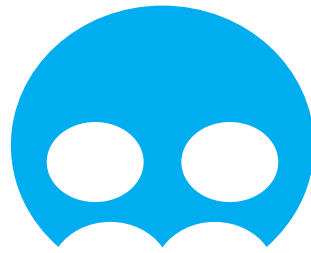


Aasaman Nepal



✓ Education

✗ Child Labor

Strategic Plan

2023-2027

Strategic Plan

2023-2027

Aasaman-Nepal

Jakankurdham, Dhanusha, Nepal

Foreword

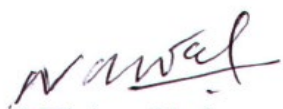
It is our pleasure to present Aasaman Nepal's 2023–2027 Strategic Plan.

This plan sets out the direction of the organisation for the next five years. Beginning with our 23-year-long journey on the path of serving children and people on the ground, we once again have collectively set strategic objectives that the organisation will strive to achieve in the next five years.

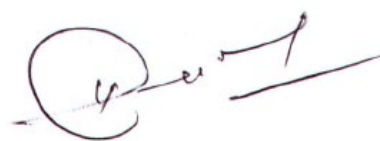
The plan has been developed with the involvement of our staff and stakeholders through an extensive consultation programme that has also engaged external partners and influencers. We are confident that the extensive internal and external consultation process undertaken in the development of this plan, will secure the support and advocacy of our staff, stakeholders, and development partners in the years to come.

The organisation has exciting aspirations as it moves into a new era of development (considering the resource crisis in the post-COVID-19 pandemic). This plan, will guide Aasaman Nepal's work over the next few years. It captures five strategic objectives (along with their indicators and actions). The strategic plan outlines how the organisation will facilitate youth-led, evidence-based advocacy to address pertinent local development issues across sectors. It also aims to institutionalise knowledge management and use Information Communication and Technology (ICT). This plan also recognises that there will be strategic media engagement to influence the decision-making agencies and enhance accountability for and action on respect for people's constitutional rights and entitlements. The plan will further help facilitate linkages, coordination, and collaboration among government and development actors. Most importantly, this plan will help strengthen local capacity in formulating and implementing policies and programmes aligned with national priorities.

We would like to thank everyone involved in the development of this plan, from the executive board to the staff, stakeholders (both government and non-government), and the members of our wider community who have contributed to the various stages of the formulation of this strategic plan. Together, with your support, we look forward to implementing this exciting set of initiatives and to meeting the many challenges and opportunities that help us support the government in accomplishing its development priorities and broader national goals.



Nawal Kishor Yadav
Executive Director



Ram Prawesh Yadav
Chairperson

Abbreviation

ASN	Aasaman Nepal
CCWB	Central Child Welfare Board
CFLG	Child-friendly Local Governance
CFS	Child-friendly School
CO/CBO	Community Organization/Community Based organization
CRPF/CC	Child Right Protection Forum/Child Clubs
DCPC	District Child Protection Committee
DCWB	District Child Welfare Board
DDC	District Development Committee
DEO	District Education Office
ECM	Each Child Monitoring
EFA	Education for All
GO	Government Organization
HDI	Human Development Index
HFMC	Health Facilities Management Committee
HP	Health Post
HSS	Higher Secondary School
IEC	Information, Education, and Communication
IPFC	Integrated Plan Formulation Committee
LSS	Lower Secondary School
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoFALD	Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development
MoWCSW	Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare
NGO	Non-government Organization
NRCS	Nepal Red Cross Society

NTU	Nepal Teacher Union
PAF	Poverty Alleviation Fund
PS	Primary School
PTA	Parents Teachers Association
RP	Resource Person
SC	Save the Children
SCPC	School Child Protection Committee
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SMC	School Management Committee
SS	Secondary School
SSRP	School Sector Reform Plan
STR	Student-Teacher Ratio
C/SZOP	Children/School as Zone of Peace
UNCRC	United National Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Introduction

ASN is a national-level, not-for-profit non-government organization (NGO) established in 1999 AD. It is registered with the District Administrative Office (DAO) [R. No: 693/055/056], affiliated with the Social Welfare Council (SWC) [Affiliation No: 10365], Inland Revenue Office, Kathmandu [PAN No: 301419332]. ASN has strong foundations at the local level with marginalized people and their institutions including the child rights forum. It has proven to have an impact on rights holders and authorities in the areas of women's empowerment, disaster risk reduction (DRR), maternity and child health nutrition, quality education, and assistance for livelihoods. Additionally, the group has been operating following its core values, which are: Trust in people's power and participatory approach; Reflect local culture and community; Say no to all forms of discrimination; and Take a human rights-based approach to development. ASN has been working for the last 22 years to improve the overall well-being of underprivileged children, girls, and youth, including Muslims, Dalits (Mushar), Janajatis, women, and community members.

While taking Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI), Human Rights, & Environmental Conservation as cross-cutting areas, ASN has six thematic working areas that include: Education & Child Protection; Health & Nutrition; DRR, Emergency Response, & Humanitarian Action; Good Governance; Natural Resource Management & Livelihood; and Women Empowerment. Moreover, it has reached out to seven provinces and 25 districts with its program.

ASN not only promotes gender equality and social inclusion across all levels and sectors of its programs but also ensures better GESI status in its governing body and staff portfolio. Of nine ASN executive board members, five of them are women. Similarly, of 337 full-time staff employed in 2022, 55 % are female, 28% Dalits, 13% Janjati, 9% Muslim, and 2% are disabled. Also, 600+ volunteers are mobilized at the field level to conduct community-level campaigns, activities, and awareness-raising sessions focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic.

ASN holds active membership in various networks like NGO federation, National Child Protection Alliance (NCPA), Children as Zone of Peace (CZOP), School as Zone of Peace (SZOP), Girls and Inclusive Education Network (GIEN), National Campaign of Education, Girls Education and Gender Equity Network, District Child Right Protection Forum, District Women Rights Group, District Dalit Right Group, Rashtriya Mushar Utthan Samaj (RMUS), Reproductive Health Coordination Committee, Emergency cluster, Member of Emergency and Humanitarian Setting (MEHS), Child Welfare Committee (CWC), and Start Fund Nepal (SFN).

