

Minimum Service Standards assessment tool and the Hospital Strengthening Program: A novel first step towards the quality improvement of Nepal’s national hospital system.

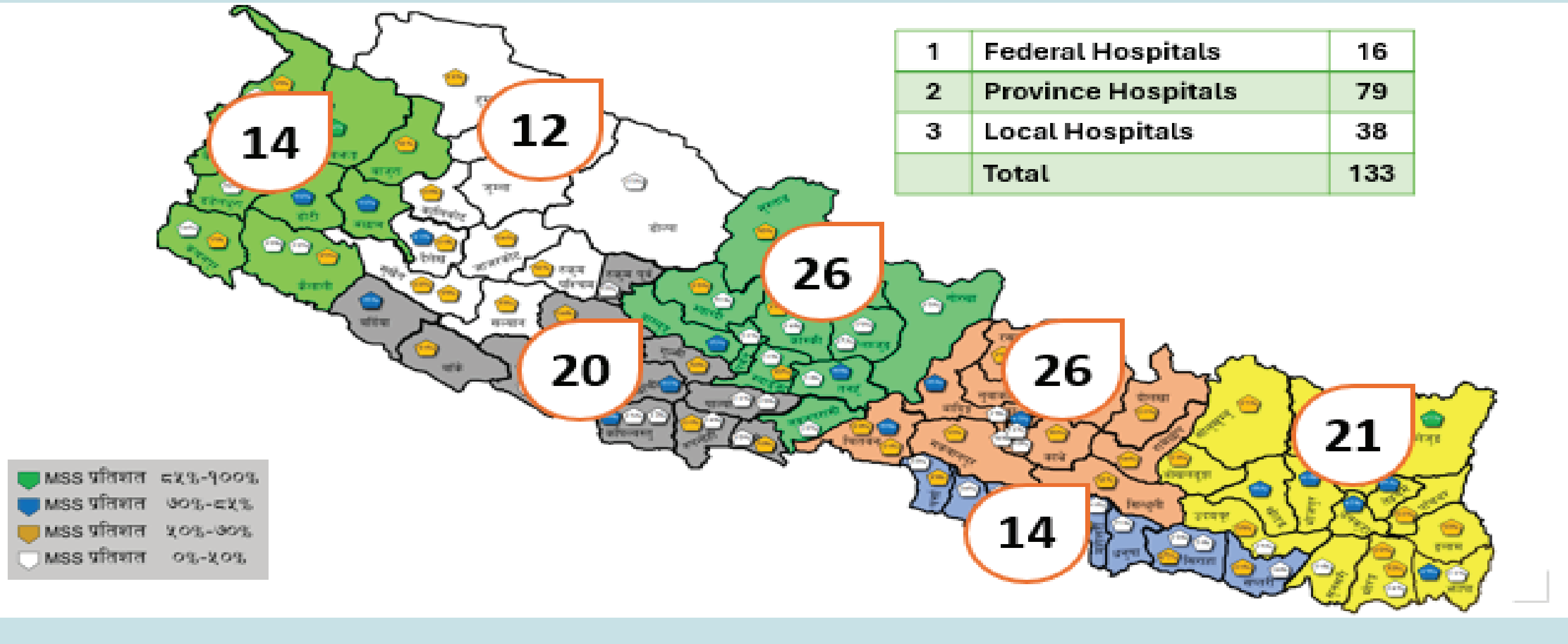
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Background

- Hospitals In Nepal face significant challenges in delivering quality health care, due to inadequate infrastructure, human resources, and equipment.
- To address these issues, Nick Simons Institute in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Population, Nepal jointly initiated Hospital Strengthening Program (HSP) and developed the Minimum Service Standards (MSS) assessment tool in 2014.
- This paper highlights the development, implementation, and impact of the program which has served as a blueprint for improving hospital readiness, addressing critical service gaps, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement across government hospitals.

Figure 1 : Province wise MSS implemented hospitals



Methods

The MSS tool offers a standardized framework for assessing hospital readiness and availability of services comprising three key domains:
1.Governance and Management (20%), 2.Clinical Service Management (60%) 3.Hospital Support Service Management (20%).

