In Nepal, VDCs have the main responsibility for all tasks related to the delivery of the social protection programmes and there are clear signs of overloading of VDCs, especially as the volume of transfers has increased significantly since the system was established (Adhikari et al. 2014; Drucza 2016; KII3). According to Drucza (2016) administration of the social protection programmes take up as much as 10-50 per cent of the VDC Secretary's time, depending on geography and population size of the VDC. And as described above they have many other responsibilities. One DDC may have 40–50 programs that they manage and implement with separate budget line items for administration, monitoring and evaluation. Another common issue is that VDC Secretaries are often not at their posts. This is partly because many of their administrative duties involve meetings at the DDC and they do not have the means of transportation to travel daily between the district headquarters and the VDC Office (Adhikari et al. 2014).

Figure 6: Operational set-up of Nepal's cash transfer programmes



Source: Adapted by the author from Drucza 2016

The cash transfers are the only programme without additional funds allocated for communication and administration (Drucza 2016). An additional issue in terms of human resources and capacity development is the frequent rotation of the centrally appointed staff at the DDC and the VDC Secretaries, and even staff in the central ministries. This means that government officials will often not be very aware of the rules and regulations governing the programmes, and that it is challenging for NGOs and Development Partners to implement effective capacity development programmes for government officials.

Registration and Enrolment

Registration entails the collection of personal data from applicants, verifying its accuracy and deciding whether the applicant complies with the eligibility criteria. Subsequently, the beneficiary is enrolled in the programme and is issued a means of identifying him/herself to receive payments (Barrett and Kidd 2015). Registration is the responsibility of the VDC Secretary, who collects and verifies the applicants' personal information at the VDC Office and accept application forms. The information required depends on the programme:

- The Child Grant: a birth certificate is required to apply for the programme. Birth certificates display the following information: the child's name; the parents' and grandparents' names; the place of birth, including village development committee and ward number; the date of birth; mother's and father's citizenship certificate numbers, date issued, and issuing district; name and signature of the local registrar; and date issued. The Dalit identity is passed on from the father, according to an official list of Dalit castes, and is registered in the citizenship ID (and is usually apparent from a person's family name). Birth certificates are issued by the VDC Secretary or by the ward office of a municipality, and can also be issued by the Registrar's Office of each district. Birth registration is free within 35 days of

the birth, but costs NPR 8 after 35 days, increasing to NPR 50 after 70 days. Research has shown considerable confusion among applicants about the registration process, with a common belief that registering a birth is sufficient to begin receiving the Child Grant. In reality, a separate application form has to be filled out in order to apply. The Child Grant is formally supposed to be targeted to poor Dalit families, but the poverty targeting is not implemented in practice (Drucza 2016).

- The Single Woman/Widow Allowance: for widows, a death certificate of the husband as well as Citizenship ID is required. Single women above 60 need a recommendation from the VDC Secretary to attest her status as unmarried (KII3).

- The Old Age Allowance requires a Citizenship ID. The ID will state the person's age, which is used to verify eligibility, but a common complaint is that the age is not correct. However, it is very difficult to change the age on a Citizenship ID. In addition, there can be difficulties obtaining the ID from the District Administration Office, especially for people who do not own land and have difficulties producing proof of residence. People without proof of residence need a recommendation from the VDC Secretary and witnesses stating their residency in the VDC. Older people can apply for the programme up to one year in advance of reaching the age of eligibility, and they will then start receiving the money on the first trimester payment date after reaching the age of eligibility (KII3).

- The disability allowance is given to people who have been assessed as having a severe disability, with either a red (full disability) or blue (partial disability) card. For disability benefits, the most important barrier to access is often the disability assessment process, which is described above.

All programmes require a Citizenship Certificate. The citizenship certificate is issued to citizens aged 16 and older; children under 16 can be issued a similar identification document that serves the same purpose. Certificates are issued by the District Administration Office, under the Ministry of Home Affairs. According to the Nepal Citizenship Act 2063 (2006), Nepalese citizenship can be acquired by descent (through the mother or father), by a combination of birth in Nepal and permanent residence, if born before 1990, as well as by naturalization for different reasons, which include marriage in some circumstances. Prior to 2006, Nepalese citizenship could only be transmitted through the father.