ASN has also signed the MoU with the Department of Education to strategically support inclusive quality education, education in emergencies, mainstreaming out-of-school children, developing local-level planning regarding education in emergencies, especially in Dhanusha, Mahottari, Rautahat, Saptari, Parsa and Dhading districts. Similarly, it has also made a strategic partnership with Save the Children, especially in Mahottari and Sarlahi districts to support education, health, and protection issues along with education in emergencies.

ASN is a child helpline 1098 service provider in the districts of the Madhesh Province. The helpline provides children a medium to express themselves in times of emergency and helps them reach out to avoid and escape abuse, neglect, exploitation, trafficking, bullying, oppression, coercion, and other forms of ill conduct. Also, ASN holds prior experience in community mobilization; local resource mobilization; public-private partnerships; coordination, collaboration, and networking; strong engagement in the area of vocational and entrepreneurship development skills training.

ASN conducts its field-level interventions in close coordination, consultation, and partnership with the local, provincial, and federal governments along with development partners, community-based organizations (CBOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and like-minded organizations. ASN has contributed to the national priorities and goals including the SDGs 2030 (2,3,4,5,6,8,11) and will continue working as per its organizational goal. The goal is to empower marginalized communities and key stakeholders toward creating inclusive, responsible, and accountable governance mechanisms to ensure the rights of all children as enshrined in the legal policy frameworks are respected, protected, promoted, and fulfilled.

Vision, Mission, Goal, and Objectives of Aasaman Nepal

Vision

Aasaman envisages a society where all children are grown up in an enabling environment enjoying all of their rights so as to achieve their full potential.

Mission

Aasaman facilitates a process of creating an enabling society that respects, protects, promotes, and fulfills the rights of children where all children equally enjoy all of their basic rights.

Goals

Aasaman empowers marginalized communities and key stakeholders towards creating inclusive, responsible, and accountable governance mechanisms to ensure the rights of all children as enshrined in the legal and policy frameworks are respected, protected, promoted, and fulfilled.

Objectives

- Increase access of rights holders, primarily the children and their family members, to government entitlements and service provisions including improving access to and quality of services in education, health, and social sectors
- Increase participation and representation of rights holders as meaningful decision-makers at local institutions and governance mechanisms in education, health, and local development
- Strengthen the capacity of rights holders and their associations/networks in claiming their rights at local to national levels
- Collaborate with and build the capacity of state mechanisms to ensure the delivery of quality services to the duty bearers
- Build CSO capacity to strengthen networking, partnership, and effective mobilizations towards protection, promotion, and fulfillment of human rights
- Ensure better and rightful assistance is extended to the vulnerable, victims and survivors of disasters and other forms of humanitarian crises with protection and support provisions as needed
- Improve documentation and institutionalization of learning and good practices for policy advocacy, replication/scaling up, and public awareness

Principles and Values of Aasaman Nepal

Principles

ASN strongly believes and advocates the following principles to eradicate child labor and ensure universal quality education, which all of the Aasaman Nepal team members are fully committed to adhering to:

- **All children should be enabled in attending formal day schools full-time.** Children attending night schools or non-formal education centers are child laborers.
- **Every out-of-school child is a child laborer.** The definition of child labor, therefore, encompasses every non-school-going child of school age, irrespective of whether the child is engaged in wage or non-wage work, working for the family or others, employed in hazardous occupations, employed on daily wages, or a contract basis as bonded labor.
- **All work/labor that a child is engaged with is hazardous as it harms their overall growth and development.**
- **There must be a total abolition of child labor.** Any legal and policy framework that supports continuing child labor is completely unacceptable.
- **Any justification perpetuating the existence of child labor must be condemned.** Any arguments intending to justify, for whatever reason, the existence and/or continuation of child labor in any form are all anti-children.

Additionally, Aasaman Nepal monitors and ensures that the following conditions are met within the family and society, of its members and staff, and are embedded in each of the projects implemented:

- *All school-age children are in school and all members of the family are literate.*
- *One member of each household is affiliated with or represented at least in one local institution and structure.*
- *Each member of a household has access to government services and entitlements including their identity*
- *No child marriage and polygamy exist.*
- *Every human rights violation event is reported.*

Core values

ASN believes that better-informed, organized, and empowered rights holders make government and local institutions accountable and responsive toward the fulfillment of their development needs and human rights. Unless they make effective and vociferous demands, the status quo proponents would keep dragging their feet. ASN has full faith and belief that all rights-based actions and struggles must be peaceful and non-violent. Every struggle for rights should have a legitimate basis. It will strictly abide by the theoretical and normative framework while pursuing the rights of excluded and marginalized groups. The basis of Aasaman Nepal's rights holders' engagement would be guided by the national and international human rights instrument in which Nepal has been a signatory/state party.

The core values and beliefs of ASN include:

- ***Trust in people's power and participatory approach:*** ASN believes in the capacity of marginalized communities, including the poor and other social categories, to determine their destiny provided that they are given the opportunity, encouragement, and tools.

- ***Respect for local culture and communities:*** ASN believes development efforts should be culturally sensitive and that gaining the respect and trust of local communities is a reciprocal process. Hence, ASN encourages and promotes open and empathetic dialogue between its staff and the communities it aims to serve as a means of gaining local trust and respect, and promoting participation and equity.
- ***No to all forms of discrimination:*** ASN condemns discrimination and makes a conscious effort to eradicate all forms of discrimination based on caste/ethnicity, gender, economic status, and/or political ideology, among others.
- ***Human Rights-based Approach to Development:*** Aasaman Nepal sees the basic needs of people, for which the State has an obligation, as their fundamental rights and makes a conscious effort to mainstream a human rights-based approach to all its program and projects.

