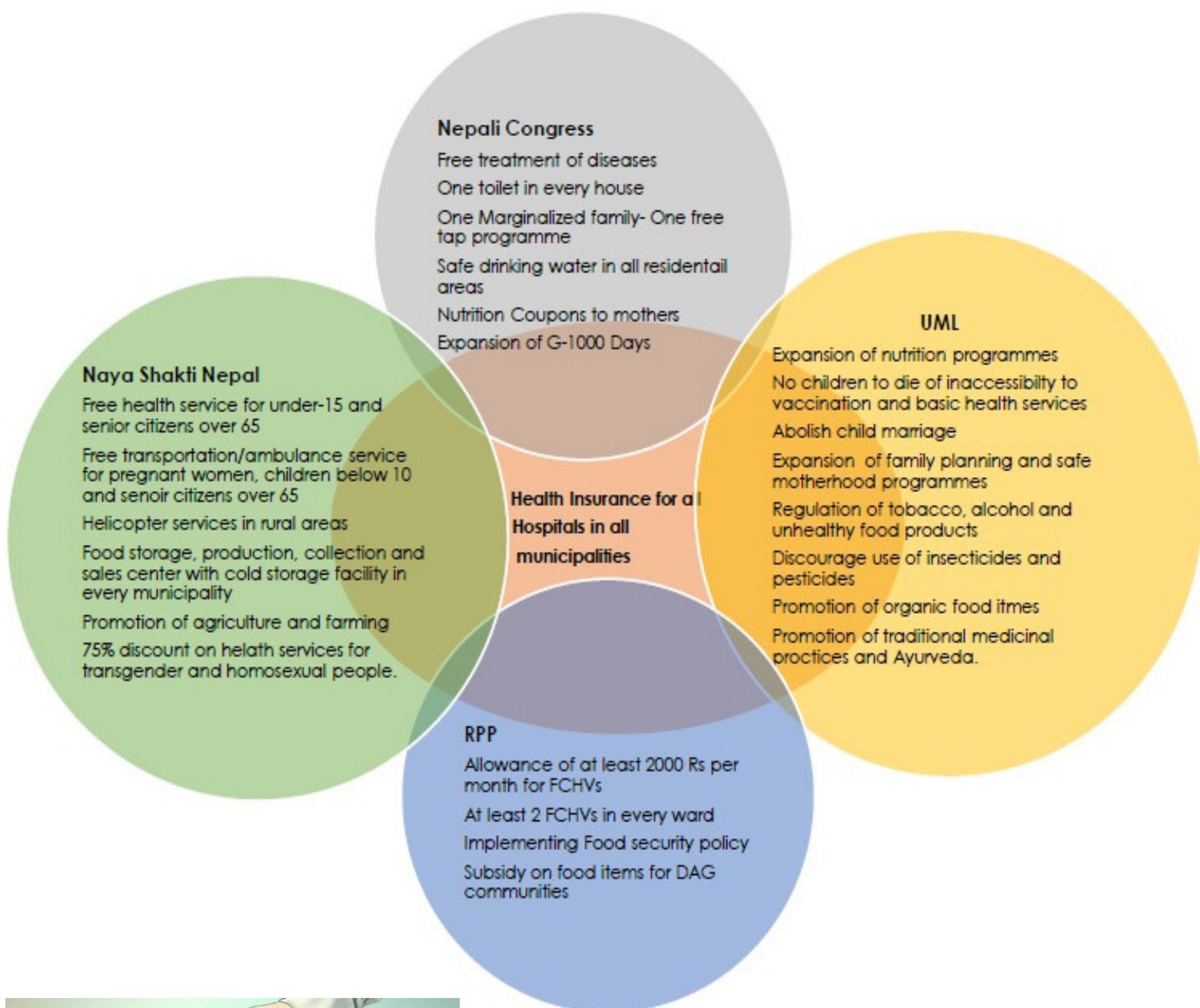


HEALTH AND NUTRITION IN MANIFESTOS: AN EVIDENCE REVIEW



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BACKGROUND

After 20 years, the local level elections are being held in Nepal and the first one since the promulgation of the 2015 constitution. These elections are being held in 2 phases, one in 14 May 2017 (Baisakh 31, 2074 BS) and the other in 14 June 2017 (Jestha 31, 2074 BS) in 4 metropolitan cities, 13 sub-metropolitan cities, 246 municipalities and 481 rural municipalities. Nepal promulgated a new constitution in 2015, which initiated the country's transition into a federal governance mechanism. In addition to being the first step in Nepal's transition to federalism, the local level elections provide a new opportunity for local participation in government. The appointment of local representatives is set to allow for devolution of power and resources to the local level and give people a better opportunities for local ownership and accountability, thereby opening doors for local development.

Prior to the local level election, political parties released their election manifestos. Election manifestos generally specify the commitments, policies and programmes of a political party. Basically it is a blueprint of the party's vision towards development based on their political ideologies. These manifestoes enable voters to learn more about the party's vision and proposed plan of actions, making it easier for them to choose whom to vote for.

As a national development organization with health and nutrition as its priority sector, HERD team sought to collect and synthesise the prioritisation made in health and nutrition sector by the political parties through the election manifestos. In this study we examined the election manifestoes political parties namely Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal – Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN UML), Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and Naya Shakti Nepal to understand their commitment in the health sector. Manifestos of these four parties have only been included in this study as manifestos of other parties were not available online.

FINDINGS: THE ELECTION MANIFESTOS

The health and nutrition related election manifestos of the 4 major political parties are as follows;

Nepali Congress

