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Research Article

Local Government's Effort for the Conservation of Rara Lake, Karnali, Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Rara, the largest Lake in Nepal, has enormous potential for the total development of the region. It is located in the Mugu district of Karnali region at an elevation of 2990 m. However, the federal and provincial governments' current plans and strategies are ineffective in protecting and promoting the Lake from both present and future viewpoints. Participation theory was the most commonly used idea in this study. In order to provide baseline data for the formulation of efficient strategies and policies for the sustainable development of the Lake and its environs, this study intends to investigate the role of Rara Lake in the socioeconomic development of the Province. The study uses a questionnaire survey with a variety of stakeholders, including local people, business owners, and members of local political parties. The outcome shows that, in the current situation, the Lake's promotion and conservation are solely dependent upon national park policies, as neither the provincial nor municipal governments have taken any direct action to further these goals. The results show that for the long-term conservation and promotion of the Lake, local inhabitants, and local government must adopt an integrated approach. The Lake would have a significant impact on the Province's and the nation's overall development if this strategy had been successfully applied.

Keywords: Conservation, diversity, eco-tourism, local ownership, participation

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INTRODUCTION

Rara Lake is a high alpine Lake in Nepal, at an elevation of 2,990 m (Lacoul & Freedman, 2005). It is situated at 29°24'N. and 82°05'E. (Ferro, 1978). Mountains surround the Lake, with elevations varying from 3,200 m in the south to 3,700-3,900 m in the north. It is the most stunning natural Lake. Its attractiveness draws both domestic and international tourists. Rara Lake is located in the Mugu District of Karnali Province, in the locality of Chhayanath Rara Municipality Ward No. 9. It is situated 375 km (aerial distance) from the capital city of Nepal, Kathmandu, in the northwestern direction. Karnali Highway is the only road to reach there. However, the condition of the road is not good. People have to suffer a lot while traveling on the highway. Another route to get there is through air transport. There is one airport at Talcha. However, air transport is not regular, and it is not accessible to local people.

Rara Lake is situated in the Rara National Park. Hence, it is protected jointly by the National Park and the Nepal Army under the National Park Act, 2028 B.S. Local intellectuals argue that the National Park Act, of 2028 has blocked the local government from having control and ownership of the Lake. As a result, the local government has no role to play in the conservation of the Lake and the local government has been unable to reap the benefits for its local people.

After the promulgation of a new constitution in 2015, Nepal became a federal state, and three tiers of government—federal, provincial, and local—have been formed. The Constitution itself defines the power of all three levels of government. The local government and provincial government of the Karnali region have expected their roles to be defined for the conservation and development of the Rara Lake. But, Rara Lake is still in full control of the federal government under the National Park Act, 2028 B.S. As of right now, the Chhayanath Rara Municipality and the local people are really motivated to safeguard Rara Lake and make sure that local residents can benefit from the economy generated by Rara Lake. The Karnali Province wants to integrate the Rara Lake for the holistic development of the entire Karnali region. The increasing concern of the local body is how Rara Lake can be incorporated into the overall socioeconomic development of the local residents.

Local government is a lower part of a country's government that deals with issues that directly affect the people in a specific area. Local governments are increasingly taking on more responsibilities, resulting in improved quality of life at the local level (Young & Kaczmarek, 2000). Local government is an ancient institution with modern concepts and it performs political, economic socio-cultural, and administrative multi-faceted functions

(Makushkin, Kirillov, Novikov, Shaizhanov & Seidina, 2016). There is general agreement among academics that people's attitudes toward local government are considered to be a key element in influencing their participation in local government (Mohammadi, Norazizan & Ahmad, 2010), (Mantysalo, 2005). Nepal's constitution has provided opportunities for political participation at the local level to guarantee efficient service delivery. It is a self-contained, multipurpose institution that offers a variety of services (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015). Local governance refers to a kind of government that is accessible to the general public on a local level (MOFALD, 2017).

The executive, legislative, and judicial power at the municipal level is governed by Articles 214 to 227 of Nepal's 2015 constitution (Government of Nepal, 2015). Local governments had less authority under the previous Nepalese Constitution of 1990, which was based on a unitary structure than under the new Nepalese Constitution of 2015. In accordance with this Constitution and any applicable laws, the village executive or town executive will have local executive authority. According to this Constitution, the local executive authority is limited to the responsibilities listed under "local-level competencies" in Schedules 8 and 9 (Government of Nepal, 2015). The executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government now have more power following the passing of the Local Level Operation Act of 2017 (MOFALD, 2017). The local operating statute gives the chairman, vice-chairman, and ward chairman total control over all things.

