

HAZARDS AND SYSTEM DISRUPTIONS IN NEPAL'S SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES

Brief Report

June 2023

INTRODUCTION

This report is a part of Pratibaddha II: “Together for Disaster Preparedness and Early Action in Landslide Affected Hilly Regions of Nepal”, a project funded by the European Union Humanitarian Aid. The project aims to unlock bottlenecks by putting vulnerable households that are at risk of landslides at the center of risk analysis, focusing on multiple interventions implemented by municipalities, the households, and humanitarian actors.

Natural hazards and shocks that disrupt the various processes of implementation of social protection programs, such as registration/renewal, database management, payment and grievance handling, prevents beneficiaries from making informed decisions about investing their benefits and avoids government as well as non-government humanitarian actors from using social protection systems to mitigate the impact of large-scale shocks and support households affected by such shocks.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To explore how different hazards, disrupt the implementation (the business processes) of major social protection programs (Social Security Allowance and Prime Minister Employment Program)
- To recommend possible solutions for the business continuity of social protection programs during and after the shocks.

KEY DEFINITIONS:

Natural Hazards: Severe and extreme weather and climate events. Natural hazards become disasters when people's lives and livelihoods are affected.

Social Protection Programme: Programmes that form a part of the national social protection system and are designed to address poverty and vulnerability e.g., child benefit/grants, social transfers, public work programmes, social insurance etc. These can be contributory or non-contributory.

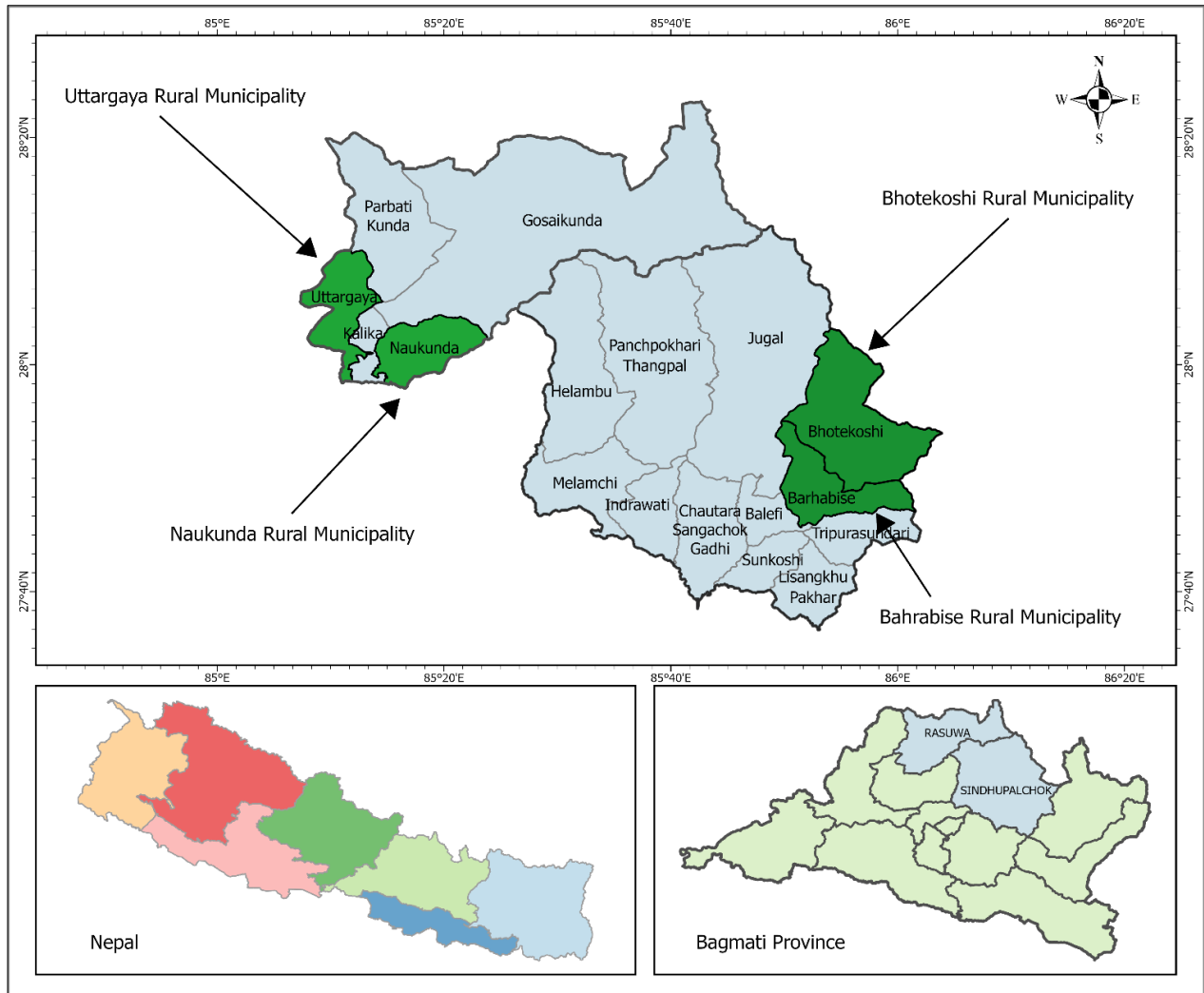
Social protection: The set of public and private policies and programmes aimed at preventing, reducing and eliminating economic and social vulnerabilities to poverty and deprivation.