Context Informing the Strategic Plan

Development Context in Nepal

- ***Federalism opened the avenue for inclusive governance.***

Promulgation of the 2015 Constitution has led to transformative changes in Nepal's governance structure and system. The constitution has distributed exclusive and concurrent state power to all three tiers of government, plus residual power to the federal government. In their exercise of power, each tier can legislate, develop, and execute policies, make decisions, and deliver services. These changes are likely to impact the roles and partnerships between the government and development partners (DPs), including civil society organizations in terms of how and with whom they interact and coordinate their activities. As the GoN's structural transformation is implemented, DPs will need to be flexible and agile in responding to the changing landscape and more closely coordinate their activities.

Despite the legal provision, and some indications of local governments started addressing local challenges people face, the inclusion, participation, and access of marginalized people to the governance mechanisms and their entitlements is still a challenge. Since full devolution of funds, functions, and functionality is not yet in place, the government machinery is not yet localized. Rather, misinterpretation of the constitution continues to justify the presence of federal government institutions across the levels of governance. Moreover, the notion of non-partisan LG is paralyzed and the political polarization has impacted LGs a lot.

Development partners, including CSOs (international and national), experienced a lack of a clear policy, conflicting messages from the government, power overlaps among the tiers of government, weak inter-governmental coordination, a need for them to deal separately with all tiers individually, and the fiduciary practices of the governments being troublesome. Despite that, a more positive environment and greater opportunities for civil society organizations are believed to exist with provincial and local governments.

Some LGs have owned CSOs. All three tiers of government have considered CSOs as development partners, at least on paper. In the absence of CSO-friendly mindsets among the elected LG representatives, and the absence of a CSO-friendly legal framework, the coordination and cooperation of LGs with CSOs varies according to the relationship and the extent to which CSOs have visible leadership.

While fundamental rights as entitled through the Constitution can be used as a tool by CSOs to engage with the government there is already some level of commitment to hold the local government to account. However, the citizenship problem is not yet fully addressed and a significant number of people are deprived of their entitlements. With the devolved authority and legal mandate for local governments for social inclusion, substantial work can be done to make the development agencies and local government GESI

responsive. As the decision-making on the service delivery is much closer to the people it makes it easier for the local government to be responsive to the need of the people. In doing so there is a chance for the local and provincial governments to re-make the bureaucratic functions at points of service delivery using ICT and other modern communication tools.

- ***Government Development priorities and challenges***

The 15th Plan (2019/20 – 2023/24), the first one developed under the new constitution, is claimed to be based on a 25-year vision that aims to bring transformational development and structural changes to the economy. The 15th Plan aims to attain double-digit economic growth while promoting sustainable development and employment for all. Specifically, the plan seeks in five years to reduce absolute poverty from the current level of 18.7 percent to 13 percent and reduce the share of people suffering multi-dimensional poverty from 29 percent to 14 percent.

The challenge, however, is not only about attaining its development goals, but also ensuring the economic dividends are spread evenly across the country and among different population groups. The government has also given importance to social development issues. In addition to the capital projects, the GoN has committed to fulfilling all the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN by 2030. The government says the federal and provincial government's planning processes are attuned to meet the SDG goals. Although Nepal has improved many social indicators during the last 10 years, it will be challenging to meet all 17 SDG goals by 2030 unless civil society organizations are engaged in localizing SDGs across sectors and levels. Civil society organizations can provide their technical expertise in facilitating the localization of Agenda 2030 apart from them contributing to the achievement of some SDGs through their interventions. Since Aasaman Nepal has already been contributing towards SDGs – through localization, as well as through its project intervention – expanding and scaling up its engagement on the SDGs agenda will be another avenue.

One of the prominent development challenges in Nepal is the issue of exclusion: social, geographic, and economic. People are discriminated against based on their gender, sexual orientation, caste, ethnicity, and religion. Similarly, people living in remote places and far from the center have less access to basic services such as health care, quality education, transport, and resources to improve their economic status. More importantly, multiple marginalizations have ruined the lives of a significant number of people. As the new Constitution declared discrimination a punishable crime, society is gradually becoming more accepting of women's rights and tolerant of minorities. However, there is a continuous need to work further in ensuring equality.

Low national absorbing capacity and under-utilization of local resources, including human resources have led to ever-growing unemployment. The lack of employment opportunities in Nepal has led to large numbers of young men and some women migrating for work in other countries. As per the preliminary report of the 2021 census, 2.1 million Nepalis are abroad. Looking at the trend of labor permit issuance by the Department of Foreign Employment, Nepal had been experiencing a steady rise in outbound migration since the 2000s. The number of labor permits issued peaked in 2013/14, reaching a high of 519,638. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions imposed on the movement of people, only 72,081 labor permits were issued in 2020/21. Despite the remittance has been increased it is poorly utilized in the productive sector, rather has contributed to the trade deficit. Although Nepal benefits from remittances that flow into the country from abroad (In 2020, the remittances sent by migrant workers amounted to 23.5% of Nepal's GDP), migration has also led to shortages of workers available for agriculture, construction, and the service sectors, making those sectors less competitive. This creates a perpetuating cycle where migration depletes the domestic workforce, hampering economic development and leading more youth to migrate in search of employment.

Nepal is slowly getting back towards economic growth after COVID-19. The Asian Development Bank estimated that Nepal's economy will be expanded by 4.7 percent in the fiscal year 2022-23, down from an estimated 5.8 percent in 2021. However, growth is due mainly to the impact of remittances. Current expenditure is equal to the national revenue, and the economic situation is characterized by a negative trade balance. Nepal's trade deficit is ever-increasing, as it is importing most of its needs from other countries. The government has been criticized for its failure to create an enabling environment for business. Private sector respondents cited increasing taxes and corruption as key impediments to business investment.