There are several intriguing things to see and do in the Rara area, making it a tourist haven. There are several types of trees, fauna, and vegetation. Chhayanath and Rinimokshya are two of their most well-known natural and social aspects, in addition to a host of other characteristics (Budha, 2017). Local government practices benefit from democracy by instituting democracy at the local level and empowering the sovereign people to actively engage in the governance process (Dahal, 2020). Despite providing important biological services, human activities and climate change are having an increasing negative influence on high-altitude ecosystems a comprehensive analysis of the water chemistry of Lake Rara (Gurung, Gurung, Sharma, Juttner, Tripathy, Bajracharya & Guo, 2018). Rocks are where the majority of the ions in Rara Lake originate. It appears that the hypolimnion in the Lake lacks oxygen, which might not be a concern right now but cannot be ignored in the long run. Additionally, some indications of human inputs into the Lake were found (Kaphle, Wang, Kai, Lyu, Paudyal, & Adhikari, 2021). The beautiful new regionalism policy of China in Central Asia has accelerated the economic development in the region (Ali, Muhammadi, Masood, &

Ali, 2021).

The key objective of this study is to explore the role of local governance in the conservation and use of Rara Lake. Similarly, this study aims to understand how Rara Lake can be utilized and linked to the overall socio-economic development of the local area and the entire Karnali Province in the new context of federalism and sharing of power among the three tiers of government. The practical challenge at present is the transfer of power and responsibility from the federal government to the provincial and local government and Rara Lake is the perfect example of how to deal with this issue.

The issue with Rara Lake is that, even after federalism, the local authority does not have any control or ownership over its conservation or usage for local benefits. The local body is asking for some sort of legal authority over the preservation and use of Rara Lake. The Karnali Province desires a similar level of shared accountability for Rara Lake. However, the main issue is that, much like in a unitary form of government, it is still under the supervision of the National Park and the Nepal Army. As of right now, Nepal has scaled back the unitary system's policies, established power sharing, and created local ownership rules akin to those at Rara Lake.

DATA AND METHODS

The Chhayanath Rara Municipality in the Karnali Province's Mugu district is where it is imprisoned. The natural beauty of Rara Lake is well-known and draws tourists. As of the time of the study's selection, it is a very significant location for visiting national and international tourists.

This study is qualitative in nature. The study's issue has been thoroughly examined using the information received from the respondents. The research is descriptive and analytical in design. Primary and secondary data sources are used to gather the data. The current study is founded on primary information acquired through in-depth interviews and questionnaire surveys of local residents, as well as on-site observation and assessment. The principal respondents for the in-person interview and questionnaire poll included executives of the local governing body, entrepreneurs' ownership and employees, and local citizens.

In this study, both primary and secondary data have been used. Interviews have been used to get primary data, and the constitution, laws, regulations, publications, journal articles, and reports have been used to gain secondary data. Individual face-to-face interviews, emails, and phone interviews were used to collect the primary data. Twenty-one respondents were chosen

for this study using judgmental and purposive sampling techniques. The researcher conducted in-person meetings with the Mayor of the Chhayanath Rara Municipality, the executive officer, and the information officer. Also, as part of the research, telephone interviews with certain Vice Mayor, ward chairmen, and intellectuals were undertaken. Primary data were mostly collected during the fieldwork. Interviews were conducted over the telephone and in person between August 1 and November 6, 2022.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rara Lake has a special floral and faunal value with rare and fragile species because it is bordered by Rara National Park. To protect the Lake's beauty, the park was created in 1976 (Heinen & Kattel, 1992). In Nepal's high northwestern Himalayas sits Rara National Park to preserve the distinctive beauty of Lake Rara and the region's typical flora and animals. With a 106 sq. km. extent, the park is the smallest protected area in Nepal (Gurung, Gurung, Sharma, Jüttner, Tripathy, Bajracharya & Guo, 2018). Rara's beauty amazes every visitor. It is regarded as the ideal location for trekking. Visitors to Rara are drawn by the region's biodiversity and vibrant cultures. It is abundant in flora and animals, high Himalayan views, local cultures, art, and way of life, among other things. Karnali is a land of joy, and if heaven exists, it can be found there (Badal, 2022). The tourism industry is the most promising component of Nepal's service economy. It presented significant opportunities for economic expansion and safeguarding world peace (Ghimire, 2020). Given this context, the pressing political concern is how to save Rara Lake for future generations while establishing local control of Chhayanath Rara Municipality.

Law Making by Local Level

The new constitution has granted 22 constitutional rights to the local level and there are 15 concurrent powers for federal, Province and local level governments. As a result, the local government is a powerful organization that seeks to ingrain democracy at the local level. An assembly of a Municipality is where local ideas and legislative skills are developed. It formulates acts and regulations for the local level. The local government of Chhayanath Rara Municipality formulated the following acts, regulations, plans in between 2017 and 2021.

