

Local Development Plan: An Avenue for University-Local Government-Community Collaboration for Sustainable Community Development

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Abstract

Sustainable development has been one of the top priorities in the present world. Community development programmes are considered important in achieving sustainability. Universities or educational institutions often talk about, and collaborate with community for its development. However, there is less attention to an institutional mechanism to include local government in the collaboration of university and community for designing and implementing sustainable community development programmes. This paper advances a model of tripartite collaboration between the university, local government and community in promoting sustainable community development through a local development plan. Drawing upon the thematic reviews of selective literature in the field of sustainable development, community development, university- community collaboration, and policies and practices of local development plan in Nepal, this paper, from the perspective of social dimensions of sustainable development, argues that the local development plan can be an avenue for collaboration between the university, local government and community for sustainable community development.

Keywords: Sustainable Development; Community Development, University- Local Government-Community Collaboration, Local Development Plan

Introduction

This paper aims to explore the possibility of university-local government-community collaboration for sustainable community development (SCD) through a local development plan. In this paper, SCD represents an overarching goal, where university-local government-community collaboration (ULGCC) is a model or strategy to support this goal that can be applied in the planning process of the local governments. Sustainable development, with the announcement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) in 2015, has been the single most priority for both the national governments and international organizations. This has been an overarching issue from global to local levels. Hence,

successful implementation of SDG has been a common concern for all agencies working at different levels for the betterment of the world.

For the sustainable development, community development programmes which are designed and implemented at the local level are considered significant. Universities and higher educational institutions advocate for transformative education that promotes community development programmes for achieving the goal of sustainable development. They often make discourse about community development and build collaboration with the community for its development. There is more practice of bilateral collaboration between university and local community, which is based on short-term needs of both parties rather than from the perspective of long-term sustainable development. Though some authors argue for the need of additional third party to facilitate the university-community collaboration (Keating & Sjoquist, 2000), there is less attention to an institutional mechanism that also includes local governments in the collaboration of university and community for designing and implementing sustainable community development programmes in incorporating them into the local development plan (LDP). This paper examines this issue and suggests a tripartite collaboration between university, local government and community in promoting community development programmes that contribute to sustainable development at its end from the perspective of development planning at the local level. Moreover, this paper argues that development planning of the local government can be an avenue for collaboration between the local government, university, and community for community development programmes.

This paper is based on thematic reviews of selective literature in the field of sustainable development, community development, university-community collaboration practice and development planning. Particularly, I have drawn upon the policies and practices of development planning of the local bodies in Nepal, namely the district development plan, which was in existence for long but ceased recently after the election of rural municipalities and municipalities in 2017, following the restructuring of administrative system as per the new constitution of Nepal, 2015. However, it is likely that the planning policy of the new local governments – rural municipalities and municipalities will build on the past practices of participatory planning process with a few essential modifications. In such a context, I have used ideas and insights drawn from the observations of development planning process at the district level pertaining to my ongoing PhD research in the field of decentralised planning. In addition, this paper is also informed by my professional experiences, which I gained working as a development practitioner and researcher.

After this brief introduction, I discuss at first the concept and theory of sustainable development, which provides a theoretical foundation for the main theme of this paper -sustainable community development. Then, I present the conceptual and theoretical discussion on sustainable community development, university-local government-community collaboration and local development plan. After this, I explain the policy and

practice of local development plan, particularly the District Development Plan in Nepal to show how community people and other actors can participate in this process. This is followed by a model of collaboration between university, local government and community for the sustainable community development programme with example of local level development plan in Nepal. Finally, I draw conclusion from the preceding discussion made in the paper.

Concept and Theory of Sustainable Development: An Overview

Sustainability is a fundamental aspect of any development efforts. However, its complexity and multidimensionality make it difficult to comprehend it with a defined theoretical perspective (Jabareen, 2008). Though there is no universal definition of such complex and dynamic concept, the definition propounded by the famous Brundtland Report (1987) is considered more widely acceptable, which defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Basiago, 1999, p. 148). There are three core dimensions of sustainable development, which the conference organized by the United Nations in Rio de Janeiro put forward as ecological, economic and social (Bjärstig, 2017).