Some ethnicities face problems in obtaining citizenship certificates. In addition, as a result of a cultural-linguistic criterion for citizenship, namely, the need to speak Nepali, many Madhesi (those speaking Awadhi, Bhojpuri and Maithili dialects) face obstacles in obtaining citizenship (UNDP, 2009 in Adhikari et al. 2014). In addition, people who do not own land and may not have resided in an area for long, may find it difficult to obtain a citizenship certificate. In addition, Nepali women can find it difficult to secure legal proof of citizenship, especially when a male family member refuses to assist them (for example, if

he does not accept that the child is his) or is unavailable to do so because he is working abroad.[14] According to Article 11.3 of the 2015 Constitution, in order to obtain citizenship for their children, Nepali women should both establish evidence of the citizenship of the child's father and that the offspring was born in Nepal (Nowack 2015). Some research has estimated as many as 4.7 million people may lack citizenship in Nepal.[15]

Previously local political party leaders were required to review beneficiary lists through the all-party mechanism established in lieu of local elections. This mechanism was formally dissolved in 2012, but in practice local political party leaders are still involved in most local decisions.

Since the programme is universal and the target group is well defined, identification is not difficult when the system is implemented well (Adhikari 2014). This is the case for the Old Age Allowance, the Child Grant and the widows/single women allowance, but less so for the disability benefit. Once eligibility has been verified, the applicant is enrolled and a Social Security Program Identity Card with the beneficiary's name and photo is supplied. This is then matched with a ledger kept at the VDC Office, which has the beneficiary lists with photos of beneficiaries. Registration with biometric identification has been piloted in Nepal as part of projects funded by the World Bank and UNCDF. The government is committed to rolling out this system to the entire country in the coming years with funding from the World Bank.

Payment delivery

Nepal's social protection programmes still use a simple manual payment system. The VDC Secretary and Assistant will facilitate payment in cash, either at the VDC office or in other locations closer to beneficiaries, three times a year. The Social Security Operational Procedures (SSOP) specifies dates of disbursement around national holidays (the week of Martyr's Day, Democracy Day and before the Hindu festival of Dashain). The central payment means that people sometimes have to wait for most of a day to be paid, depending on the number of beneficiaries in the VDC (Drucza 2016). However, in our field research we found various flexible payment arrangements that made the payments more convenient for beneficiaries. For example in Sindhupalchok a VDC Secretary would call people from 1-2 wards at a time. In addition, people who miss the payment day can collect the money within 35 days at the VDC Office. The VDC Secretary or his Assistant will also carry out payments directly to households in case of people who cannot move to the payment location. Alternatively, these people can also nominate a proxy who can collect the payment on their behalf. For the Child Grant, the payment is done to the mother of the eligible child.

The World Bank is piloting the use of branchless banking and the government is committed to transitioning entirely to this payment mechanism in the future. Already about 300 VDCs

[14] http://asiafoundation.org/2012/05/23/stateless-in-new-nepal-inclusion-without-citizenship-is-impossible/

[15] http://fwld.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Acquisition-of-Citizenship-Certificate-in-Nepal-Estimation-and-Projection.pdf

and 130 Municipalities are providing payments through banks (KII3). In terms of accountability, the crucial advantage of outsourcing the payment mechanism is that it separates the function of registration and enrolment from the payment function, significantly reducing the risk of fraud by local government officials. Outsourcing of payments also frees up time for programme staff to focus on other critical programme processes, including monitoring and grievance management (Barrett and Kidd 2015). A large randomised controlled trial from the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh showed significant reduction in leakage as a result of the introduction of biometric identification and outsourcing of payment to banks (Muralidharan et al. 2016). While there will, at least in theory, be many advantages of the transition to bank payments, it is important to ensure that banks are accessible, especially for older people and people with disabilities. For example, recent newspaper reports cited issues for people with visual impairments in opening bank accounts.[16] In addition, bank payments mean that payments will no longer offer citizens an opportunity to meet local officials and it will be less visible to citizens that the money comes from the government.

Grievance and redress mechanism

There is no functioning independent grievance redress mechanism in Nepal's social protection programmes. According to the Social Security Operational Procedures, the VDC/Municipality shall make the beneficiary lists public and any complaints can be filed with the VDC/Municipality, or, in the case of the disability benefit, with the Local Social Protection Coordination Committee or the District Social Protection Coordination Committee.