Table 1

Law Making by Chhayanath Rara Municipality

Description	Years	Numbers
Acts	2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021	31
Regulations	2017, 2018, 2019, 2020	8
Code of Conduct	2018	52
Aachar Samhita	2017, 2019	2
Mapdanda	2017, 2076	2
Direction	2018, 2020	3
Plan	2020	2
Total		100

Source: Chhayanath Rara Municipality office, 2022

Table 1 contains a list of 100 laws passed by the previously elected municipal assembly. In just five years, this Municipality has enacted these laws. The Financial Procedural Act of 2017, the Education Act of 2017, the Cooperative Act of 2017, the Agricultural Act of 2017, the Land Act of 2019, the health policy, and 8 regulations, including those for certification, education, city police, and others are some of them. Additionally, 52 procedural laws and codes of conduct, such as those governing municipal meetings, FM Radio, sanitation, the prohibition of alcohol in public places, scholarship for Dalit students in higher education, one daughter one account and others have been passed. These are the prominent tasks performed by the municipal assembly.

Municipality Governance System

After the promulgation of the new constitution, the local government gained constitutional authority and started to deliver effective services to the people at the local level through elected representatives. Despite being in a remote backward area, Chhayanath Rara Municipality started holding regular municipal council meetings and created annual plans and budgets for its development and the delivery of fair and unbiased services to the public.

The elected officials provide services to the public daily from the ward office. The citizen charter for their office has been displayed there. However, there is little public consensus, and the citizen charter has not been followed. Nevertheless, the representative of the people works to create a local system of governance and growth. The elected officials formulate laws, acts, rules, and regulations to facilitate service to the people and for the Municipality's social, economic, and cultural development (Bham, B. personal communication, October 2022).

Rara is a piece of paradise on the earth and we work together to maintain it. "Beautiful

Rara Lake and Our Rara” is our motto, and we work together to maintain it. It is a natural resource that is well-known both nationally and internationally, and it currently draws both domestic and international tourists. Because the locals barely have a means of subsistence in Mugu, the federal government and provincial governments have created good policies for its protection, which largely benefit the locals (Rawal, N., personal communication, August 2022).

In order to improve the quality of life for its citizens and provide the groundwork for its sustainable development, the newly elected government (2017) created a five-year plan. Our need for convenient travel along the Karnali Highway, however, is of poor quality; similarly, everyday air service should be offered (Sawat, D. D. personal communication, 2022). Black-topped roads are the first priority for this Municipality, followed by water and electricity and then the development and preservation of Rara Lake (Kumai, K., personal communication, August 2022).

All buffalos, cows, and other domestic animals in the Rara National Park area are restricted. In 2032 BS, Rara National Park was announced. Then, two villages were shifted from Rara to Nepalgunj. Rara is protected by the current state of affairs, despite this fact, the local people complain that their local needs have not been satisfied by the current management and they have been given no role in the management of Rara Lake. The National Park and Nepal Army even do not allow the locals to enter the buffer zone to use the forest resources for day-to-day livelihood (Rokaya, D. personal communication, Oct. 2022).

Development

In 2020, the late King Mahendra renamed Rara Lake to Mahendra Lake. Following that, Rara National Park was announced in 2032 BS as part of the National Parks & Wildlife Conservation Act, of 2029. It has been listed as a world heritage site, but it is a poor area with no infrastructure, and the tourism industry is undeveloped, despite huge potential for growth. There is beauty in nature. Future generations will benefit if it is protected well. It needs a master plan and should be developed like Lumbini. Other religious and historic sites near Rara Lake are awaiting preservation and development (R1., personal communication, October 2022).

The 77th district is one of the poorest, making it more challenging to get to. The people’s means of support are being compromised. The output of apples has not developed. The nation as a whole develops well-informed policies through its central government and Provinces. Not only is it economically backward, but it is also socially, politically, and culturally backward.

Nepal's constitution now gives it more autonomy and power to advance. Despite the fact that it continues to grow, more money is being allocated to it (R2, personal communication, October 2022).

Research and study centers need to be established in the area (Nepal, J. personal communication, October 2022). For Mugu Rara Lake to be developed as a multidimensional natural resource, a pitch road link is required. Similar to this, horticultural and agricultural development accelerated. We should employ current technology to produce organic food. Similar to this, the production, storage, and distribution of apples generate cash. Despite our efforts to promote hotels, homestays, and quality services. Likewise, we require cycle rods for tracking (R3, personal communication, October 2022).