- ***Resource Crisis in Post-COVID-19 pandemic.***

Asian Development Bank (ADB) expected regional economic growth in developing Asia to decline sharply in 2020 due to the effects of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, before recovering in 2021. However, the second wave of COVID-19 continues to hard-hit the economy. Similarly, apart from an anticipated sharp economic slump caused by halting economic activity, collapsing trade, and greater stress in the financial and banking sectors in the South-Asian countries, Nepal's economic growth is expected to fall to a low range reflecting lower remittances, trade, and tourism, and broader disruptions caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. The economic growth rate is estimated to be around 4.7 percent in 2023. However, there have been additional challenges to achieving the estimated economic growth as economic activities have been re-affected by the new waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. Amid the uncertainty on how economic growth will recover, the economy related to tourism and remittance will certainly be a hard hit.

The impact of the pandemic continues to hit low-income people hard, especially informal workers in the hospitality, retail trade, and transport sectors who have limited or no access to healthcare or social safety nets. Most importantly the COVID-19 pandemic is claimed to have reinforced economic inequality. If not engaged well in productive work, mass flight of migrant workers from cities to rural areas, a protracted COVID-19 crisis may threaten food security, especially for the most vulnerable.

In addition, the development sectors in general, and the civil society organizations in particular, will have squeezed financial resources due to the global recession. Ministry of Finance data indicates that while INGOs' core funding increased (to 215 million USD) in FY 2018/19 (from 110 million USD in FY 2017/18) it sharply declined by 38.8% reaching 132.8 million USD in 2019/20. Apart from the resource crunch COVID-19 drained resources that would otherwise come to other sectors. According to the Ministry of Finance, of the total 2,002.8 million USD disbursed in Nepal in 2019/20, 512.9 million USD was disbursed for COVID-19 response and recovery. While much of this support came from new projects designed specifically in the pandemic context, 48.6 million USD was reallocated from existing projects. INGOs contributed a further 5.5 million USD to COVID-19 related efforts. In such a situation, mobilizing financial resources for both the ongoing projects as well as new programs will be difficult. Moreover, as the local government priority will shift more towards economic revitalization and other service sectors, the CSOs working on human rights issues will even see a hard time.

A recent war in Ukraine also has a global impact. The polarization among the countries, and their priority in supporting humanitarian action, if not on direct military support to Ukraine, in addition to a disruption in the global supply chain raised living costs in developed countries. While they prioritize addressing domestic challenges, financial aid through both the government and non-governmental sources to third-world countries will likely remain constrained.

- ***Social transformation requires addressing various social evils***

Despite growing institutional awareness of the caste system, religion, and class the deep-rooted harmful social norms have a wider impact on the agenda of social transformation. As a result, meaningful and

inclusive participation is yet a challenge across levels of governance. Even in the family and community, intergenerational dialogue is growing low leading to increasing family conflicts and fragmentation. Increasing substance abuse among youth and a growing number of youths out-migration have contributed to this fragmentation.

- ***CSOs need to harness the benefits of information and communication technology***

Nepali CSOs are far behind in harnessing the benefits of ICTs for various reasons. Firstly, they have low access to software including that supports financial/inventory management and program/human resource management for example. On the other hand, there is a lack of competent human resources in using available technologies, and there is a security challenge with those technologies available free of cost. In addition, internet connectivity is an issue that restricts the best use of some technologies. As a result, the potential of making paperless organizations, E-school, and E-village is far from reality for most CSOs. However, there is a vast potential for CSOs to use social media platforms that include Facebook, YouTube, Whatsapp, and Twitter among others to create awareness, reach out to the wider community, and make their communication with them better. It helps CSOs to increase their visibility, and maintain transparency to gain public trust.

Nepal government has promulgated ICT Act - 2074 and Digital Nepal Framework -2019 that deal with various thematic issues such as health, Education, Finance, Agriculture, Environment, Urban Infrastructure, and Tourism. It indicates that the government intends to promote digitalization across sectors which CSOs could also get the advantage of.

- ***While addressing pertinent environmental challenges Nepali CSOs could contribute to the national and international development agenda***

The government's commitment to environmental protection opens an avenue for CSO collaboration and cooperation. Nepal has reiterated its commitment to various international treaties and conventions that inform national policies and plans. United Nations Framework for Climate Change and its protocol have influenced the National Climate Change Policy -2019 and National Policy for Disaster Risk Reduction -2018. Similarly, various guidelines and action plans to implement those policies such as NAPA and LAPA are in place. Nepal's commitment to REDD+ is also a milestone to this end. National Environment Policy -2076, National Strategic Action Plan on Forest and Environment Conservation -2078, and Action Plan on Banning Plastic Bag -2078 are some of the manifestations of Nepal's commitment.

International development partners have also crafted their strategic interventions to align with international conventions and protocols. As a result, climate change, environmental protection, and DRR are some of the priority areas, that Nepali CSOs can contribute to. Green Climate Fund (GCF), Global Environment Facility (GEF), Adaption Fund, and Climate Investment Fund are just a few resources that CSOs can mobilize.

Local government has a key role to play to hold polluters accountable and pay. Since the use of pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and plastics are on the rise local government has to make sure that policy and guidelines including LAPA are in place. Similarly, making schools a green zone is an area of collaboration where CSOs can extend their technical competence which LG is mostly lacking.

Civil Society and the Legal Environment

Though civil society in Nepal enjoyed a relatively better legal environment compared to its counterpart in the neighboring countries there were already several issues about making it compatible with the international standard. In addition, recent attempts from the government have increased the threat that civic freedom will be shrunk. The proposed Act (known as Social Development Act) that intends to replace existing Acts

is also heavily criticized for its intention to restrict CSOs' activities to a large extent. As a result, the draft Act is pending for the last couple of years. Similarly, due to the criticism from the civil society sectors, some local governments withdrew the proposed bills regulating CSOs. Whereas several public statements of political leaders and bureaucrats reiterate its international commitment, and the constitutional mandate various policy documents appear contradictory.

Promulgation of several legal frameworks including policies and Acts has implications for the CSO's functions in general and Aasaman Nepal's work in particular. Local Government Operation Act - 2074, 15th Five-Year Plan, Aid Mobilization Policy, CSR Policy, Social Security Act-2075, and SDGs influence the CSO functioning as a whole whereas Children Related Act - 2075, Compulsory and Free Education Act - 2075, EFLG framework, Labor Act, Workplace Sexual Harassment Abolition Act - 2071 are some legal frameworks impacting Aasaman Nepal's actions in particular.