Shock Responsive Social Protection: The use of social protection systems to mitigate the impact of largescale shocks (those affecting whole communities, regions or even with national reach) and support households affected by such shocks.

Management Information System (MIS): Systems (or software applications) that manage information for the functioning of registration and eligibility systems, or the operation of specific programmes to deliver benefits and services (e.g., payments transactions, conditionality monitoring, etc).

Design Tweaks: A programmatic option for shock responsive social protection - adjusting the design of routine social protection programmes to take into consideration the crises a country typically faces, to ensure they are better able to maintain regular service in a shock and can best meet needs of those affected by shocks.

STUDY AREA



Map 1: Location map of study area

field work in Rasuwa district was conducted in Naukunda and Uttargaya rural municipalities. Similarly, the field work in Sindupalchowk district was carried out in Barahbise municipality and Bhotekoshi rural municipality.

METHODS

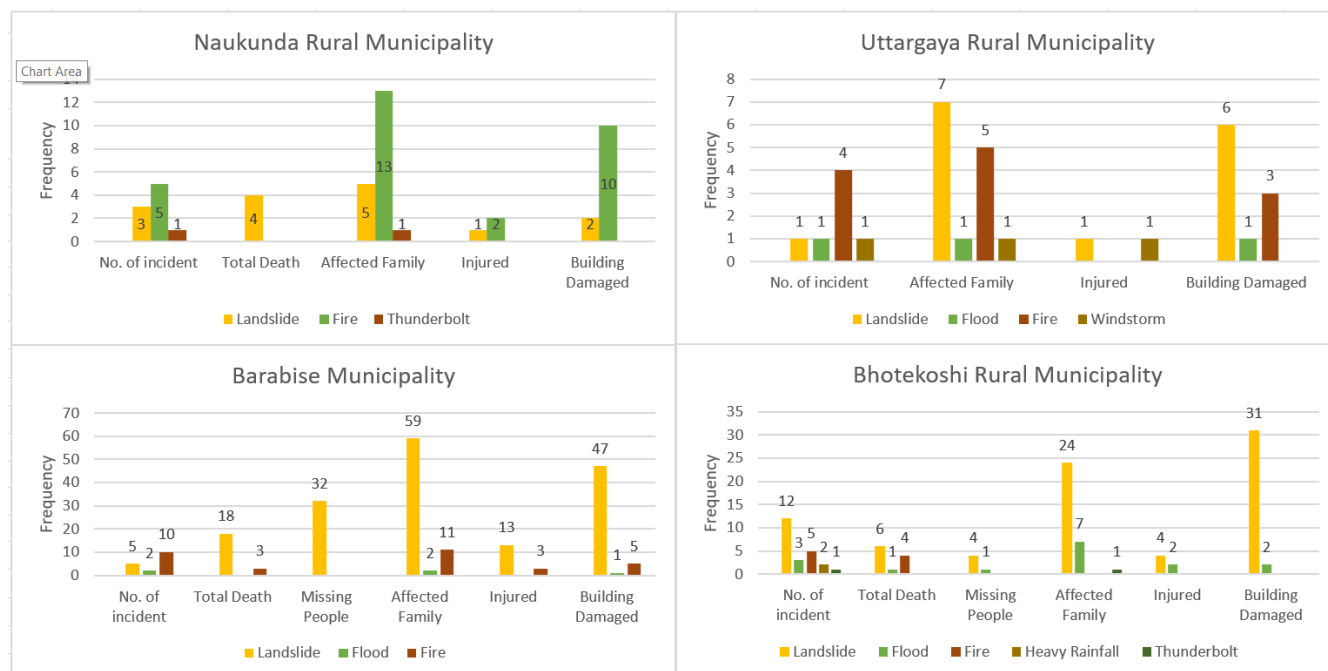
Qualitative methods were used for this study. The data was collected from eight focus group discussions, and twenty key informant interviews in the above-mentioned four municipalities. Secondary data was also reviewed based on its availability and the designed checklist. The assessment includes major hazards/ disasters in the study sites and the existing registration/ renewal, payment and grievance handling mechanisms and processes of two major social protection programmes of Nepal, Social Security Allowance (SSA) and Prime Minister Employment Program (PMEP). The participants of the interviews and discussions were municipal level authorities, and SSA as well as PMEP beneficiaries.