- Assessment Framework:**
MSS involves a detailed checklist-based evaluation covering essential services and operational standards.
- Gap Identification and Funding:**
Identified deficiencies are addressed through the planning and budgeting meetings
- Implementation and Monitoring:**
The MSS initiative employs a structured process of data collection, analysis, and follow-up assessments to ensure continuous improvement.

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

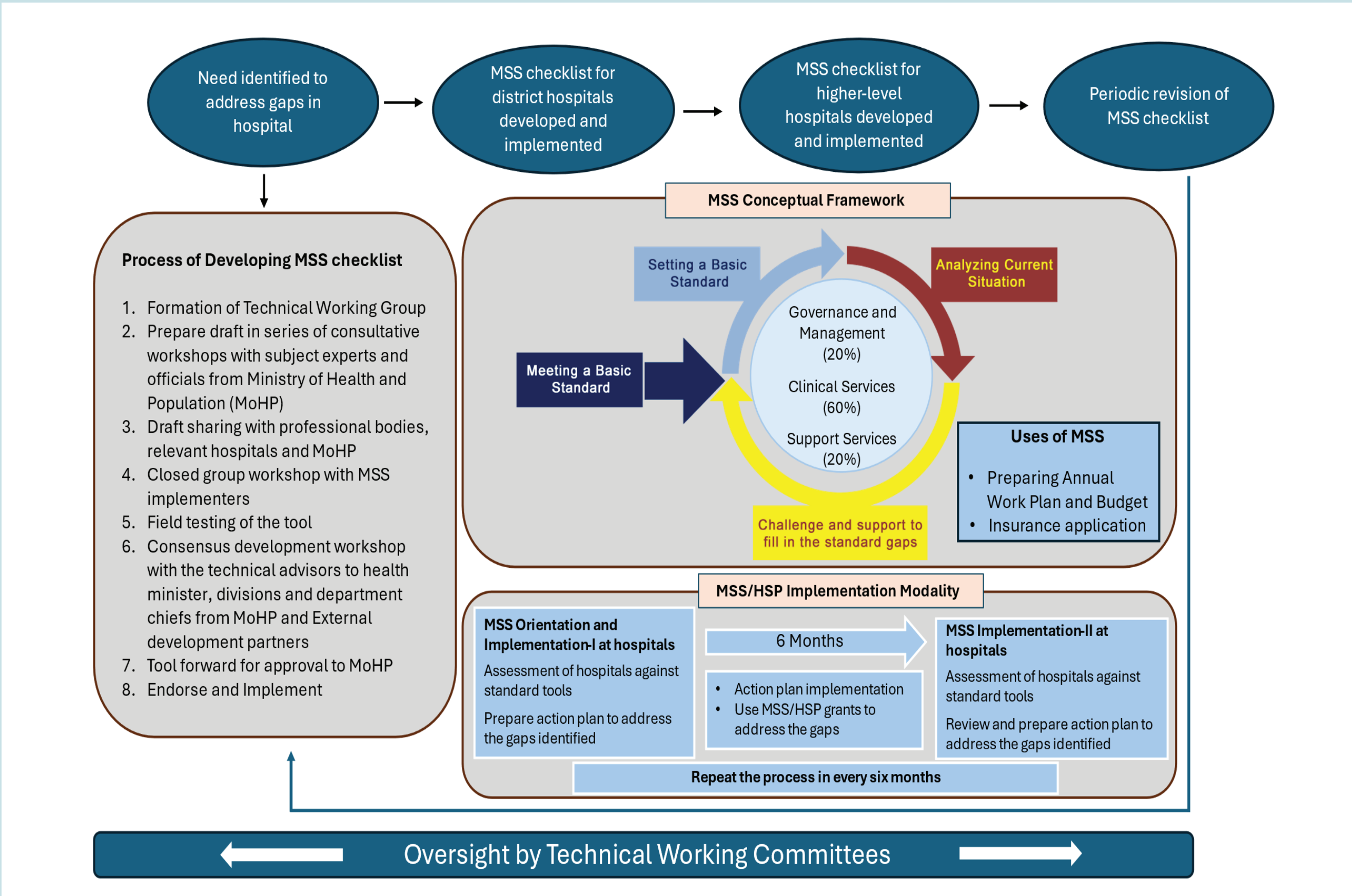
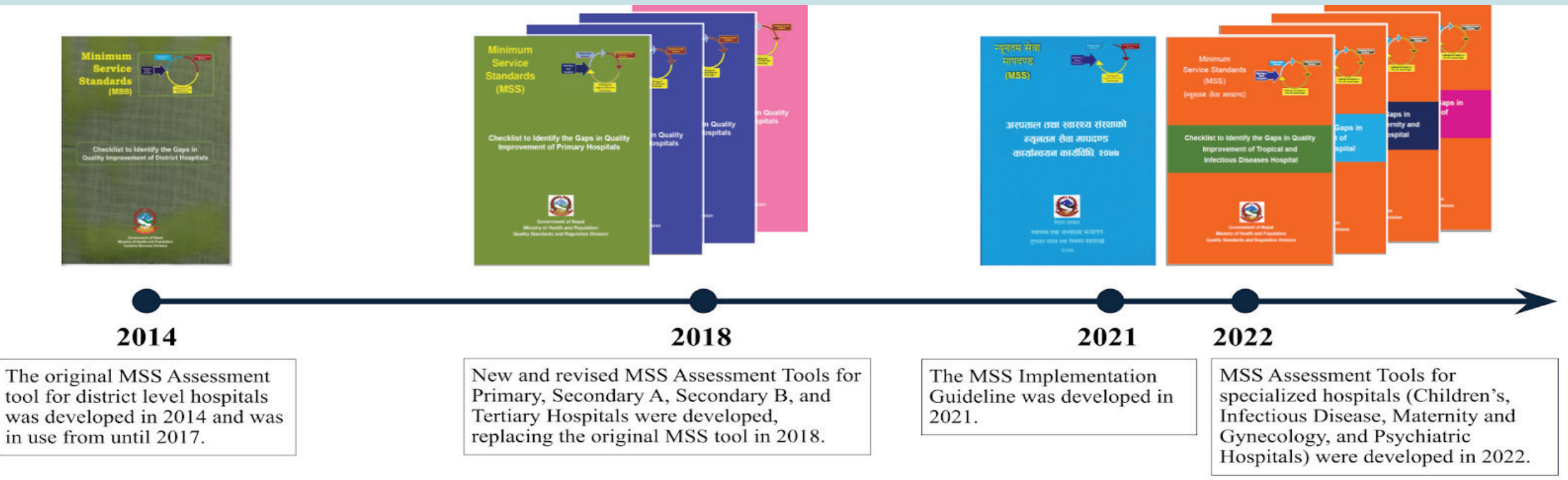


