

## Policy Brief Series Seven

### *“Strengthening Protection Cluster at Province and Local Level”, Challenges and Recommendation.*

Nepal is one of the highest risk countries in terms of disasters. The multi-hazard prone country every year face greater damage and loss due to disasters like flood, landslide, fire, storm, earthquake, thunderbolts etc. Due to different disasters, Nepal face economic challenge that has significant impact on the economy of the nation. Government of Nepal has endorsed National Disaster Response Framework (NDRF) as a key guideline for disaster response and plays vital role to mobilize international humanitarian assistance in mega disaster, in case if government response is beyond its capacity. NDRF has envisioned eleven clusters in the framework, who will be activated and function during the time of disaster response. The clusters are led by the government institution and co-lead by the either UN agency or INGO.

Protection cluster in one of eleven clusters that focuses on the women, children, elderly PWDs, lactating mother and other groups who are most vulnerable during disasters. NDRF has prioritized the need of the most vulnerable groups during disaster response. In addition, the framework has also prioritized the psychosocial support programs during the disaster response. In addition, the Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan Formulation Guideline (2020) has provisioned that every local level should have emergency preparedness and response plan, that should consider the special needs, priority of women , children, PWDs and other vulnerable groups. However, still the gap is existing in the implementation of the national frameworks and guidelines especially at local level, after the new federal structures. The district structures are almost dissolved and moved to the local level, hence the transition phase has shown its consequences in effective functioning of the protection cluster including other clusters. Due to inactive protection cluster at local level, vulnerable groups are facing threats and challenges in response that has been realized during Covid-19 response. There happened lots of cases of GBV, harassment and abuse.

#### **Key gaps and challenges to effective functioning of the “Protection Clusters” at local level.**

**Gap in knowledge and understanding:** From the dialogue it is identified that, local level representative including mayor and social development division/branch is not aware and sensitized on the function of protection cluster and its importance during disaster response to avoid GBV, harassment, exploitation and abuse is exactly not realized by the concerned persons. There seem lack of understanding on the accountability and leading role of the local level to lead the protection cluster. In some local level, the concept of protection cluster itself is very new to them. Social development branch looks counting on the deputy mayor for the viability and functioning of protection cluster. Hence, they must be oriented on the provision of national policies for disaster preparedness and response. Mayors and chairs need to be sensitized on policy provisions to establish and activate the protection cluster. The realization among the policy makers and officials at local level seems inadequate. After the dissolving of district level structures to local level, there is confusing situation to establish and lead protection cluster. Hence, they need to be clarified on

their role by the federal government based on the preparedness and response policy provisions. Even the local level are also not clear on the number of clusters to be formed because all eleven clusters may not be such relevant to all local level, or they can merge two, three sectors in one cluster.

In local level where protection cluster are formed, it is just in minute or in some document but not physically exists. It is also realized that, local representatives are not serious on the need of the protection cluster, may be because they have not realized its importance.

**Lack of coordination and collaboration:** There seems lack of coordination and collaboration between deputy mayors, vice-chairs and social development branch on the accountability to lead protection cluster. At the present context, it is realized from the discussions that, deputy mayors are getting less support from social development branch to initiate the formation and functioning of the protection cluster. There is no coordination among three tiers of government for the activation and functioning of the protection cluster.

During Covid-19, all the local level were directed to form and activate the protection cluster. MoFAGA sent letter to all local level regarding the protection cluster, but local level were not able to form and activate because they were just directed but not oriented on formation and accountability of protection cluster. Even, the province government also has not prioritized the protection cluster. Deputy mayors have not the decision making power, all the decisions are made by Chief Administrative Officer and Mayor, hence they are not able to make decisions on the different priority agendas related to protection and security.

**Limitations in the stakeholder mapping:** There are various civil society organizations who are working in protection issues but the mapping is very poor. Local government do not have the database of the agencies working in their area on protection issues. In case of rural municipalities, there is not even a single organization who works on the protection programs. Hence, mapping of the agencies and bringing them altogether in a common platform of protection cluster is inevitable and should be led by the local government (social development division/branch). The local level, where there is no agencies to work in protection issues, should encourage the agencies working there to also support the protection related programs. After stakeholder mapping, the relevant and resourceful agencies might be selected to support and co-lead the protection cluster.

**Inadequate human resource in local level:** The inadequate human resource in local level is also a challenge to undertake the required actions for establishing and activating protection cluster. For the agency mapping, gap analysis, data and information management, the dedicated human resource is vital, which is lacking in the local level. Limited human resource with much responsibilities might hinder the actions needed to function the protection cluster.

**Lack of protection cluster integration in other clusters:** There is no integration of protection cluster in the committee and plans of other clusters. It is yet not realized that, protection cluster is not a stand-alone subject, but it needs to be prioritized in the plans and actions of all other clusters (WASH, Shelter, NFI, Nutrition etc). The major gap is found in the EPRP (Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan) that groups who need protection and security plans are not well addressed for their need. The blanket approach will not work in response, hence for the need based

support, protection cluster must be discussed and consulted while developing response plan of other clusters and plans must be well implemented during emergency.

Voices of Local Level:	Civil Society Voice:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not aware on the need and responsibility of protection cluster (no conceptual clarity).</li> <li>• Mayors are decision makers, and often difficult to make them understand the need of protection cluster.</li> <li>• In most of the rural municipalities, agencies working on the protection areas are limited.</li> <li>• Mayors should also be sensitized on the protection cluster.</li> <li>• The guidance and orientation from province and federal government on policy provisions related to disaster preparedness and response, so as to realize the need of protection cluster.</li> <li>• Deputy Mayors are not getting support from their own party to take leadership role.</li> <li>• Capacity gap is challenging the accountable role of representatives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local level are not sensitized on protection cluster, most of the do not understand “what is protection cluster?”.</li> <li>• The mapping of agencies working on protection cluster is lacking.</li> <li>• Gap in the coordination and collaboration between representatives and staffs of social development division/branch.</li> <li>• Very limited advocacy efforts are being made to sensitize local level.</li> <li>• Formation of protection cluster seems project based, like a project activity. It challenging the efficacy after project.</li> </ul> <p><b>Policy Recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy orientations to local government including social development division/branch to clarify the importance of protection cluster, its roles and responsibilities and to sensitize on the inclusion mandate provisioned in the policies.</li> <li>• The province government should take the</li> </ul>

ownership and accountability to support and facilitate local government to establish and strengthen the protection cluster.

- Federal government should guide and facilitate to develop clarity on the required number of clusters at local level for uniformity.
- Dedicated human resource allocation at local level to strongly work on the formation and viability of protection cluster in coordination with Social Development Division/Branch and Judicial Committee.
- Integration of protection cluster in other clusters to incorporate the issues of protection in their plans and programs.

**Note:** This brief is prepared based on the policy dialogue discussion on “Strengthening Protection Cluster at Local Level”; Challenges and Recommendations held on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2021, with the deputy mayor of Butwal Sub-metropolitan, Lumbini province and Pokhariya Municipality, Parsa, province 2, and CSOs from Province 1, Lumbini province, province 2, Bagmati Province, Gandaki Province, Karnali Province and Sudurpaschim Province.