There are already several issues undermining the freedom of Nepali CSOs to function well. However, there is a reasonable fear among CSOs that given the widespread poor understanding of the broader concept and role of CSOs among government officials and leaders, variation that the local governments might bring to their respective legal frameworks is likely to escalate the difficulties of CSOs further.

- *There are critical gaps in understanding the role of civil society across sectors and levels.* While the Government of Nepal (GON) seems to undermine the role of civil society in Nepal's overall development the public perception towards the CSOs is not up to the mark. Apart from that, the bureaucracy is not treating the CSOs well. Similarly, not all CSOs fully understand their role, and people's understanding of CSOs is also very limited.
- *Legal frameworks do not respect the independence of civil society.* Primarily, Nepali CSOs are registered under three laws: the Associations Registration Act (ARA) of 1977, the National Directive Act (NDA) of 1961, and the Companies Act of 2006. Secondary registration is then sought under the Social Welfare Act (SWA) of 1992 for domestic CSOs seeking foreign or government assistance of any kind. The existing legal framework does not adequately recognize the independence of civil society. The one-door policy described in the Constitution (2015) appears to envision a role for CSOs in areas of national needs and priorities only. The registration process for CSOs makes it clear that the GON treats the sector only as a tool for development purposes and expects its entire function to align with national development policies. In addition, the Association Registration Act mandates the GON to give instructions to associations and to terminate associations if they refuse to follow directions.
- *Multiple requirements for CSOs are too burdensome.* Many of the demands required of CSOs have made their functioning troublesome. Whether it is related to the pre-registration requirement of a recommendation of the local agency where the CSO is intended to be established or district-specific reporting requirements to DAOs, for those CSOs working in multiple districts, these blanket requirements are burdensome, particularly for small CSOs. Similarly, mandatory affiliation with Social Welfare Council for any CSO willing to partner with international development partners has added CSOs based in remote districts another layer of burden.
- *Restrictions on access to resources coupled with budget restrictions.* The requirement of seeking separate and additional approval to receive foreign or government resources has resulted in project delays, particularly for those funded by international donors. The limit on administrative costs in budgets restricts the ability of CSOs to work on advocacy issues, as the SWC mandates most of the project budgets to focus on hardware or tangible development outputs.

Learning while implementing the Strategic Plan (2018-2022)

In addition to these contextual realities, this strategic plan is informed by some of the key lessons that Aasaman Nepal learned while implementing its earlier strategic plan (2018 - 2022). Those learning include the following:

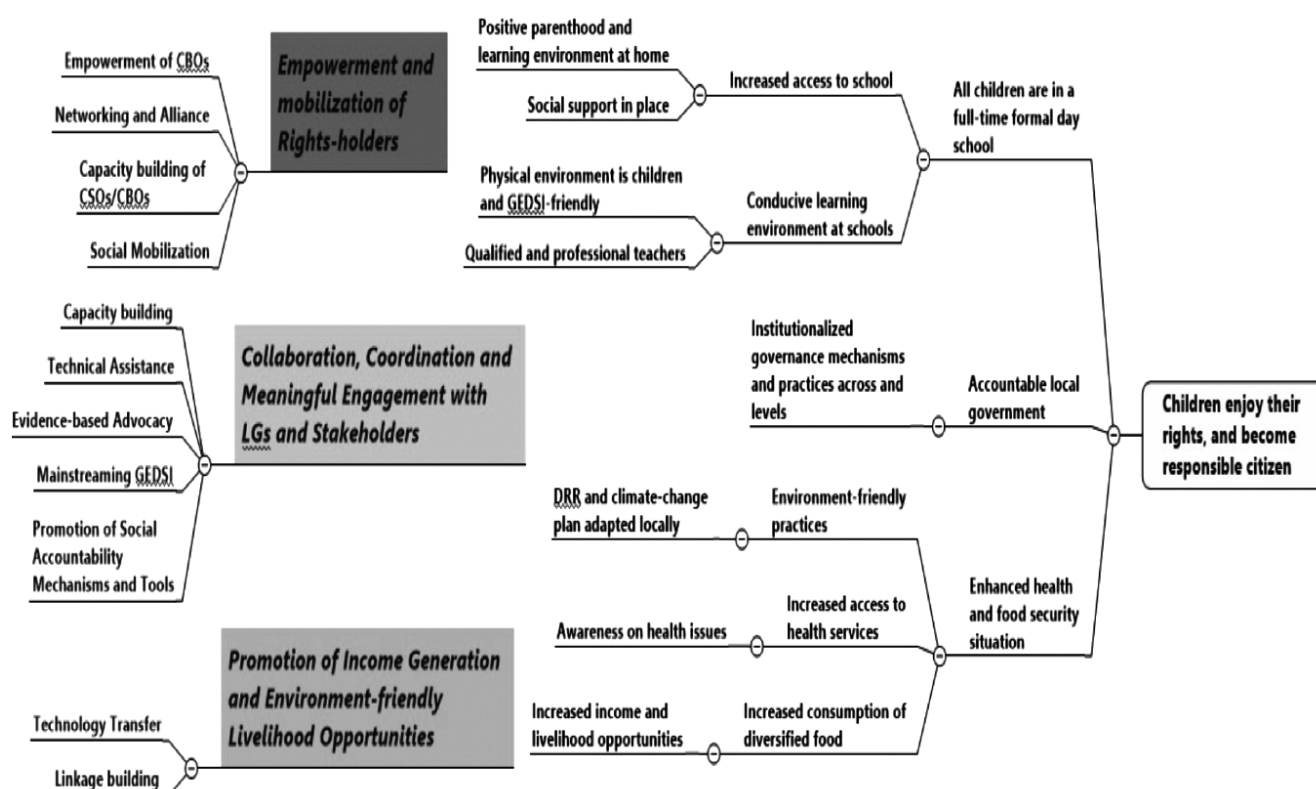
- Strong coordination and collaboration help institutionalize LG capacity that has a spill-over effect on the CSO functioning across sectors and levels. Supporting LGs in developing plans and policies not just ensures making that policy framework available, trust of those institutions will also rise and avenues for further partnership and collaborations emerge.
- A comprehensive knowledge management plan is required in an organization that continuously and systematically generates, captures, disseminates, and uses knowledge based on key learning questions to ensure wider stakeholders can replicate and/or scale up their programs based on one CSO's learning.
- Proper mobilization of the support structure ensures the effective implementation of the project. Readiness of those mechanisms and structure, if not in place, can be developed through persistent effort in looking for common grounds.
- Governance cross across all sectors and that is a precondition to ensure the rights of marginalized and poor people to their entitlements. However, holding the concerned duty-bearers to account involves long-term and strategic involvement with them.