The VDC Secretary is the first point of contact for anybody who wish to raise a grievance, with the DDC acting as the grievance mechanism for complaints about the VDC Office and any issue that is not within the mandate of the VDC Secretary. There are also anti-corruption outreach offices under the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), but as there are only ten of these in the entire country, they are unlikely to be accessible for most people (KII3).[17] In addition, people can, at least theoretically, contact MoFALD directly or utilise the government's general complaints mechanism 'Hello Sarkar' ('Hello Government'), which provides a hotline number (KII3). According to the DoCR, there are no resources allocated to complaints handling by the local bodies, and in practice people are more likely to complain to local political leaders (KII3). Recent research has found that only 14.1 per cent of 4,950 beneficiaries in a sample knew where to go in case of complaints about the social protection benefits. Most of those who said they were aware indicated the VDC Office and the VDC Secretary. About 66 per cent of the 699 beneficiaries who knew where to go to complain said that their complaint had been resolved (New Era 2016).

[16] http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2017-02-19/visually-impaired-struggle-to-open-bank-account.html

[17] See also http://ciaa.gov.np/en/about/regional-office.html

Management Information Systems and Document Management Systems

Until recently, beneficiaries have been registered manually in a paper-based information management system. The DoCR has recently introduced an online civil registration and social protection MIS, the '*Vital Event Registration and Social Protection Management Information System'* (VERSP-MIS), which will be further strengthened in the coming years with support from the World Bank.[18] The DoCR has so far registered about 1.3 million beneficiaries in the database, but it will need to be further developed in the coming years to handle new requirements and improve its user interface (KII3).[19]

Public Communications

In general, VDC Secretaries do not have incentives or capacity to do outreach or communications activities, and instead simply register the people who come forward. Some VDCs publish beneficiary lists, but many do not and there is not strong monitoring of the VDCs by the DDCs (KII1). Since the VDCs have not been allocated any budget for communications, communications and awareness raising have been largely left to NGOs. For example, in Karnali region UNICEF worked with the Nepali NGO KIRDARC to run a complementary sensitisation campaign to create awareness about the Child Grant, launch a birth registration campaign, provide nutrition-related training and awareness and develop the institutional capacity of local bodies (Adhikari et al 2014). HelpAge International has previously worked with the Nepali NGO NEPAN to create awareness about the Old Age Allowance, and through the CSSP Save the Children and its partners have carried out awareness raising activities for single women's groups and mother's groups through social mobilisers. The LGCDP has hired social mobilisers and established the Ward citizen forums, which play an important role in disseminating information.

Monitoring, performance management and learning

According to the Operational Guidelines, the process of registration and payments are supposed to be monitored by District- and Local social protection coordination committees. However, these are rarely operational, unless programmes like the CSSP have worked to activate them (Adhikari 2014; Drucza 2016). At the VDC level, the Local Social Security Committee is mandated to provide recommendations for issuing new identity cards and for monitoring the disbursement of the social protection programmes. The Chairperson of the committee is the VDC Secretary and the members of the committee should include at least nine representatives appointed by the VDC Secretary among beneficiaries of the social protection programmes, as well as coordinators of Ward citizen forums.

In order to avoid inclusion of ineligible people, the Operational Guidelines specify that if the committee is found to have recommended an ineligible individual, the services to the

[18] For more information about this, see the World Bank project documents: http://projects.worldbank.org/P154548?lang=en

[19] For more information about the current system, see: https://www.slideshare.net/ekendra/management-information-systems-mis-in-nepal-mofald-by-ekendra

person will be stopped and the amount unrightfully received shall be collected from the members of the committee.

At the District level, the Social Security District Coordination Committee should include a long list of various community representatives. The list is very extensive, and it is perhaps not surprising that the committee is not functioning in practice in most places.[20] The Committee is supposed to be responsible for:

- Selecting the banks for the distribution of the social security allowance/stipend/grant;
- carry out regular monitoring in the district;
- take initiative to ensure the transparency of the distribution of social protection programmes;
- to enhance public awareness of the social protection programmes;
- to support and coordinate with the DDC, municipality and DDC to ensure record management;
- to regularly monitor whether the distribution of payments made through the appointed banks has been conducted smoothly or not.