Photo 1: FGD with the SSA beneficiaries

MAJOR HAZARDS/DISASTERS AND SEASONALITY

Disasters and losses (2017-2022)



Source: Records from municipalities, LEOC, 2023

Within the period of the last five years, all four municipalities were affected by a series of recurring hazards. As per the number of incidents recorded, landslide in Bhotekoshi and Barabise has the highest repetition frequency followed by fire. The tables clearly highlight that landslides and floods are the two major hazards affecting people's lives and properties.

As per the seasonal hazard calendar, the two major hazards; landslide and floods occur during the monsoon season starting from Ashad till Kartik (June to October). Whereas fire, windstorms and thunderbolts happen during the dry months of Chaitra (March) through to Ashad (June). Furthermore, climate change is bound to accelerate the rate at which seasonal hazards occur, damaging properties and creating hurdles for regular activities.

Seasonal Hazard Calendar													
	Magh	Falgun	Chaitra	Baishak	Jestha	Ashad	Shrawan	Bhadra	Ashoj	Kartik	Mangsir	Paush	
Landslide						Red							
Flood						Yellow							
Fire			Pink										
Windstorms			Green										
Thunderbolt			Yellow										

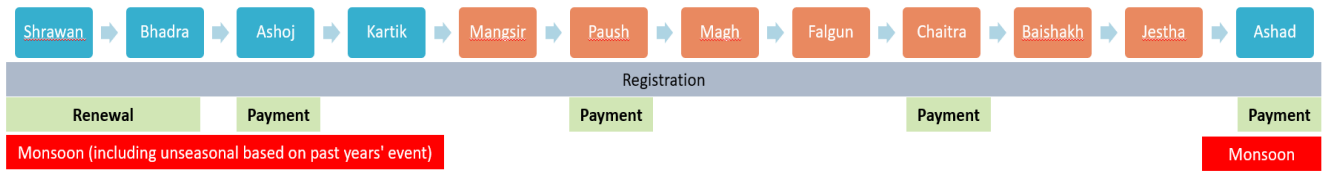
Source: Focus group discussion, 2023

OVERLAY OF SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES' BUSINESS PROCESSES WITH MAJOR HAZARDS' SEASON

Social Security Allowance (SSA) programme is federal government cash transfer programme to the specific categories of demographic vulnerable population such as, elderly, widowed, children under five, people with disability and people from endangered ethnic groups. Main business processes related to the beneficiaries consist of

registration/renewal, payments, and grievances submission. Prime Minister Employment Programme is Nepal government's cash for work programme designed to support the people aged between 18-59 from the poor and vulnerable households who are living with minimum income sources.