- All health related policies and programmes will be conducted with the aim of providing reliable, quality and easy health services. The health policy will ensure that no one shall die from curable diseases due to being deprived from health services.
- At least one hospital with 15 beds will be constructed at every rural municipality that provides maternity services. A 25–50 (depending upon the need) bedded modern hospital will be constructed in all municipalities.
- In all government hospital, a social service unit will be established. The treatment for arthritis, heart diseases and kidney transplant which has been made free will be made even more convenient and also the provision of free dialysis will also be delegated to the local level.
- In the new federal structure, in every ward of the villages and municipalities, women will be provided with the required nursing training and will be deployed at their own area as a paid volunteer to ensure safe maternal and child health.
- Under the leadership of Nepali Congress, the local governments will conduct at least 100 pilot projects to include non-government sector as a service provider.
- Programmes will be held to ensure health insurance for all Nepali citizens. Programme for health insurance will be conducted throughout Nepal. Families comprising up to 5

members will be required to pay an annual amount of 25000 Rs for their membership and will receive a support of up to Rs 50000 for their medical treatment.

- A social campaign for construction of toilets in every home and hygiene/cleanliness promotion will be conducted. 'One Marginalized Family- One Free Tap' programme will be introduced for a period of five years.
- In all residential areas, safe drinking water will be made available. Cleanliness programmes will be directed towards the preservation of drinking water sources and maintenance of the quality of drinking water.
- In all municipality, a Drinking Water Board will be established for the management of drinking water.
- With the slogan of 'Post-natal mother: Nutritious food', post-natal mothers will be provided with nutrition coupons by the local health center. Also, to ensure proper nutrition for post-natal mothers, a regular nutrition allowance will be provisioned.
- Treatment programmes will be conducted throughout the country. The current Sunaula Hazar Din (Golden Thousand Days) programme will be made available in all wards.