But again, no resources have been allocated for these activities. According to the Operational Procedures, it is the responsibility of the DDC to monitor the distribution process in coordination with the Social Security District Coordination Committee. In addition, a specific sub-committee is supposed to be established for inspection and monitoring of the social protection programmes. The members of this sub-committee should include the relevant district level officials as well as a representative from the district chapter of the Federation of Nepali Journalists and a representative from civil society. The Operational Guidelines specify a wide range of responsibilities of the sub-committee for managing and monitoring the implementation of the social protection programmes, including acting as a grievance mechanism. In practice, the lack of resources allocated to the purpose means that monitoring is sporadic. The Office of the Auditor General checks the financial trail down to the DDC level, but they are not able to check whether recipients actually receive the right amount at the right time (Drucza 2016). The DoCR carry out spot checks when they visit Districts, but they do not have resources for systematic or comprehensive monitoring and only have resources to visit a small proportion of the VDCs in the country (KII3).

[20] The Operational Guidelines specifies the following members: The LDO and CDO, the Head of the Women and Children Office, a representative from the District Senior Citizen Welfare Committee, the Deputy Chair of the District Coordination Committee for the Discriminated, Oppressed and Dalit Community's Upliftment and Development, the Deputy Chair of the Women District Coordination Committee, the Chairperson of the District Committee of the NGO Federation or representative appointed by him/her, a representative from the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry at the local level, the Deputy Chair of the Disabled District Coordination Committee, the Representative of District Federation of Nepali Journalist, a representative of Child Network, a representative from the organizations working on social mobilization who is appointed by the DDC, a Plan Monitoring and Administrative Officer or in his/her absence DDC officer appointed by the LDO.

Annex 4: Data on Nepal's social protection programmes

Both expenditure and the number of beneficiaries of Nepal's social protection programmes has increased significantly since the first programme was introduced in the mid-1990's. Table 4 shows beneficiary numbers and expenditure between 1995/1996 and 2015/16.

Table 4: Development in expenditure and number of beneficiaries of Nepal's social protection programmes over time

Fiscal year	Total government expenditure (NPR, million)	Social protection expenditure (NPR, million)		Social protection expenditure as % of total government expenditure	No. of beneficiaries	Average annual per capita benefit (NPR)
		Budgeted	**Actual**			
1995/96	46,542	260	244	0.5	203,095	1,200
1996/97	51,168	280	277	0.5	344,348	804
1997/98	57,118	350	320	0.6	340,299	940
1998/99	59,579	400	396	0.7	371,854	1,066
1999/2000	66,272	530	523	0.8	375,027	1,395
2000/01	79,835	530	525	0.7	385,602	1,362
2001/02	80,072	580	542	0.7	424,841	1,276
2002/03	84,006	580	571	0.7	460,329	1,241
2003/04	89,443	600	583	0.7	455,063	1,282
2004/05	102,560	755	734	0.7	460,329	1,595
2005/06	110,889	800	822	0.7	483,507	1,700
2006/07	133,605	910	1,038	0.8	510,286	2,035
2007/08	161,350	952	941	0.6	572,342	1,644
2008/09	219,662	4,408	4,265	1.9	944,410	4,516
2009/10	259,689	8,500	7,252	2.8	1,425,382	5,088
2010/11	295,361	8,948	7,823	3.0	1,564,134	5,002
2011/12	339,168	8,560	8,296	2.8	2,046,980	4,053
2012/13	358,638	9,350	10,206	3.0	2,045,080	4,991
2013/14	435,055	11,004	10,373	2.4	2,172,595	4,774
2014/15	531,340	12,596	12,263	2.3	2,160,576	5,676
2015/16	701,172	16,450	15,006	2.1	2,265,535	6,624

Source: New Era (2016)

Coverage

Table 5 shows number of beneficiaries and coverage rates of each of the main programmes. The coverage rates presented in the table are based on estimates of population groups provided by the World Bank (2014) based on the NLSS, combined with population projections from UNDESA. They should therefore be seen as rough estimates, not precise coverage rates. We also do not know the number of duplicates or 'ghost beneficiaries' counted as part of the beneficiaries. Results from the CSSP and the World Bank SSNP project shows about 10-15 per cent of beneficiaries may in fact not belong to the target group. There may also be a number of people registered in several different

locations (KII4). Nevertheless, the estimates do provide an impression of whether most eligible people are in fact receiving the benefits.