Social Security Allowance (SSA)



Prime Minister Employment Program (PMEP)

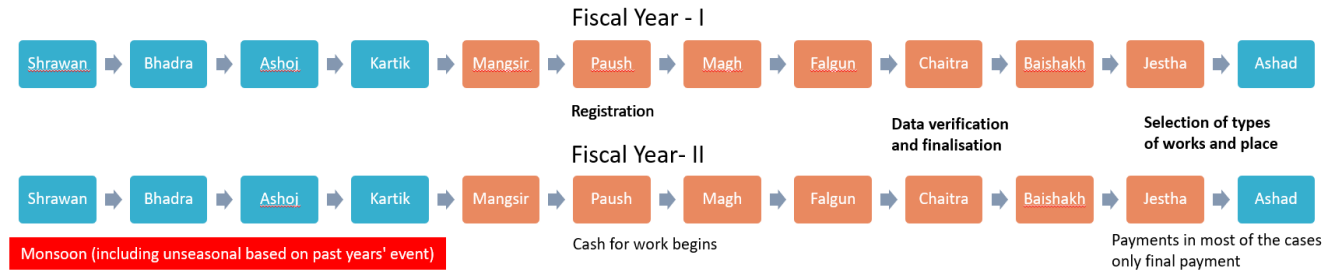


Figure 1: Overlay of Social Protection Programmes' Business Processes with monsoon induced hazard

Unlike Prime Minister Employment Programme (PMEP), the business process of Social Security Allowance (SSA) program such as registration, renewal and payments apparently intersect with the seasonal pattern of major hazards i.e., landslides and flash floods. The registration to the SSA opens throughout the year however the renewal process only takes place in Shrawan and Bhadra (mid-July to mid-September). Similarly, the first installment of payment takes place in Ashoj (mid-September to mid-October) and last installment of payment takes place in Ashad (mid-June to mid-July). In the context of hills where the landslides and flash floods are prevalent in the monsoon period, it is challenging, specifically for senior citizens, persons with disability, and, mothers of small kids to travel to the ward/municipality offices and banks to fulfill the process on time and receive payments as the core function of national social protection systems is to support people to manage risks and vulnerabilities, including the range of idiosyncratic (i.e., 'household level') shocks that typically occur through the lifecycle.

Regarding PMEP, the applicant must register during the months of Paush (February/March). The program is implemented during the months of Paush-Jestha (February-June). Payment is made after the completion of the work, only once in most cases. The implementation period does not fully coincide with the major hazards season, hence, is not solely affected by natural disasters such as landslides and flash floods.

“Landslides and floods are common occurrences in this rural municipality. These natural hazards might delay allowances by a few days as the roads get damaged and banks shut down.”

Ward Secretary of Bhotekoshi rural municipality

SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM DISRUPTION DUE TO NATURAL HAZARDS

Major stakeholders for implementing social security allowance programme are beneficiary, ward secretary, municipal level social security allowance focal person, and bank. The responsibility of beneficiary is to collect all the necessary documents, apply for registration and renewal and travel to the banks for account opening and claim payments. Ward secretary verifies all the documents and enrolls the beneficiaries to the Vital Event Registration and Social Protection Management Information System

(VERSP-MIS). Municipal level SSA focal person ensures the registration, facilitates the banking process and disbursements. Bank manages accounts and disburses the benefits. So far, no major system disruption issue due to landslides and flash floods have been identified except some delays in the distribution of allowance and challenges to the beneficiaries to travel to the banks to receive the allowances.