CPN UML

- The implementation of national rights concerning health as determined by the constitution will be assured. For this the investment will be increased as needed.
- All citizens will be provided with compulsory health insurance. For those who are poor, the government will waive 50% of the cost that has to be paid for the insurance. In all the hospitals in operation under the government will provide free of cost treatment for a range of diseases determined by the government.
- A hospitals with a capacity of 25 beds in every rural municipality and a hospital with a capacity of 50 beds in every municipality will be brought into operation.
- The services of vaccination, family planning, safe maternal and child health will be brought into operation in every health post and tole in Nepal.
- In local level hospitals, along with allopathic, ayurvedic, homeopathic, yunani, acupuncture, amchi and other natural and traditional health services, alternative treatment process will be introduced and brought forth in a united and coordinated manner.
- Nutrition programme will be brought into operation in every village and city in a way that all villages and cities will be free of malnutrition. No children will die from not having access to health services and vaccination. Also the practice of child marriage which is responsible for high maternal mortality will be abolished. Pregnant and post-natal mothers will be provided with all required nutritional support along with free of cost and easily accessible health services.
- Blood testing, checkups and medicines for fatal diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney diseases, cancer etc. will be provided free of cost. Also for kidney patients, dialysis and transplant services will be made easy and free of cost in every province.
- In rural municipalities and municipalities, for the control and treatment of cancer, a cancer treatment center will be established.
- Production and distribution of tobacco and alcohol products will be strictly regulated. Likewise, the production and sales of unhealthy food item will be discouraged and awareness will be given to not eat such food. Also the excessive use of fertilizers and insecticides/pesticides will be controlled and the production and distribution of organic food products will be given special subsidies.
- In order to control, identify, provide psycho-social counselling and provide free treatment for mental health problems, different community based programmes will be conducted.

Diseases such as dengue, chikungunya, malaria, kalazar, encephalitis etc. will be effectively controlled. The situation of people dying due lack of treatment for TB, pneumonia, typhoid and diarrhea will be ended.

- Primary treatment facilities inside and outside the schools will be made available and sexual-reproductive health related programmes for young girls and boys will be brought into operation. Students will be provided with required psycho-social counselling and will provided with quality education.
- Programmes will be introduced for increasing the health awareness and for bringing positive changes in the lifestyle of the people.
- Public gyms and entertainment centers will be brought into operation for making exercise, yoga and entertainment an integral part of the people's lifestyle.
- One trauma center will be opened in a distance of 30 minutes in every villages and cities of highways to provide effective and timely treatment to the victims of road accidents. Also for the most marginalized villages, the provision for air ambulance will be introduced. Free treatment will be provided for the victims of sudden accidents and natural disasters.
- A special plan for medicine production will be developed for the preservation and improvement of the herbs and other medical items that are found in Nepal. Ayurveda and traditional medicinal practices will be promoted, investigated, taught and the quality of services will be improved.
- Handicapped people will receive free of cost health services from local hospitals. The elderly citizens and people from marginalized families will be provided easy and free of cost medical services.
- Health centers will be established and operated and health education will be changed through the identification of the requirements experts and health technologies in the health sector in order to provide quality health service. Research and investigations related to health will be encouraged. The practice of using health education as a medium for earning profit will be discouraged.

RPP

- A hospital with a capacity of 25 beds will be constructed in every village/municipality.
- In the hospitals that receives donations from villages and municipalities, primary healthcare facilities will be provided free of cost. A treatment fund will be established in every village and municipality. From this fund, the cancer patients and patients of kidney failure within the village/municipality will be provided with amount of 1 lakh rupees for their medical expenses.
- At least 2 FCHV will be appointed in every ward of every village/municipality and necessary training will be provided to disseminate health related awareness. Also the provision to take health services at the doors of individuals will be introduced.
- Within 7 years all citizens from all village/municipality will have health insurance.
- Female Community Health Volunteers will be given an allowance of at least Rs 2000 monthly. Mothers from marginalized families will be provided with an amount of Rs 5000 when they give birth to a baby as a grant for feeding nutritious food to the baby.
- A food security policy will be implemented to ensure no one stays hungry in all rural municipality and municipalities from hilly region.
- Food items will be made available in subsidy for extremely marginalized and backward groups will be from rural municipalities and municipalities.