These three dimensions, though their roles are different, need to be integrated to achieve sustainable development (Kemp, Parto, & Gibson, 2005). Priority, however, may vary depending upon the particular context. This paper is informed by the social dimension of sustainable development, which asserts that “a socially sustainable system must achieve distributional equity, adequate provision of social services including health and education, gender equity, and political accountability and participation” (Harris, 2000, p. 6). ‘Political accountability’, in the context of this paper, concerns with the role of local government in planning and implementing community development for the benefits of local people while the term ‘participation’ suggests for the involvement of all actors in the community development as a collaborative practice. Collaboration among stakeholders has been considered indispensable to achieve sustainability at present time (Gray & Stites, 2013). In this paper, collaboration among stakeholders like university, local government and community has been proposed for sustainable community development.

SCD, ULGCC and LDP: Conceptual and Theoretical Discussions

Since this paper builds upon three different but interrelated concepts – sustainable community development (SCD), university-local government-community collaboration (ULGCC) and local development plan (LDP), I discuss these three concepts in this section in order to develop an integrated understanding of these concepts. The whole discussion is informed by the perspective of participatory development and bottom-up planning approach, which are in practice since 1980s after the failure of traditional modernist approach of development and top-down planning.

Sustainable Community Development

The field of community development is vague as it appears to denote many things that occur in communities, which are supposed to benefit local people. This is a dynamic concept changing over time, and is specific to the context. "...the concept is not cohesive and unified but represents a repertoire of meanings which encompass many shades of community development that are not necessarily mutually compatible but reflect particular political and social practices in the contexts in which they occur (Sihlongonyane, 2009, p. 137). Hence, there can be various concepts and approaches of community development. However, the goal of community development is ultimately to help community people to address their problems in the changed context. "Building resilient communities that can support themselves is a crucial factor in today's modern society, where local governments deal with increasingly complex social issues, as well as the need for modern facilities and services" (Department of Local Government and Communities/Government of Western Australia, 2015, p. 6) . Community development, therefore, mainly seeks solution to the local problems with the participation of local community.

Though the field of community development is excessively wide, there is yet to do much in collaborative way to improve the living conditions of community people. As the field is wide, there can be many sub-areas of community development, and various types of agencies can be involved in this affair. But the overall goal of community development is to uplift the living conditions of people. "The predominate focus and value of community development is to improve people's lives. It is a practice in the sense that many are involved at the local, regional and national levels" (Lee, Kim, & Phillips, 2015, p. 2). Fabiani and Buss (2008) have rightly pointed the diverse field of community development and need of collaboration as they say it is "highly diverse, providing as yet unrecognized opportunities for synergistic collaborations" (p. 4). Thus, an important issue on the practice of community development is that though it is in practice since long ago and many are involved in this field, there is need of partnerships and collaborations among the stakeholders to get synergic impact from it.

Though community development is in practice since the beginning of human society (Garkovich, 2011), the concept of sustainable community development (SCD) is a recent one. It emerged with the increasing concern to sustainable development. Sustainable development is not only a broad term that carries wider meanings and interpretations but also a contesting term due to the conflicting interests of various stakeholders (Kemp et al., 2005). Nevertheless, the concept of sustainable development occupies central place in present policy paradigm, and it has been the responsibility of local authorities to work with local communities for sustainability (Saha, 2009). Integration of key components – social, economic and ecological - is viewed as essential condition for sustainable development, which is equally important from global to local levels (Kemp et al., 2005).

It is realized that to achieve the goal of sustainable development, conventional community development programmes need to be designed considering the principles of sustainable development. “Development of all types requires reconsideration and transformation in light of the sustainability imperatives. Community development is no exception” (Hembd & Silberstein, 2011, p. 262). Integration of sustainability dimension into the conventional economic development of community entails sustainable community development as it is a “merging of aspects of the fields of community development and economic development, implying practice aimed at community betterment and economic improvement at the local level, preferably encompassing sustainable development approaches” (Phillips & Besser, 2013, as cited in Lee et al., 2015, p. 4). Hence, in the age of widespread concern to sustainable development stand-alone practice of community development in the traditional way would be an out of fashion approach.