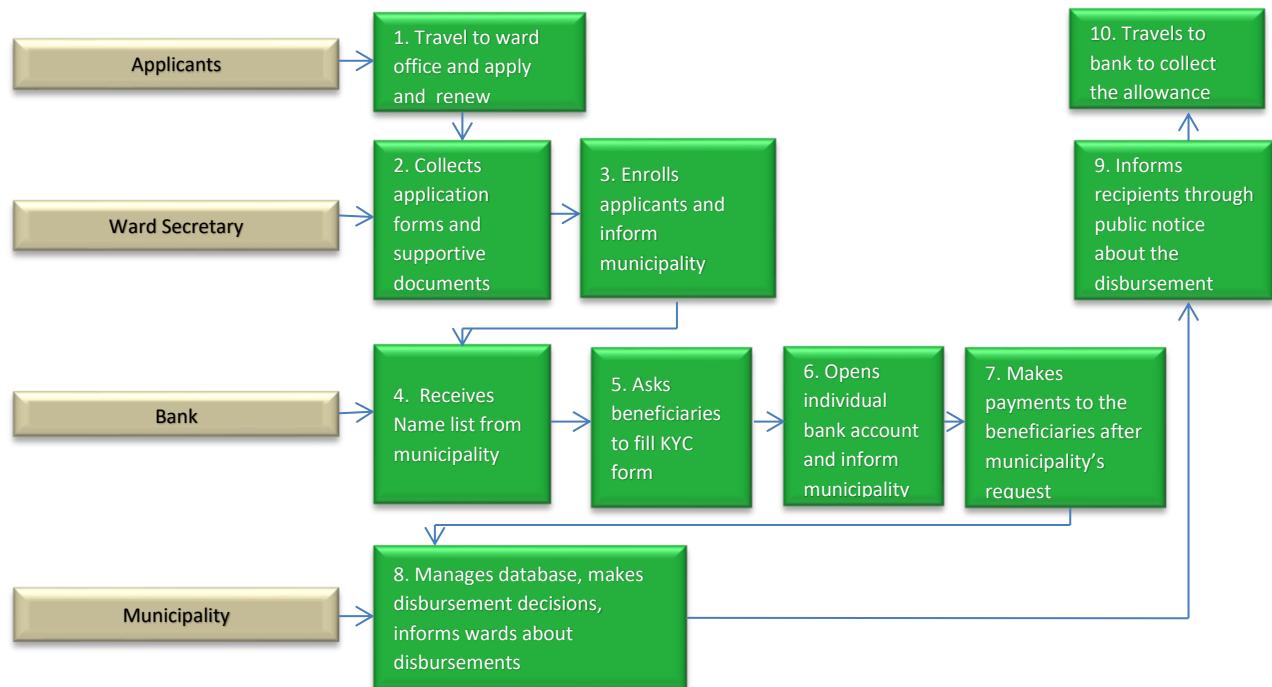


Figure 2: Social Security Allowance business process

- Elderly pension recipient from Barabise Municipality
 - "Traveling to a bank means allocating an entire day because the bank is so far away. Roads are sometimes blocked during monsoon due to floods and landslides, reducing our mobility, and making it impossible for us to travel."
- Disability allowance recipient from Naukunda rural municipality
 - "I mostly take my nephew as my witness to the bank to collect SSA. However, it is impossible for us to travel to the bank because of recurring landslides during monsoon so I would prefer to receive SSA at home."
- Single women from Bhotekoshi rural municipality
 - "The bank is located far from the village and the vehicle fare is as high as NPR 300 per person. During the months of Asar/Shrawan (June/July), the roads are all blocked due to landslides and it becomes impossible for us to walk to the bank."

RECOMMENDED DESIGN TWEAKS

Some of the major recommendations to adjust the design of Social Security Allowance programme's implementation system considering the major shocks like landslides and flash floods are as mentioned below.

These recommendations shall promote for the better position to maintain the regular service particularly payments and can best meet needs of those affected by shocks.

Adjustment in payment schedule: As the first and last installments of social security allowance payment coincides with the major hazard season, the movement of either municipalities or banks to the village, or the movements of beneficiaries to the wards or banks seems risky. Thus, the adjustment in payment schedule particularly preponement before the monsoon begins would support to maintain the regular payment service to the beneficiaries.

Additional payment options: At present, as the payment option mainly focus on banking payments where beneficiaries are required to physically visit the banks, the additional payment options like cash camps at the beneficiary's vicinity, ATM cards, Mobile banking would add the options to the beneficiaries to withdraw the benefits on their appropriate location and time.

Flexibility in renewal time: As the renewal time, Shrawan and Bhadra (mid-July to mid-September) of each year intersects with the monsoon season, the flexibility in renewal time (before or after the monsoon) only for those who are at-high risk of landslide would prevent them from being at risk.

Additional grievance handling options: As two out of four payments and renewal time coincides with the monsoon period with possibility of regular system disruptions, the additional mechanisms for grievance handling would ensure the system at place.

Contingency plans with municipality: Considering the extreme climate events, there are always uncertainties about the continuity of system during and after shocks mainly in hilly areas. Thus, municipal level contingency plans would maintain the regular service related to social security allowance programme implementation which ultimately supports the beneficiaries best meet their needs during the crisis.

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