ASN Theory of Change

The Theory of Change underpinning our Strategic Plan addresses our assumption that we achieve sustainable results when we empower rights holders, collaborate and coordinate with wider stakeholders, and address livelihood challenges with environment-friendly initiatives. Ensuring the rights of children requires a collective effort. Aasaman Nepal and its partners collaborate to design and test sustainable solutions and deliver impact at scale. ASN shares its learning and adopts relevant models so they become stronger and more effective in their unique contexts, while also sharing what it learns beyond the alliance to contribute better to the rights of children from a system perspective.

We believe that various pathways collectively would help us realize the results chain that takes us through children's access to quality education, accountable local government and different stakeholders, and better health and food security in the community.

ASN will align our various tactical strategies and frameworks to deliver this Strategic Plan following our principles and values. Specifically, we will update our results framework to ensure it is aligned with our strategic plan to help us gather evidence on our institutional and programmatic outcomes, track our progress against our Strategic Plan, test our Theory of Change, and better understand and share our impact story. To do this, we will design a robust MEAL system that is informed by key learning agenda and ensure all project MEAL plan contributes to generating, capturing, disseminating, and implementing what we have learned.



Strategies Objectives, Indicators, and Actions



Strategic Objective One: Mobilize youth to lead evidence-based advocacy in addressing pertinent local development issues across sectors

Aasaman Nepal will strengthen its ability to coordinate and sustain targeted advocacy to hold the development stakeholders, including local governments to account in addressing pertinent local development issues across sectors. Our efforts will aim to catalyze and connect youth action for greater advocacy impact across sectors and at scale. We will do this by exploring and championing new and emerging ways for citizens and local civil society organizations to influence relevant decision-making processes at local, provincial, and national levels.

While being open to addressing emerging development challenges, we aim to incorporate climate change and Disaster risk reduction (DRR) as cross-cutting development agendas in another sector programming such as education, livelihood, and health among others. In doing so, we will keep human rights at its core.

Key indicators and major actions:

Indicators

- Percentage of the project amount allocated as an emergency fund and utilized
- Number of DRR support materials and rescue team members mobilized
- Number of schools in ASN working area with learning and nutrition corner
- Number of Palikas in ASN working areas having nutrition-friendly local governance framework
- Number of ASN working palikas having food security scheme
- Percentage of wasting decreased in ASN working area
- Number of persons in ASN working area going through regular screening of NCD and follow-up
- Percentage of people with increased consumption of locally produced diversified food
- Percentage of accessibility and utilization of sanitary toilet

- Percentage of personal hygiene and sanitation increased
- Number of ASN working palika having a climate-resilient plan
- Number of ASN projects incorporating climate change as a cross-cutting agenda
- Number of advocacy initiatives undertaken
- Number of youths mobilized in advocacy and campaigns across sectors
- Number of people ASN reaching out with humanitarian support

Key Activities

- Preparation of DRR preparedness plan with support materials and rescue team
- Extension of support to NPC and LGs in planning and designing education, DRR, climate change, livelihood, health-related programs, and policies
- Establishing and mobilization of an emergency fund
- Promotion of learning and nutrition corner in each school of ASN working area
- Promote nutrition-friendly local governance to contribute to malnutrition-free schools
- Promotion of a positive deviance approach in the project area to encourage the use of indigenous food
- Supporting palika in developing food security plans and mechanisms
- Launch an advocacy campaign on the right to food and food security
- Food Security (increase in internal food production through scientific farming/conservation)
- Promotion of nutrition-friendly local governance (NFLG) in ASN working palika
- Launch campaign on WASH
- Building ASN and other stakeholder's capacity in addressing emerging development issues such as DRR, climate change



Strategic Objective Two: Institutionalize knowledge management in Aasaman Nepal and use of ICT

We will continue to produce and disseminate in-depth and strategic information, and knowledge on the issues of ASN concerns while analyzing the drivers and enablers of best practices. In doing so, we will take knowledge management as the guiding framework in designing a MEAL system that best generates, captures, disseminates, and uses knowledge to inform future programming. It curates and disseminates data and information in disaggregated forms to enable their practical application in supporting informed decision-making toward social justice.

This work will be furthered by the strategic use of information and communication technology to track ASN and its partner's actions to demonstrate a stronger case for how collaborative actions with CSOs and LGs are proving effective in making desired change a reality in different contexts. Our efforts will be accompanied by continuous learning-sharing opportunities and capacity building of the ASN team and other stakeholders in using the evidence generated by the system to its best.