Naya Shakti Nepal

- A plan will be developed and implemented to control the excessive deformation and disharmony in the health sector and make the health services easy, accessible and of high quality.
- Two 500 bedded hospitals will be opened in every province.
- A provision for providing free health services for children below 15 years of age and elderly citizens over the age of 65 will be established.
- Handicapped people, pregnant women, single women, war affected people, Dalit communities, transgender and homosexual people and people living below the poverty margins will be provided with 75 percent discount on health services and health services for these people will eventually be made free.
- Within 5 years the provision of health insurance for all citizens will be implemented as a campaign.
- In Karnali and other rural areas, 5 helicopters will be provided immediately for transporting women and emergency patients, so that people do not have to lose their life by not reaching the hospital in time.
- In every municipality, a hospital with at least 100 beds and in every ward a health center with 5 beds will be made.
- Through an integrated service center, agriculture, cattle farming, fishery, herb farming and industry essential technical services, counselling on physical and mental health, tourism promotion, and law related consultancy services will be provided. Additionally, yoga/health camps will be operated.
- Pregnant women, children below the age of 10 and senior citizens over the age of 65 will not be charged any fare ambulance or in any public transportation within the city.
- In every rural municipality, a hospital with at least 25 bed will be made and one health center will be made in every ward.
- In every rural municipality, one food storage center, production center, collection center, sales center and one cold storage facility will be established.

DISCUSSIONS

All the 4 parties have committed to the establishment of hospitals in every villages and municipalities as their top priority. Furthermore, all the parties seemed to be equally dedicated to provide health insurance to all Nepali citizens in all rural municipalities and municipalities. Likewise, pregnant and post-natal mothers will be provided with all required nutritional support along with free cost and easily accessible health services.