Table 5: Coverage rates of Nepal's tax-financed programmes

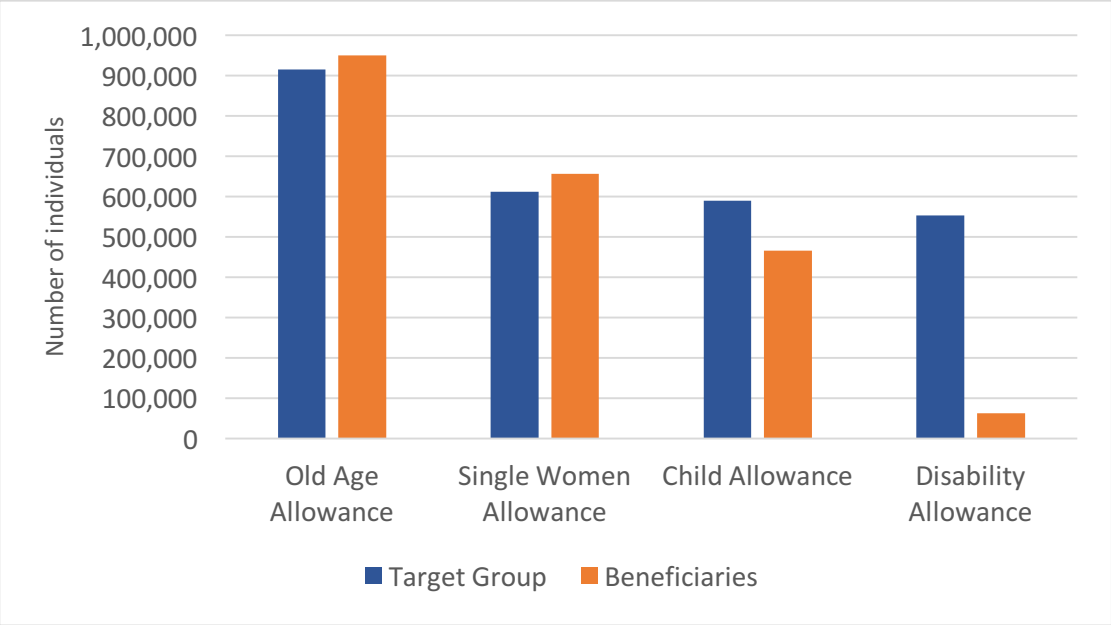
	Number of beneficiaries (2015/16)	Estimated target group	Coverage (%)
Old Age Allowance	951,000	1,128,044 people, including 820,679 individuals over 70 (not Dalit or from Karnali);[21] 282,816 Dalit individuals over 60;[22] and, 24,550 Individuals over 60 from Karnali.[23] When subtracting the 212,007 who are receiving the civil servant's pension and are therefore not eligible for the Old Age Allowance, the target group is reduced to 916,037.	103.82%
Single Women's Allowance	657,414	612,268, including 215,911 single women aged 60-70[24] and 396,357 widows above 15.[25]	107.37%
Child Grant	466,074	589,470 children, including 28,070 children under 5 in Karnali Region and 561,400 Dalit children under 5.[26]	79.07%
Disability Benefit	62,184 (According to ILO: Partial: 31,324 Full: 30,860)	553,113 people with severe disabilities.[27]	11.24%

Source: Author's calculations based on World Bank (2014) and UNDESA

[21] The World Bank (2014) estimates that 88.34 per cent of the population over 70 are in this group, based on the NLSS household survey. The number of people have been calculated based on a projected 929,000 people aged 70 and above in 2015 (UNDESA).
[22] The World Bank (2014) estimates that 11.52 per cent of the total population over 60 are Dalits, based on the NLSS.
[23] The World Bank (2014) estimates that 1 per cent of the total population over 60 are in Karnali Region, based on NLSS
[24] The World Bank (2014) estimates 26.59 per cent women over 60 to be single, based on average proportions in administrative data. UNDESA projects the number of women aged 60-70 in 2015 as 812,000.
[25] The World Bank (2014) estimates 3.9 per cent of the total female population over 15 to be widows, based on average proportions in administrative data. UNDESA projects the total female population above 15 in 2015 to be 10,163,000.
[26] World Bank (2014) estimates that the number of children under 5 in Karnali Region is about 1 per cent of the total number of under 5 children. Estimates of the number of Dalits in Nepal vary greatly. According to the official 2011 census, they constitute 13.6 per cent of the total population but researchers and Dalit organisations assess that this number could be above 20 per cent. The number stated here assumes 20 per cent of children under 5 are Dalit and calculated the total number of Dalit children under five based on UNDESA population projections of the total number of children under the age of 5 at 2,807,000 in 2015.
[27] There are wide disparities between estimates of disability prevalence in Nepal. The World Health Survey found a prevalence rate of 31.9 per cent, while the 2011 census reported a very low figure of 1.94 per cent, relying on self-reported disability with a list of eight types of impairments, a methodology that is known to lead to significant underreporting. The figure used here uses the 2011 census number as an estimate of prevalence of severe disability and should be seen as on the low side of the most probable actual prevalence rate, based on international estimates.