Key indicators and major actions:

Indicators

- Number of staff members trained in database management software and ICT
- Number of stakeholders visiting Aasaman Nepal's online databank
- Percentage reduction of the paper-based transaction at ASN
- Number of ASN policies, programs, and knowledge products in e-library browsed

- Number of ASN annual reports prepared based on strategic planning indicators
- Number and types of knowledge products ASN shares through various online platforms
- Number of action research conducted by thematic areas
- Number of MEAL unit members trained on MEAL and KM-related issues
- Number of learning events organized across levels of government and stakeholders
- Number of knowledge dissemination events organized by ASN
- Number of policies prepared in ASN on data protection, cyber security, and IT
- Number of CRFM desks established in the ASN working district

Key Activities

- Installation and use of database and software to manage MEAL, Finance, Admin, Logistic related functions at ASN
- Development of KM-informed MEAL system at ASN
- Promotion of ASN as a paperless organization
- Promote ASN in the Madhesh province as a data bank concerning education, DRR, and climate-resilient programming
- Carry out thematic action research
- Promotion of using social media for mass outreach and communication
- Organizing review, reflection, and learning events
- Sharing ASN learning through various forms of knowledge products
- Formulation of data protection, cyber security and IT policies at ASN
- Promotion of functional CRFM desk in ASN working areas
- Networking with successful schools to learn from their best practices



Strategic Objective Three: Brand and scale up Aasaman approaches through proactive media engagement

We will strengthen our ability to influence the CSO ecosystem with our successful models in addressing the development issues from human rights-based approaches across sectors and levels. Our efforts will aim to catalyze and connect civil society efforts with the media sector for greater advocacy impact across sectors and at scale. We will do this by exploring and championing new and emerging ways for engagement with media sectors to influence relevant decision-making processes at local, provincial, and national levels.

Through strategic media engagement, we will develop pathways to engage decision-making agencies to enhance accountability for and action on respect for people's constitutional rights and entitlements while continuing to advocate for new ways to respect the contribution of locally owned development initiatives toward the social transformation and gain solidarity.

We will work with media sectors firmly to shape and influence public discourse on civil society organizations' role through more innovative and persuasive ways of demonstrating the relevance and sustained impact of civil society for social justice.

Key indicators and major actions:

Indicators

- Number of coordination and collaboration events ASN organized with different tiers of government for learning sharing
- Number of best practices and success cases from ASN scaled up and replicated

- Number of scholars working with ASN as interns
- Number of recognitions/awards ASN receives for its contribution
- Number of individual/institutional members associated with the ASN network
- Number of cases demonstrating ASN contribution in policy formulation and development agenda setting across sectors and institutions
- Number of networks, coalition, and alliances ASN participate in
- Number of ASN team members serving as resource persons across thematic issues
- Number of media partnerships
- Number of coverages in the media about ASN, its achievements
- Number of joint monitoring with media partners
- Number of partnerships with CSOs

Key Activities

- Promotion of coordination and collaboration with GOs and CSOs on thematic issues
- Continuous education of ASN staff on its mission and theory of change
- Design and implement advocacy campaigns to mainstream pertinent development agenda across the sectors and actors
- Engagement of academia and scholars to reflect development initiatives from an academic lens
- Development of ASN Network
- Media engagement program
- Creation of opportunities for ASN team member to provide their technical competence to network members and other stakeholders
- Facilitation of policies and program development of stakeholders including the local governments
- Promotion of learning and sharing platforms
- Development and dissemination of lessons learned from ASN



Strategic Objective Four: Facilitate linkages, coordination, and collaboration among government and development actors

We will strategically convene diverse groups and coalitions for joint action and actively pursue opportunities to create synergistic results and increase mutual solidarity and collective impact. We will work to improve the mutual accountability practices of civil society organizations to urge and enable organizations and movements to collaborate with a range of stakeholders and build greater public trust, which ultimately enhances our collective impact.

We will harness the power of collaboration and networking with civil society actors, government agencies, local governments, and other stakeholders to develop and amplify people-centered narratives of sustainable change to key stakeholders. In doing so, we will focus on the significant contributions of marginalized sections of society such as women, Dalits, Muslims, and differently-able groups as well as youth activists.

Key indicators and major actions:

Indicators

- Number of partnerships made with CSOs
- Number of partnerships with international development partners
- Number of coordination and collaborative events/platforms ASN facilitated
- Number of youths engaged to advance the development agenda

- Number of strategic partnerships developed
- Percentage of resources mobilized through a strategic partnership
- Number of collaborations with LGs and Province governments
- Number of collaborations between state, CSOs, and private sectors
- Percentage of funds received from LGs
- Number of palikas covered by ASN program
- Number of Province government ASN serve as a focal point on development issues
- Number of projects and programs incorporating NRM/Climate change and GEDSI as a cross-cutting theme
- Number of indicators on NRM and climate change in the ASN program
- Percentage of funds allocated for cross-cutting issue
- Number of ASN's documents/policy/guidelines incorporating cross-cutting issues
- Number of projects in each thematic area

Key Activities

- Strengthening network and accountability
- Extension of partnership with CSOs and international development organizations
- Leading and facilitating collaboration, coordination, and engagement with LGs and other stakeholders
- Media mobilization for better outreach and effective advocacy
- Leverage ASN technical expertise to expand its engagement with government and CSOs across sectors and levels
- Expanding ASN outreach through social mobilization and private-sector engagement
- Periodic audit of ASN policies and guidelines
- Offer ASN expertise to build the capacity of other CSOs and CBOs
- Strategic partnership for fundraising (Joint programming/partnership with LGs)



Strategic Objective Five: Strengthen local capacity in formulating and implementing policies and programs aligned with the national priorities

We will strategically mobilize our competence and experience in facilitating the capacity-building initiatives that result in institutionalizing capacities to assess local context, engage multiple stakeholders, and design localized policies and programs that are attuned to national and international commitments. The national priorities as delineated from the Constitutions, other legal and policy frameworks, and programs will be taken as the reference point of departure.

We will customize capacity-building initiatives based on the differential needs of stakeholders and design the intervention collectively to ensure that institutional readiness is in place for sustained use of the knowledge and skills. Based on our learning, we integrate continuous technical assistance as a key element of capacity-building to institutionalize the capacity to sustain the benefits.