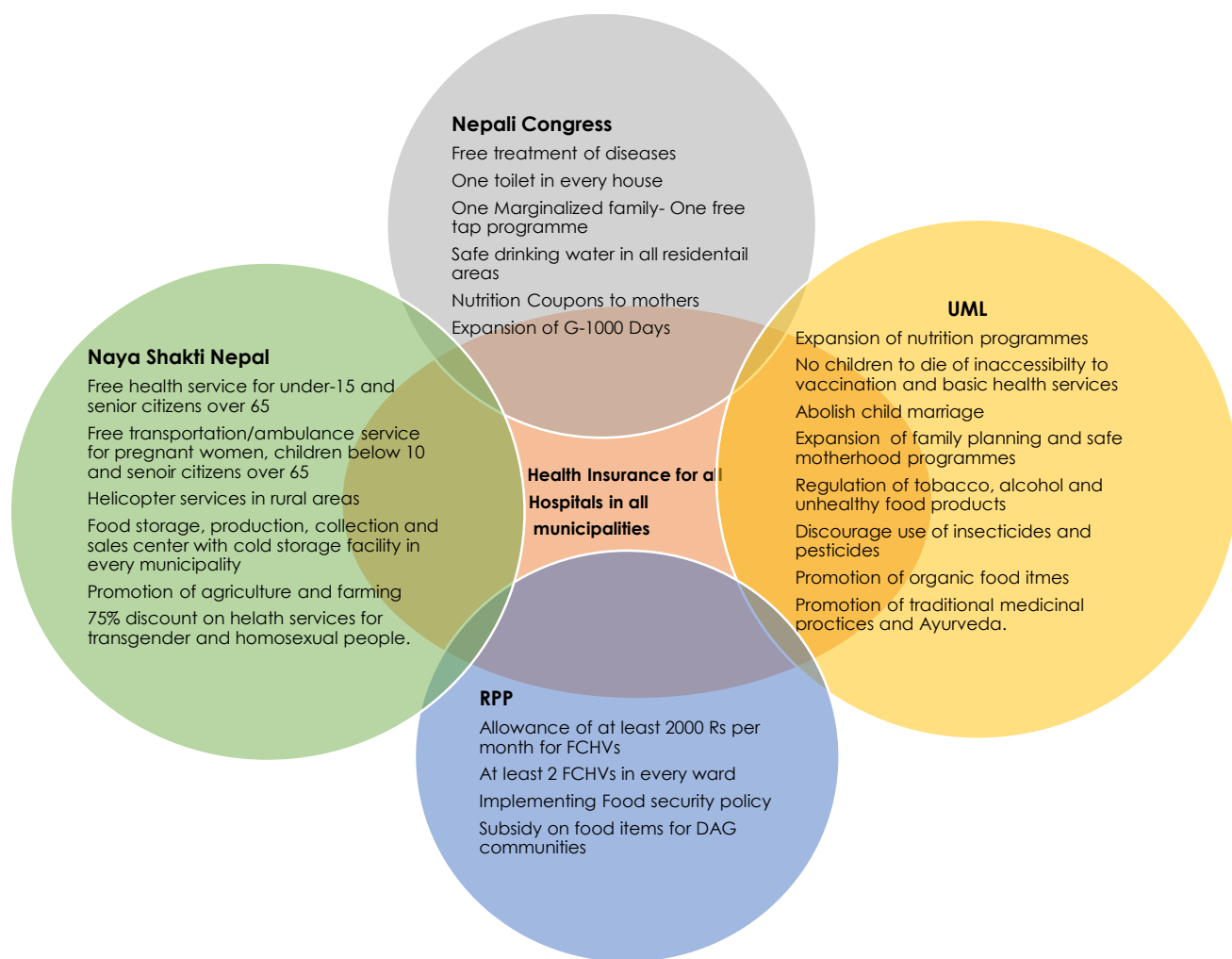
The Nepali Congress have committed that no Nepali citizens will die of curable disease in federal Nepal. The party manifesto states that the treatment for arthritis, heart diseases and kidney transplant will be made free and more convenient and the provision of dialysis will be delegated also to the local level. NC plans to include non-government sectors as a service provider through pilot projects. According to Nepali Congress, in the new federal structure, women will be provided with nursing training and will be deployed in their own locality as a paid volunteer to ensure safe maternal and child health. Furthermore, the party plans to construct one toilet in every home and conduct cleanliness promotion programmes. Likewise, 'One Marginalized Family- One Free Tap' programme will be executed for a period of five years with the provision of safe drinking water available in every residential areas of the country. In terms of nutrition, the party plans to provide post natal mothers with nutrition coupons through the local health center and to ensure proper nutrition for post natal mothers,

a regular nutrition allowance will also be provisioned. Furthermore, the current Sunaula Hazar Din, programme will be made available in all wards.

Among all the parties, CPN UML's manifesto incorporated the areas of nutrition very well. The party expresses commitment to bring nutrition programme into operation in every villages and cities to make them free of malnutrition. UML manifesto states that no children will die as a result of inaccessibility to vaccines and basic health services. CPN UML commits to abolish the practice of child marriage from Nepal which is responsible for high prevalence of maternal mortality in the country. It commits that the service of vaccination, family planning, safe maternal and child health will be brought into operation in every health post and localities in Nepal. In addition, blood testing, checkups and medicines for fatal diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney-related diseases and cancer will be provided free of cost. Likewise, there would be provision for regulating the production and distribution of tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food products will be introduced. In addition, the party states that it discourages the excessive use of pesticides and fertilizers and promotes organic food items, use of traditional medicinal practices and Ayurveda instead.

RPP has come up with more support mechanisms in favour of FCHVs. The party has a provision to give an allowance of at least Rs 2000 monthly to FCHVs and at least 2 FCHVs will be appointed in every ward of every village/municipality and also necessary training will be provided to them to disseminate health related awareness. The party also focuses on developing a food security policy in the country with the assurance that no citizen from any rural municipalities and municipalities particularly would have shortage of food intake. The party has kept provision of subsidies on food items especially for the disadvantaged, marginalized and backward groups in its manifesto.