As Figure 7 shows, in the 2015/16 financial year it is estimated that coverage rates of both the Old Age Allowance and the Single Women's Allowance could be close to 100 per cent. It must be noted that it is not possible to provide an accurate calculation of coverage rates, since we do not have accurate data on the target groups of each of the programmes. However, it is possible to provide an estimate, and it is apparent that the Old Age Allowance, the Single Women's Allowance and the Child Grant all have high coverage rates. On the contrary, the disability benefit only reaches a little more than 10 per cent of the potentially eligible beneficiaries.

Figure 7: Number of beneficiaries and target groups of social protection programmes



Source: Author's calculations based on World Bank (2014) and UNDESA

Table 6 shows the rates of exclusion for the various benefits and the reasons for exclusion, as found by New Era (2016), based on a limited sample of about 5,000 beneficiaries (as is clear from the table, this sample is not sufficient to provide reliable data on small sub-groups such as single women or people with disabilities).

Table 6: Eligible persons not receiving the social protection benefits

Social Protection Programme	Total number of people in the sample	Eligible, but not receiving		Major reason for not receiving (% of those not receiving)
		No.	%	
Senior Citizen	403	95	23.6	1) Application being processed (49.5%) 2) Wrong birth date in citizenship ID (20%) 3) Have not applied (18.9%)
Single women	5	0	0.0	-
Widows	190	21	11.0	1) Application being processed (52.4%) 2) Have not applied (19%) 3) Receiving pension (9.5%)
People with Disabilities	34	15	44.1	1) Applied, but did not receive disability ID card (53.3%) 2) Application being processed (13.3%) 3) No citizenship paper (13.3%
Dalit children	229	93	40.6	1) No birth registration (35.5%) 2) Application being processed (29.0%) 3) Benefit withheld because no toilet (6.5%)[28] 4) Have not applied (5.4%) 5) Have just registered the birth (5.4%) 6) Did not know about the benefit (4.3%)
Total	**861**	**224**	**26.0**	1) Application being processed (42.4%) 2) No birth registration (14.7%) 3) Have not applied (12.1%) 4) Wrong birth date in citizenship (8.5%) 5) No toilet (4.5%) 6) Could not receive disability ID card (3.6%) 7) No citizenship ID (3.6%)

Source: New Era (2016)

Inclusion errors and leakage

The World Bank (2014) found that according to administrative data, significantly more beneficiaries of the Old Age Allowance and the single woman/widow allowance were registered than those who report receiving the benefits in the Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) 2010/11. In 2010/11, 792,500 beneficiaries were registered to receive the Old Age Allowance, but only an estimated 717,400 received the benefit according to the NLSS, potentially indicating a leakage rate of 9.5 per cent. However, a large portion of these could be people who are registered but waiting for the first payment, since registration happens only once a year. New Era (2016) found that fully 12 per cent of

[28] As a part of the National Open Defecation Free campaign, several districts or VDCs have passed a resolution to stop payments to beneficiaries from households not having toilets, even though this is illegal (New Era 2016).

eligible beneficiaries of the Old Age Allowance (50 per cent of those eligible who are not benefitting) were waiting for their application to be processed. For the Single Women's Allowance, the World Bank (2014) found that 319,800 were registered, but only 207,700 were estimated to receive the benefit in the NLSS, with a leakage rate of 35.1 per cent (although since these are estimates based on the sample in the NLSS there is a margin of error to the numbers). It should be noted that beneficiary numbers of both schemes have increased significantly since the NLSS was carried out in 2010/11. The analysis showed quite low levels of inclusion errors, with two per cent of households receiving the Old Age Allowance being ineligible and 3.2 per cent of the widow pension (World Bank 2014). Overall, the survey data imply that households received NPR 5.8 billion from the four programmes, whereas the official budget allocation was NPR 6.8 billion, a potential leakage rate of 16 per cent (World Bank 2014). A household census conducted in Dadeldhura and Kanchanpur districts in Western Nepal in 2012 showed the leakage to 'ghost' beneficiaries in the Old Age Allowance and Single Woman Allowance to be much higher, at 37 per cent. As this was based on a survey of all households in the two districts, the result is reliable, but may not be representative of Nepal as a whole (Drucza 2016).