There can be scepticism on community development in the context of rapidly expanding globalization. However, in spite of the increasing globalization, there is still significance of community development as local issues exist everywhere (Robinson & Green, 2011). What drives the local people to community development is their common need and interest. Change that occurs in the field of community development is the sustainability aspect (Hembd & Silberstein, 2011). The notion of sustainability has raised the concerns of wider sections of society towards the community development of certain specific community, not limiting to the interests of local people. “Sustainability strategies at the community level need to reflect a global view and understanding” (Hembd & Silberstein, 2011, p. 263). There is also one famous common saying used to express the global- local nexus - “Think Globally, Act Locally”. Community development programme is essential for sustainable development as “approaches designed to recognize local specificity can mobilise and foster local knowledge, building greater understanding of, and commitment to, sustainability objectives” (Kemp et al., 2005, p. 15). Thus, it appears that community development is guided and influenced by global agenda but implemented in the local context to meet the needs of local people within the framework of sustainable development.

At local level, there will be various stakeholders of community development as it is not only the outcome but also a social process (Robinson & Green, 2011). In the process of community development, local government and its planning mechanism can be a viable way. Participation of local community in the decision making process of planning is crucial for establishing ownership and sustainability. “Since sustainability requires local resources and strategies, public participation in the planning process seems critical and essential” (Blair, 2004, p. 104). However, in practice, according to Blair (2004), participation of local people is constrained due to inappropriate mechanism. This calls for support to local government as well as communities to undertake community development efforts in a sustainable way. Hence, I discuss, in the section below, the concept and practice of university–community collaboration and try to explore the possibility of additional

involvement of local government to create a mechanism of university-local government-community collaboration for sustainable community development.

Universities' Collaboration With Community and Other Actors

I discussed above that community development seeks collaboration among different stakeholders. Indeed, there is a long established practice of university-community collaboration for community development. There is a common practice of university across the world, working with the community in helping them to solve their practical problems. "Partnerships between communities and institutions of higher education are emblematic of a more general trend in community development" (Armijo, 2005, p. 366). Though there is a long practice of university-community collaboration, "...the building of significant partnerships between universities and communities is still a complex task, which generates multiple tensions" (Strier, 2010, p. 1). One of the tensions identified by Strier (2010) is power relationship between the two partners. Hence, it is useful to assume here that involvement of third party namely local government may transform this power relationship for the "development of meaningful partnerships with communities" (Strier, 2010, p. 1).

One of the key areas where universities have been engaged in community development is through service-learning, which has been in practice for long. According to Angelique (2001), service learning programmes provide opportunity to students to use their academic learning to solve various community problems. Thus, it helps establishing a kind of collaboration between university and community. Lieberman, Miller, and Kohl (2000) see important roles of universities for the betterment of the communities, and view that though there is a practice of partnership between universities and communities, there still are many areas to be explored and to bring into practice. Another important point they raise on university-community partnership is that "both are long-term residents of the community. If the university performs poorly, it is unable to throw up its hands and leave town. It either needs to withdraw from the partnership or redesign its efforts" (Lieberman et al., 2000, p. 167). This indicates both the university and community as viable partners of each other.

However, the mechanism developed and adopted for the university-community partnership is crucial for its sustainability and for better results thereof. "The type of interaction and the sustainability of the partnership depend, to a great extent, upon the kind of organizational structure that is used to link the university and the community" (Keating & Sjoquist, 2000, p. 142). This indicates the need of a linking mechanism or agency for facilitating the partnership of university and community. Keating and Sjoquist (2000) also view that poor communities do not have the ability to establish linkage with university themselves such as the linkage of government and business sector. Hence, there is a need of another agency to have effective partnership between community and university. For this, the most possible agency can be the local government, which is closest to the community.