Key indicators and major actions:

Indicators

- Number of human rights issues concerning women, children, senior citizens, and marginalized people are raised and mainstreamed in the government program
- Number of LG and other stakeholders oriented on GEDSI issues
- Number of LG and other sector stakeholders mainstreaming GEDSI in its program

- Number of the annual planning process and social accountability events at LGs facilitated by ASN
- Number of women leaders in LGs and sectoral line agencies trained
- Number of CSO leaders and staff members from marginalized groups trained
- Number of wards/palika declared 'violence free'
- Number of LGs declared free of child marriage
- Number of LGs declared free of child labor
- Number of board and staff members trained on GEDSI
- Number of ASN policies and programs that are GEDSI friendly
- Percentage of women and marginalized communities recruited as staff at ASN
- Percentage of children in full-time formal day school at ASN working area
- Percentage of local-level judiciary committee members trained by ASN
- Number of LGs in ASN working area with child labor policy/program
- Percentage of GBV and VAW cases addressed by the social justice committee in the ASN working area

Key Activities

- Campaign to ensure access to social justice, inclusive participation, and governance across sectors
- Advocacy on protection issues of women, children, senior citizens, and marginalized community
- Sensitization of stakeholders on GEDSI
- Capacity-building interventions for elected leaders, government staff, and other stakeholders on various development issues
- Collaboration with LGs and schools with educational projects
- Promotion of social accountability tools across ASN project areas
- Campaign to end violence, child marriage, and child labor
- Design and implement education projects
- ASN staff capacity building program
- Formulation of ASN policies that are GEDSI sensitive
- Extension of technical expertise to LGs and other sector stakeholders in policy and program design

Our Learning and Accountability Commitment

We will improvise our actions based on what we have learned about learning and accountability standards and practices. We will: a) ensure our stakeholders and partners understand decisions made concerning our strategic plan, what we want to achieve, and how we will go about doing it (giving account); b) collect and address feedback from our members and networks on how we are delivering on our strategy (taking account); and c) enable those who are part of and affected by our strategic efforts to inform and review decisions about the way we progress our strategy (being held to account).

As a learning organization, ASN will:

- Put marginalized people's needs at the center of our work, prioritize more consultative and participatory programming and allow spaces for adaption when changes in direction are required.
- Measure our contribution to social transformation, which includes using quantitative data and qualitative data to substantiate the difference we make.
- Learn internally to understand which of our approaches work well and learn from and with others as we co-create and implement our programs.

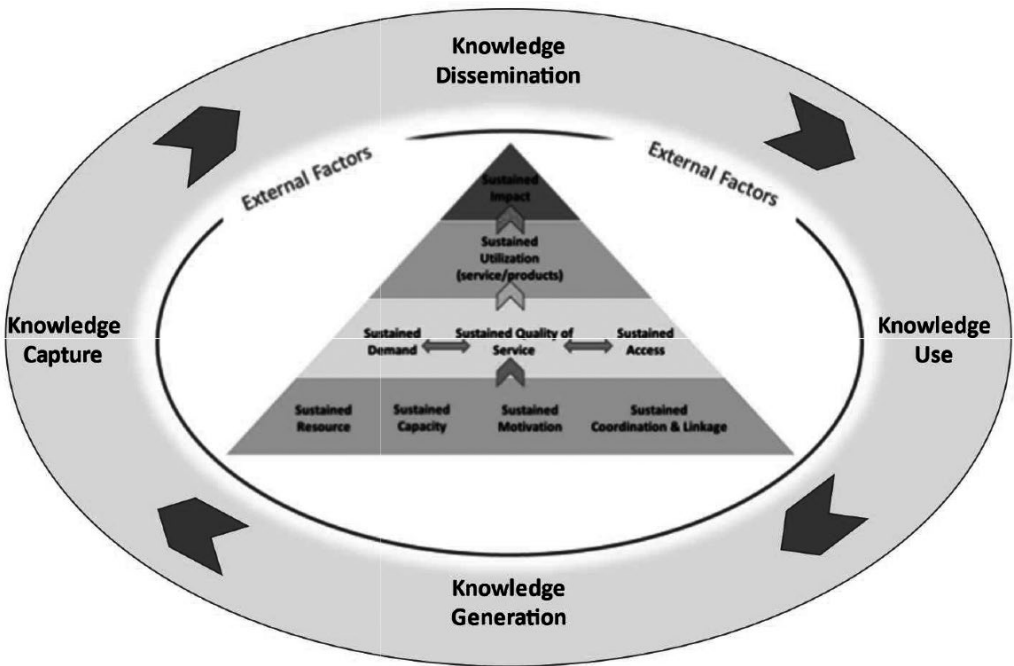
Aasaman Nepal develops a results-based integrated MEAL Framework based on which all project-specific MEAL frameworks will be developed to ensure that all of the project MEAL components feed the information and data to the integrated MEAL framework. It will help ASN to track its institutional journey, beyond the project-specific MEAL.

To streamline the results-based management approach in the MEAL component, a comprehensive MEAL framework will be first developed that gives scope for disaggregated management information system (MIS) development for ASN and the tools and frameworks will be developed to make sure that all relevant information is periodically captured and managed. Apart from data collection tools (structural and participatory) standard formats for periodic reporting, case studies, success stories, good practices and lessons learned, and innovation will be developed.

To standardize the MEAL application, after developing a MEAL Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), all of the ASN team members will be oriented about the MEAL Strategy, Framework, and Tools along with their responsibilities to make it functional.

Sustainability Plan

Sustainability of the ASN results – process as well as the products and services – will be a key concern of our MEAL system. We will design and implement all campaigns, advocacy initiatives, and program/project-based partnerships considering the sustainability framework. We intend to create a sustainability foundation across sectors and create sustained demand for as well as supplies of quality services to enhance the sustained utilization of services and products by the right-holders in the ASN working area.



While remaining vigilant to external factors, ASN will adopt knowledge management as the basis for repositioning its approaches. Knowledge generation through a series of reviews and reflections both internal to the ASN as well as with the key stakeholders and discussions with the communities will help capture and document best practices, and lessons learned in different formats that will be shared through publications, websites, workshops and seminars to increase the likelihood of replication and scaling up of the best

ASN will make sure every project has its exit plan and the exit plan has been brought into the scope of monitoring. Moreover, ASN exit plan will incorporate the engagement with government line agencies from the start of the project so that it could be handed over to them as planned.