In Kavre, the total number of beneficiaries were reduced from 29,000 to 26,000 (about 10 per cent) because of the CSSP's work to help the DDC digitise beneficiary lists (KII6). Similarly, in Sindhupalchok, the programme resulted in 865 names being removed from the beneficiary lists (3.76 per cent of beneficiaries). Another survey on social security benefits found a 13–20 per cent leakage rate due to multiple listings and ghost, dead or migrated recipients (Drucza 2016). A recent Public Expenditure Tracking and Service Delivery (PETS) survey of the social protection programmes found no leakage between the Ministry of Finance, the DoCR and the DDCs, with accurate record keeping of the fund transfers. However, there was some leakage between DDCs and VDCs: In the financial year 2014/15, the sample VDCs reported receiving 3.1 per cent less funds than what was released to them by the DDC; in 2015/16, it was 12.5 per cent. Some of this is likely to be because of poor financial record keeping by the VDCs. For example, the sample VDCs also reported returning a larger amount of funds to the DDC than what was supposed to have been left over according to their records. And the survey found poor financial record keeping in the VDCs in general, with about 40 per cent unable to provide financial records of earlier years than the immediate past year. In the distribution process, the survey found that 4.8 per cent of the beneficiaries who were paid were non-existing persons, or 'ghost beneficiaries'. Most of these were people who had died but were still on the beneficiary lists (New Era 2016). Overall, based on the above evidence, it therefore seems unlikely that the leakage rates are as high as 37 per cent across the country, with a figure of 10-15 per cent more likely.[29]

[29] While there are no international standards to determine what an acceptable level of leakage is in social protection programmes, it is recognised that a certain amount of fraud and error is inevitable. For example, income support programmes in the UK had an estimated fraud and error rate of 5.3 per cent in 2004-05. Low-income countries with much lower administrative capacity should be expected to have significantly higher rates. In India, a Government audit in 2003 found that 31.6 per cent of IAY (housing programmes) and 53.5 per cent of SGSY (a credit program) funds did not reach the intended beneficiaries. In the case of the SGRY, a rural employment programme, administrative

Issues related to payments

The World Bank (2014) analysis of the NLSS showed that the average annual benefit, at NPR 5,669 and NPR 5,796 respectively, were on average slightly below the official entitlement at the time of NPR 6,000.[30] Several other studies have found issues of delays in payments and beneficiaries receiving less than they are entitled to. A public expenditure tracking survey of cash transfers found that between NPR 63 (for the single women allowance, corresponding to 12.6% of the benefit at the time)) to NPR 134 (for the full disability allowance, corresponding to 13.4% of the benefit at the time) were reported to have been deducted from monthly entitlement amounts (New Era 2013 in Drucza 2016). Assessments of the Child Grant by UNICEF (2014) and Adhikari et al. (2014) found significant issues related to missing payments. However, these surveys were done within a few years of the Child Grant being introduced, and given the lengthy administrative registration procedures at the time, with a period of 6-18 months from registration to first payment, this is likely to have had an impact on the findings. The most recent expenditure tracking and service delivery survey indicates that issues of missing or reduced payments have been much improved: only seven per cent of beneficiaries in the sample were being paid less than they were entitled to, and the difference was very small: the average benefit they received was on average only 3.6 per cent less than what they should have received (New Era 2016).

A 2012 survey of 5,179 beneficiaries from a representative sample of districts across the country found that 87 per cent of people reported receiving the payments every four months, as specified in the Operational Guidelines, and that 75 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with the payment mechanism (only 10 per cent reported that they were not satisfied) (Ligal and Shrestha 2012). More recently, the survey carried out by New Era (2016) similarly found that 86.3 per cent of beneficiaries were satisfied with the current payment system. Even though beneficiaries express satisfaction with the payment mechanism, and payments happen broadly every four months, there are still significant payment delays. This is caused mainly by delays in the release of funds from DoCR to the districts and from districts to the VDCs (New Era, 2013; 2016).

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data showed 31.3 million man-days of work generated in 2001, while survey data for 2002-03 estimated this number at less than 3 million, only about 10 per cent of the official figure (van Stolk and Tesliuc 2010).

[30] The sample was too small to enable analysis of the other programmes.