Collaboration of universities or academic institutions with community is increasing with the introduction of participatory research and development. It is argued that learning will be enhanced when there is wider collaboration for community development. Seitz (2001) introduces Participatory Planning for Sustainable Community Development Method (PPSCD), which seeks participation of community people in all the steps and process of community development. The PPSCD method helps enhance the learning for all kind of stakeholders from researchers to policy makers. Indeed the shift “from gathering data to increasing learning has been the trend in international participatory development theory and practice over the last twenty years” (Seitz, 2001, p.9). University and academic institutions can play a crucial role in this collaborative learning process of development. “Just as the community becomes a learning resource in this process, so universities must become more of a community of interests, leading by example toward new democratic paths to development” (Wiewel, Gaffikin, & Morrissey, 2000, p.29). Again, there will be the need of a facilitating agency, namely local government for sustainable partnership between the university and the community.

Like with the community, there is also working relation between the government and the universities which benefits each other. According to Gordon (2016), there is high possibility of mutual partnership between university and government in the field of knowledge management and skill enhancement. Regarding the university-government working relationship, Battaglio (2008) views that “In linking practice and theory, academic institutions can play an important role in advancing the goal of responsible government” (p. 125). He mentions a wide range of activities supported by universities for local government of which planning and development is one of them. Since participatory planning process of local government is a wider practice, there can be collaboration between university, local government and community. To see the possibility of this partnership through local development plan, following section follows the concept and evolution of development planning at the local level. Indeed, the practice of local development plan is in practice worldwide where decentralised planning system has been adopted.

Local Development Plan

With the inception of development campaign in 1950s, development planning came into practice in the developing countries and, as a corollary, development thinking has undergone through various changes overtime with consequent impact on development planning. In the beginning, it was guided by the top-down approach under the modernist theory of development, which had aimed at raising economic growth. But, experiences sincethe past five decades of development shows that “growth does not trickle down; development must address human needs directly” (World Bank, 2000, p. 1). The top-down approach, indeed, did not work as it ignored the participation of local people in the development process. Accompanying planning approach with the modernist development

paradigm was the preparation and implementation of the development plan as a blueprint paper of government designed and implemented by the central level agencies to raise economic growth.

There has been significant shift in development thinking from the modernity or growth approach to human development or participatory approach or people centred development over the decades. This urges for the bottom-up process of development instead of a top-down approach. As a consequence, decentralization of development process and government is initiated. Decentralization, according to the World Bank (2000), “entails the transfer of political, fiscal and administrative powers to sub-national units of government” (p. 108). The devolution of governing power from the central government to the local government implies that accountability also shifts accordingly (World Bank, 2000). This notion of decentralization influenced largely the donors and governments as they realised that development delivered from the central level did not reach effectively to the beneficiaries at the grassroots level. Such situation pressurised the donors and governments for the decentralisation of the development and governance system. As a consequence, development planning, which was centralised so far began to decentralise.

In addition, ineffectiveness of centralised planning system, emergent of market economies and wave of democratic politics were some important reasons that appeared worldwide in favour of decentralisation (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007). Specifically, the compelling pressure “for devolution of the state’s decision making power to lower levels of government” and “inefficiencies of government bureaucracies in the developing world” (Miraftab, Silver, & Berad, 2008, p. 3) have been such contextual conditions that push for the decentralisation of the government and the development. These all in combination influenced the centralised system of development planning to expand to the local level to make the planning process participatory. At present, the main tenet of planning is on “mechanism and processes”. “The focus on how to plan rather than what to plan” (Dale, 2004, p. 6) has been the main concern. The process focused planning approach urges for devolving power from the central to the local government. “Localisation is praised for raising levels of participation in decision making and for giving people more of a chance to shape the context of their own lives” (World Bank, 2000, p. 4). Thus, as part of the whole decentralisation process, development planning at the local level came into policy and practice.