Naya Shakti Nepal, has stated the provisions of providing free health services for children below 15 years of age and senior citizens over the age of 65 with free health services. Also, the manifesto states that the transportation including ambulance service will be made free for pregnant women, children below 10 and senior citizens over 65 years of age. The party has also committed to provide helicopter services for rural areas to provide timely treatment; establishment of food storage centers, production centers, collection center, sales center and one cold storage facility in every rural municipality. Agricultural and farming promotion is also a major part of their agenda. Furthermore, Naya Shakti Nepal has also come up with a unique policy of supporting LGBTs by providing 75% discount on health services.



Manifestoes are the blueprint of the political party's image. In this advert, the manifestoes are developed with ambitious visions and goals which may sound impressive but could be difficult to implement. The resources and national capacity may be insufficient to support the claims made in these manifestos. The parties tend to adhere to a **'Populist Strategy'** by developing ambitious plans - making impressive commitments to get votes and this can have larger implications upon the parties as they will lose trust of the citizens and will raise doubts on the reliability of the political commitments.

Moreover, in Nepal, manifestos are created based on the history, visions and political ideologies of the parties. These manifestos tend to be more inclined to their theories rather than on the developmental needs of the country. Manifestos are not a mere formality but are the basis for long term national development. These manifestos need to be based on requirements and need assessment of the people rather than just concentrating on their ideologies, beliefs and political agendas.

CONCLUSION

The manifestos presented by the parties are important national documents that explain what the parties will do if they win the elections. The voters come to know about the policies, agendas and commitments of the various parties that are fighting in the election. Manifestos present an opportunity for the public to engage and learn about the parties and inspect their policies. The information provided by the election manifestos are crucial to the voting decision making process in an open and democratic election.

We have observed that all the parties have common agendas in areas of hospital establishment and universal health coverage for all citizens of Nepal. However, there are distinctive differences in other agendas among the parties. Some parties tend to focus more on increasing accessibility of the health services, while others on making the health services cheap and affordable, nutrition/child and maternal health, more support and motivation to female community health workers, hygiene and sanitation, immunization and vaccination.

The manifestos presented by the parties generally involve impressive agendas and commitments. However, without the accomplishment of their agenda and fulfillment of their commitments, these manifestos could backfire on the political parties themselves when not implemented. Manifestos need to be more than just words and need to be brought into action. Manifestos often tend to focus on the superficial and ignore the things we really need. Furthermore, these manifestos are also written in times of election when their priority is only to win the election. Hence, more often a whole array of long-term agendas are conveniently forgotten. Manifestos need to be more than just some political advertisement. It is evident that all political parties have released attractive manifestos to draw votes without proper analysis of the national context and economic situations. In the past, political parties have failed to fulfill their commitment in Nepal and have been largely disapproved by the opposing parties.

Furthermore, in Nepal we have a tendency of providing supply-driven facilities and services rather than on the basis of needs of the citizens. The government decides on what interventions to make based on their internal capacity and technical competencies. Sometimes political parties tend to propose their plans and programmes based on their history, political ideologies and past experience which may not always be relevant to the present context and circumstances. The agendas and commitment need to be beneficiary-centered and specifically targeted to meet the needs of the people. There is a need to conduct prior research and need assessment studies in order to understand where and what type of interventions and facilities are needed. Their decisions need to be based on evidence and facts rather than on set ideologies.

If the parties manage to comply with their manifestos, it will largely benefit them. Besides aiding to the sustainable development goals of the nation, it also aids as a trust-building platform for the political parties. These manifestos are vital for the creation of their political image in the minds of the citizens. The parties need to take ownership and should be held accountable for the agendas and commitments mentioned in the manifestos.