Figure 3. Timeline of MSS Assessment tool Development



Findings

- Since its launch in 2014, the MSS initiative has accomplished several key milestones achieved significant **milestones**:
- Expansion:** MSS has been implemented in 133 government hospitals till July 2024.
 - Improved Clinical Services:** MSS provides a blueprint for hospitals to pursue excellence and has tracked and motivated substantial improvement in clinical services, such as
 - Basic laboratory investigation (+46%) increased from 39% to 85% ,
 - Spinal anesthesia (+32%) increased from 51% to 83%
 - Cesarean sections (+40%)- increased from 45% to 85%
 - Policy and Management Impact:**
The MSS has shaped budget allocation, hospital upgrade criteria, and insurance reimbursement policies .

Figure 4. Percentage of Hospitals meeting select MSS standards at Baseline (2014-2017) and Most Recent (2023/24) (n=72)

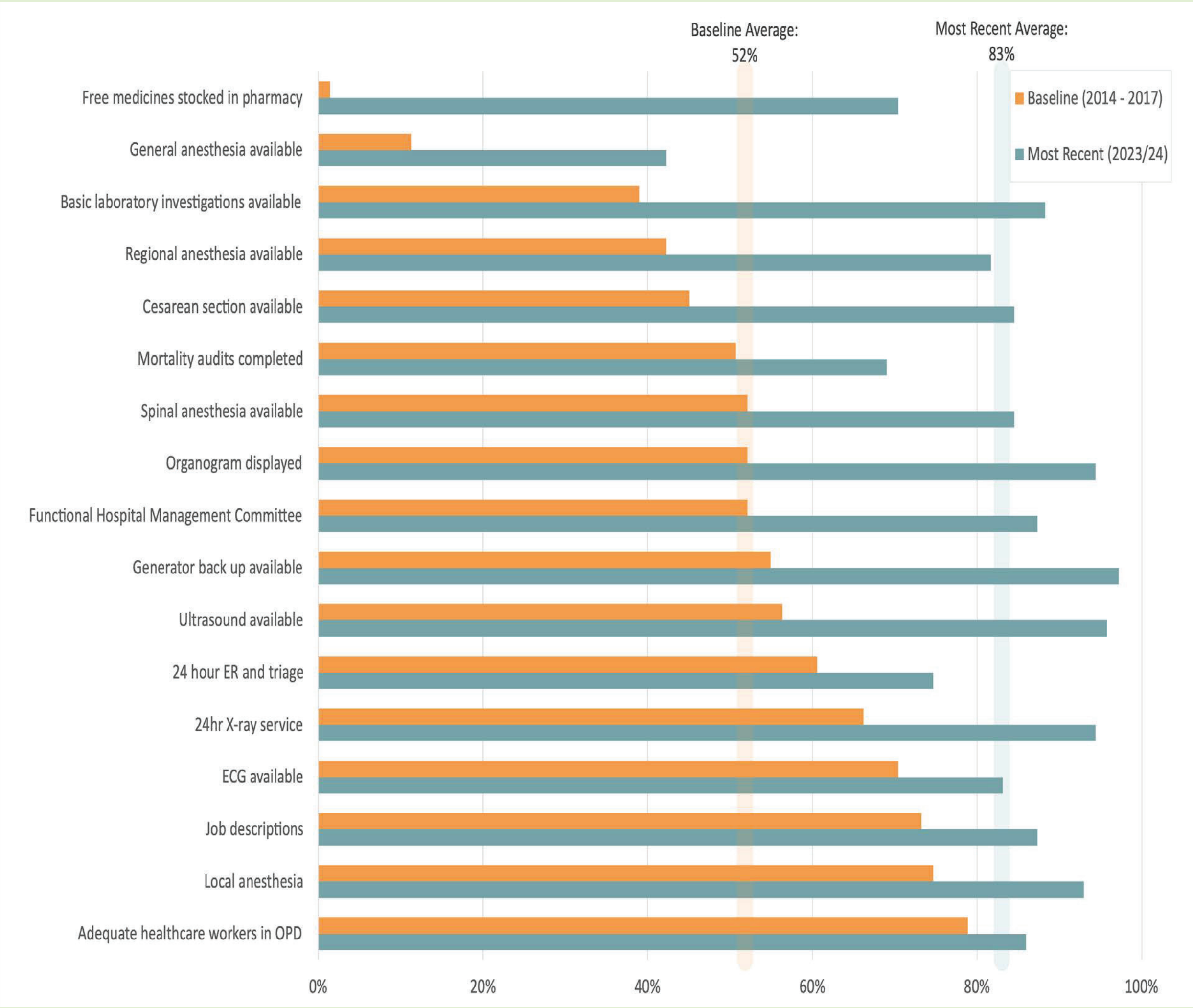


Figure 4 shows the % of hospitals meeting MSS standards at baseline and their most recent assessment. Average % of hospitals meeting selected MSS standard was 51.8% at baseline and 83.1% for most recent data.

Figure 5. Change in Total MSS Scores Overtime by Hospital Level from 2019 – April 2024 (n=693)