Though the decentralised planning has been in practice, often issues are raised in the technical capacity of local governments in bearing their responsibilities including the formulation of local development plan. “Local government need technical assistance, research, and education to help them better understand their current conditions” (Honadle, 2000, p. 85). This suggests that there is a need of support to local governments to identify the community needs and to incorporate the community needs into a well-designed local

development plan for the sustainable development of the communities that lie within the constituency of a local government.

In Nepal, there was a long practice of participatory district development plan up to the recent past guided by Local Self Governance Act, 1999. Though there are only village and municipal executives as per the new constitution of Nepal to formulate local development plan, there is high possibility that these new local level governments can learn and follow the best practices of past participatory development planning processes. Hence, I present in the following section the policy and practice of decentralised planning system in Nepal, which provides a basis for the university-local government-community collaboration for sustainable community development.

Policy and Practice of Local Development Plan in Nepal

Nepal has been practising decentralised planning system over the decades in various phases of decentralisation. Though Nepal has entered recently into the federal system, I do not consider this for the discussion in this paper as it is still in transition phase and not yet in practice in view of local government and local level planning system. However, I will briefly mention the new development regarding local government at the end of this section. Hence, at first, I present here the policy and practice of local level planning system that underwent since 1990 to recent past up to 2016. The Local Self Governance Act 1999 (LSGA, 1999) was the latest effort that mandates local government body namely District Development Committee (DDC) to prepare and implement the District Development Plan (DDP) as an autonomous function in the principle of local self-governance. The LSGA, 1999 provided institutional power to DDC to prepare and implement development plan at its own discretion (His Majesty's Government of Nepal, 2000). It has a provision for the formulation of integrated district development plan, incorporating the sector-wise programmes and projects into the plan.

Further, the LSGA, 1999 directs DDC to adopt the participatory process of planning formulation. One of the principles of self-governance in LSGA is to establish civil society "based on democratic process, transparent practice, public accountability, and people's participation" (His Majesty's Government of Nepal, 2000, p. 3). Thus, it appears that the legal framework for decentralised planning has envisioned the participation of all stakeholders in the planning process of the district development plan. In spite of such importance given to the planning in policy, there was low participation of stakeholders in the planning process, mainly "representative of marginalised groups" (The Asia Foundation & Enabling State Program, 2012, p. 60). One review report mentions that there is poor coordination among sectoral offices in the district and the "participatory process often not followed" in the planning process (Association of District Development Committee of Nepal, 2001, p. 5). Though there is very little empirical research on the formulation and implementation of district development plan there is no clear indication in public that there

has been significant improvement in the planning system of local government even after the LSGA, 1999. Hence, it can be said that there is enough room to improve the planning practice of DDC to make it more participatory and to address the needs of community people involving various stakeholder in the planning process.

The well-known 14 steps procedure of DDP, which is an important guideline was in practice in spite of certain weaknesses. The process starts from the hamlet level and passes through ward, Village Development Committee (VDC), Ilaka (a cluster of 3-5 VDCs) to DDC level. The process up to VDC level is important in view of the participation of grassroots people and to cater their needs and common interests. However, my observation in the field was that the existing practice is only a ritual as there was tendency to fulfil the formal process from the bureaucratic point of view rather than meaningful efforts for the participation of marginal communities in the planning process. Hence, the process of planning becomes an elite dominated exercise limiting the participation of marginal groups in expressing their practical needs and interests. Moreover, the planning exercise was more the compilation of demands of well-articulated people rather than selecting feasible projects on the basis of local priorities and resource allocation.

Thus the situation of local planning process in Nepal was facing the challenges of participation of marginal communities and prioritisation of local needs based on available resources. This situation demands skilful facilitators to guide the participatory planning process and trained planners to exercise prioritization and resource allocation. But the reality is that local body (DDC in the past) had no adequate human resources to do such jobs. This is the area this paper strongly argues where university can help local governments and communities in the planning process to design and develop sustainable community development programmes as part of the local development plan.

The above situation occurred in the past is very likely to continue even in the newly constituted villages and elected municipals executives to prepare their local development plans. According to the new constitution of Nepal promulgated in 2015, there will be no DDCs as the local government body as before. But there are constitutionally provisioned local governments as Village and Municipalities, which are supposed to be more powerful as the constitution has provided them with a list of specified "local level power" (Government of Nepal, 2016, p. 250) to perform them as an autonomous government. This implies that the local bodies in the past have been transformed into local governments, which will be more autonomous to undertake their development planning at the local level. However, as mentioned above, they would not possess necessary skills to prepare the local development plan incorporating sustainable community development programmes. Hence, there will be a high need of collaboration between university, local government and community for their mutual benefits, particularly through the process of local development plan.

In the next section I discuss how university, local government and community can collaborate for developing community development programmes namely through local development plan, facilitating communities and helping in prioritisation and resource allocations.

University, Local Government and Community Collaboration for SCD

Though service-learning is one of the key areas of university for the collaboration with community, such collaboration appears more as short-term project rather than establishing an institutional mechanism. Indeed, various efforts of universities for collaboration are under severe criticism because of their short-sighted nature. "...universities appear to go about establishing partnership arrangements in a fairly haphazard manner. Over the past decade, there has been an enormous amount of experimentation and creativity in the development of collaborative arrangements with little or no formal evaluation" (Wiewel et al., 2000, p. 31). Hence, such less prepared ways of collaborative efforts are not helpful to foster sustainable community development.

In case of Nepal, there are also a few examples of university-community and college-municipality collaboration practices. One of them is community development programme of Dhulikhel Hospital of Kathmandu University. "Dhulikhel Hospital has considered community based rural health programmes as one of the utmost priorities, and as a result has been constantly involved in developing, innovating and implementing rural health programmes through the Department of Community Programmes" (Dhulikhel Hospital, 2010). Thus, Kathmandu University has initiated collaboration with community, which is focused on rural health. However, it has not worked for integrated community development, collaborating with local government from the perspective of sustainability. Another case is Khowpa Engineering College, which is indeed not a collaboration project but an undertaking of Bhaktapur municipality itself. These few initiatives can be expanded for sustainable community development, involving local government and community through the mechanism of local development plan.

Therefore, in order to promote SCD, the university, local government and community need to enter into an institutional mechanism that meets interests of all collaborating partners. So far university has linked with community mainly for the sake of service learning motive (Angelique, 2001). Since community development needs to be transformed into SCD, it is essential to involve more partners in this process as past experience shows that more collaborative efforts help in attaining sustainability. "Now, in the twenty-first century, the vision of broadly collaborative approaches seem more feasible than at any time in the long and rich history of community development" (Hoffman, 2012, p. 11). Hence, wider collaboration has been realized for successful community development programmes. As both local government and university are working with local community, there can be collaboration between these two institutions for the support of local community to plan and

implement SCD. In case of Nepal, the Village and Municipalities being local government bodies, they can be a strong partner institution to enhance the university-community collaboration.

As learnt from the past practices, the missing part is basically the involvement of local government in university–community collaboration. Since development of local communities lies under the premise of local government, involvement of local government helps to institutionalise the existing practice for the sustainable community development. Taking example from Nepal, as discussed above, there can be collaboration between universities and local government, the Village and Municipalities as per the new constitution, for the community development programmes through their respective development plans. University in this process can facilitate the planning process of the local government to develop community development programmes while local government can play leading institutional role undertaking ownership and managing local resources for the community development programmes. University can take benefits from such collaborative efforts to enhance the service-learning programmes and research and development component. Community, on the other hand, can get sustainable programmes with the technical support from the university, and institutional support from the local government.