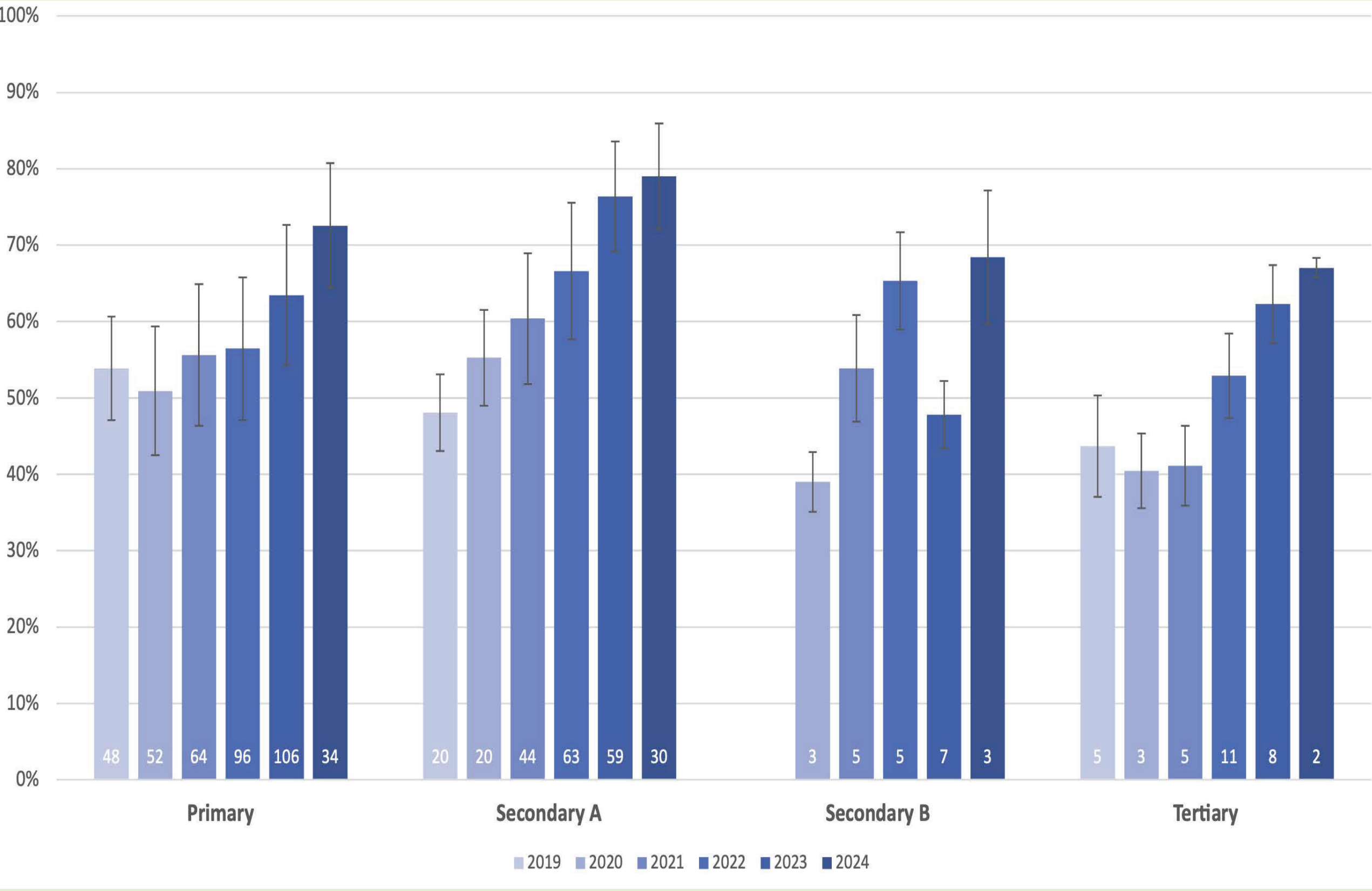


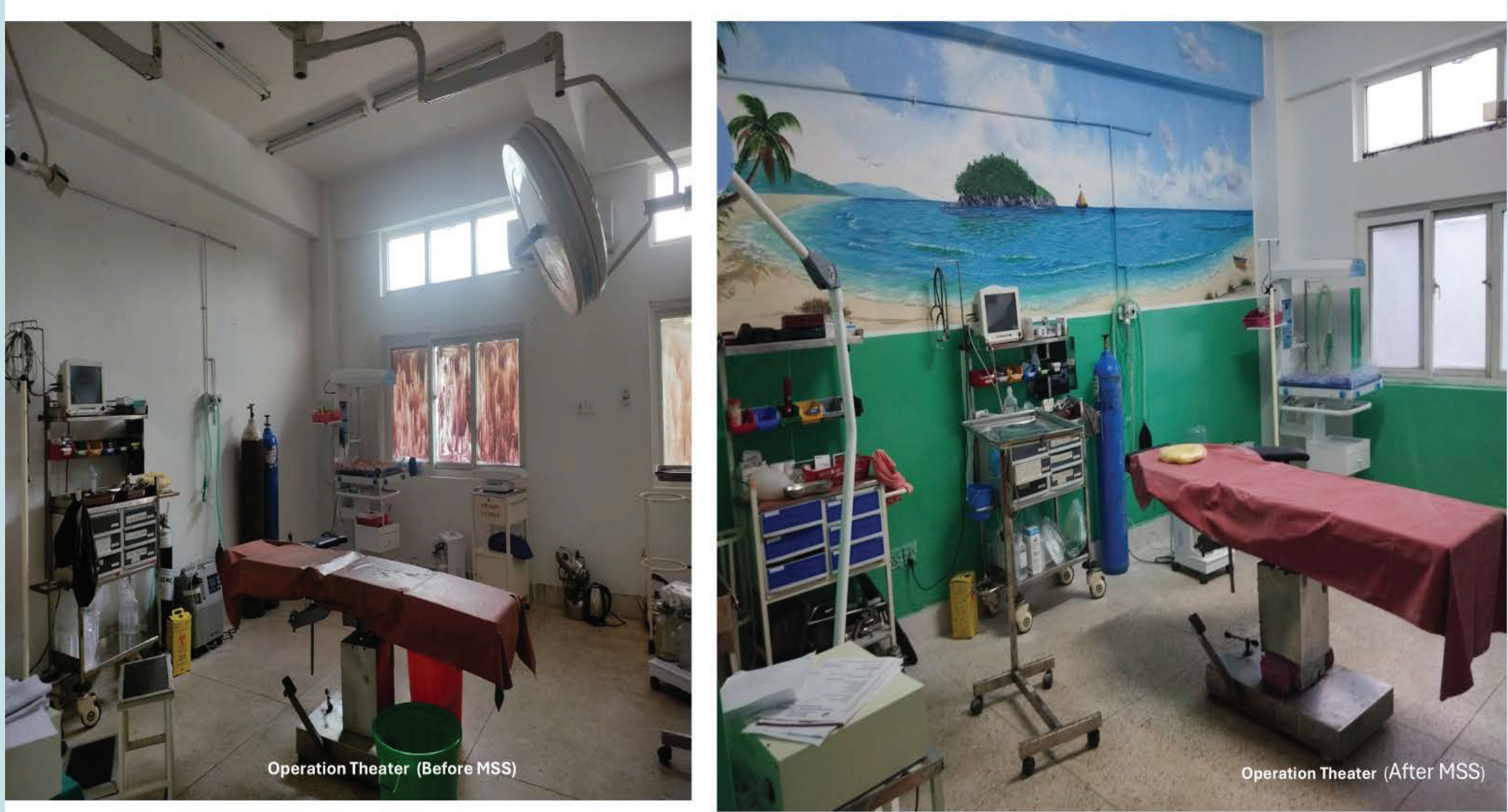
Figure 5 shows a significant and sustained increase in the average total MSS score from 51.6% in 2019 to 66.4% in 2023 (n=180) and 75.0% in 2024 (n=69) across all level of hospitals in current version of MSS assessment tool. The decrease in Secondary B’s score in 2023 due to recent upgrading of hospital levels.

Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The MSS initiative demonstrates that quality improvement programs can succeed in resource-limited settings when supported by systematic assessment tools and strategic resource allocation. The key factors driving the program’s success include:

- Context-Specific Design:**
MSS was tailored to Nepal’s healthcare challenges, ensuring relevance and acceptability.
- Government Collaboration:**
Close partnership with the Ministry of Health and Population provided legitimacy, sustained support, and enforcement mechanisms.
- Continuous Improvement Culture:**
By providing hospitals with a clear roadmap for excellence, the MSS initiative has fostered a mindset of accountability, competition, and ongoing improvement.

Hospitals before and after MSS Implementation:



Voices from the field:

- "MSS serves as the backbone of many health facilities. It is the anatomy of hospitals—without it, their physiology cannot function properly." Director (Health Directorate, Madhesh Province)
- "MSS inspired me to take on the responsibility of Medical Superintendent by guiding my managerial decisions. It serves as the foundation for quality hospital services.“ Medical Superintendent, Bardibas Hospital.

Conclusion

- The MSS program is a pioneering and impactful initiative aimed at improving healthcare quality in Nepal's government hospitals.
- It serves as a model for LMICs looking to enhance healthcare quality through context-specific, scalable, and sustainable interventions.

"Quality healthcare is achievable in LMICs with the right tools and resources."

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