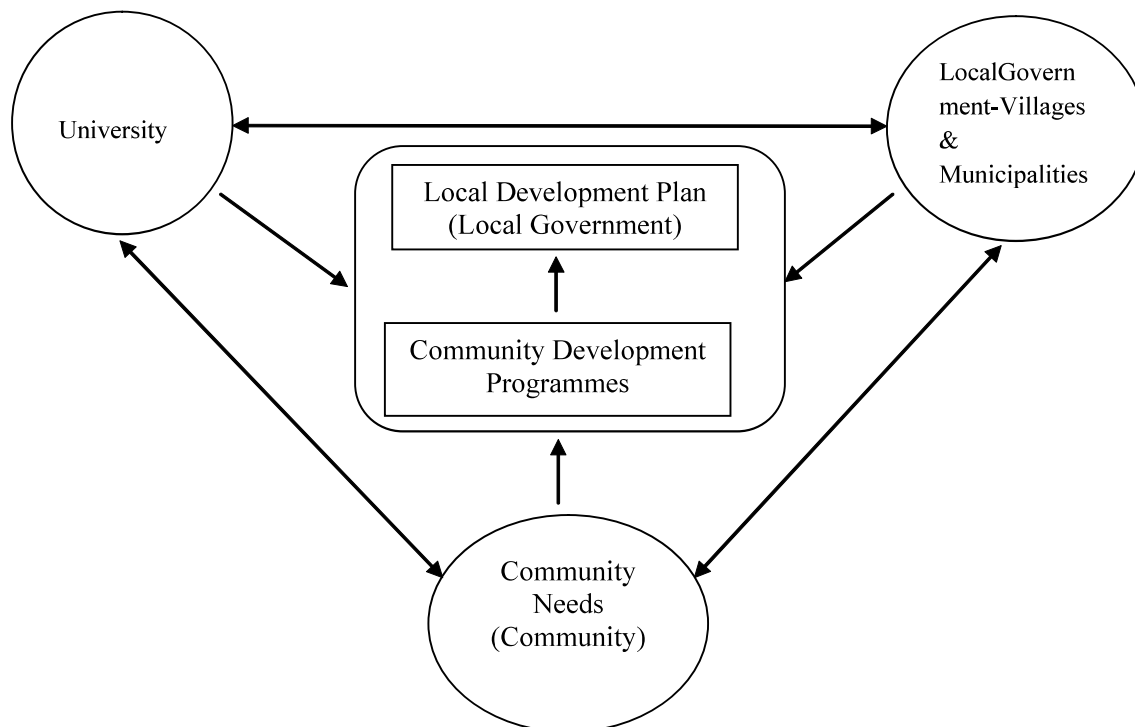


Figure 1. University, local government and community collaboration for community development through local government development plan.

Figure 1 depicts the collaboration between university and the local government, Villages and Municipalities. University, through the service learning programme, and research and development programme participate in the development planning process of the local government. The 14 steps of district development plan (DDP), which starts from community level can be used in this model with certain modification, which can eventually be helpful in identifying the needs of community for community development programmes. University and local governments- the Rural Municipalities and Municipalities - can facilitate this process for developing sustainable community development programmes, involving local community in the whole process. Indeed, there needs to be continuous interaction between the university, the local government and the community. Thus, this model helps in developing an institutional mechanism of collaboration between the university, local government and community, which meets the needs of all actors, and helps all stakeholders for the promotion of sustainable community development from the long-term perspective of development and learning.

Conclusion

Collaboration between universities, local government and community has been essential for the sustainable development of communities in the changing context of modern society. There has been practice of university-community collaboration since long ago through service learning. This practice can be extended, involving local government for community development programmes through the local development plan, which is also in practice worldwide. The introduction of participatory development approach is crucial. University, local government and community collaboration can play a significant role for sustainable community development programme by establishing an institutional mechanism viable for long-term. The participatory process of local development planning, which was in practice for a long time in Nepal can be an example of an avenue for such collaboration as it allows for the participation of multiple stakeholders. University, local government and community may jointly interact in the process of the formulation of development plan of local governments whereby community development programmes can be developed and implemented considering the aspect of sustainability. This model urges for further enhancement through continuous practice and research from the collective learning of academy, local government, and community to foster sustainable community development.

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