Rara Lake is a national pride since it is stunning, yet it is only accessible from the western side of Nepal. Mugu district is incredibly archaic. The tourism industry can support the general development of this region if we improve it. First and foremost, the country should establish strong policies that will increase locals' sense of ownership and encourage them to safeguard Rara Lake, which is the only tourist destination that supports their way of life. As a result, locals should get involved in protecting Rara Lake. The Prime Minister of Nepal and the Chief Minister of the Province of Karnali made statements and announcements regarding the protection of Rara Lake and our intention to overall development policies, but in reality, nothing was done to advance its development. Top political party leaders made announcements on how to further their platforms and interact with Rara Lake throughout the election season. Despite being driven by the people, they do not actually make proper policies for its protection and conservation. We now need to protect it so that locals can take part and acquire ownership. They are aware of Rara Lake and the resources available to them. In a similar manner, the hospitality industry develops through full cooperation. So far, agro-tourism, rural tourism, the production of organic food, environmentalist animal protection, etc. A sustainable development program will leverage a variety of natural resources in addition to meeting local people's involvement and policy needs. Currently, there is poor administration of tourism, and hosts do not treat guests well. They ought to have given the tourists the finest service possible. There is no oversight or control by the local or provincial governments. Without a legal mandate, the government is unable to enforce national park restrictions (R4, personal communication, October 2022).

Our town places a high premium on jobs, education, and health. In a similar vein, we supply clean drinking water to the locals after being chosen by them. To support the

tourism industry, we encourage homestays and will provide the necessary infrastructure and governance following the needs of the population. Because of land erosion and the lack of a consistently high level of rainfall in our area, residents should undergo a soil test (R1, personal communication, October 2022).

Rara Diversity

Extended transportation, and improved quality in Rara Lake, a special caste of fish (Asala) is preserved and its production and distribution are necessary for its growth, but only preservation can save the ecosystem; similarly, we produce apple Jadibuti, since, mineral water and these products are stored and distributed for use by tourists and by the general public. Rara National Park is not a hospitable place for people, and neither is the Nepal Army, which we need for sustainable growth. Production of seeds, conservation efforts, and benefit sharing with the public are necessary (R5. personal communication, October 2022).

The name of the rural airport is Talcha (lock), also known as Karnali Talcha and Nepal Talcha. First and foremost, we need infrastructure development. Next, we need tourism development for hotels and community homestays. Because only a few people, such as politicians and easily accessible hotel owners, benefit from hotels, if we encourage and promote community homestays, the concept of community and cooperation will be developed in rural areas. Its offerings will make visitors very happy and encourage them to stay longer. Its offerings will make visitors very happy and encourage them to stay longer. From Murma Top, we can observe the 10 districts, including Dolpa, Humla, Jumla, and other places of religious and historical significance. We must take the cable vehicle from Rara to Murma Top. We will construct a high-altitude playing field in Upper Mili for use in international tournaments at the SAARC level. Around Rara Lake, we can create smart villages and improve education and health with a more conscientious model of society. This will have an impact on other societies, just as one museum is necessary to comprehend Karnali Province culture, history, religion, and other indigenous knowledge, and Sinja Valley will serve as the origin of the Kash language as Nepali. We still need to connect two land pitch roads and connect with Tibet for agricultural modernization, apple production, and other professional farming and production storage, packing, and distribution effective management. Chhayanath Cabul Car is the name of the Municipality, as is the Jadibuti collection center, production, and protection, as well as Aarcha Gumba, Silajit, and other Himalayan area Ayurveda mediation collation and which encourages other participants (R6, personal communication, October 2022). Local residents have become the focus of federal and provincial policies. A holistic approach will promote the

social, political, economic, and cultural development of the locals as well as the protection and conservation of the region's most important resource, Rara Lake. This will boost the western region of Nepal's Karnali Province.

According to the questionnaire survey's findings, the destination populations only acknowledged financial gains in the form of services and employment creation (Baral & Rijal, 2022). They were unaware of any extra benefits that Rara Lake could offer to the locals and the broader community. It contributes significantly to the local community's income. By gathering and considering the suggestions made by locals, residents of the Karnali Province, and elected officials of the local body and the Province, the protection strategy for Rara should be revised. The responsibility for Rara Lake's preservation, conservation, and sustainable use should fall under the jurisdiction of the local people, local administration, and provincial government. The lives of the locals will be significantly impacted. Additionally, residents of the area can benefit from it and contribute to its conservation. So that everyone feels included and the local population and the entire region may profit significantly from Rara Lake, appropriate policies should be implemented at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels with good coordination.

Role of Local Level

The elected local legislature passed the appropriate laws in accordance with constitutional rights. This Article came into effect after Nepal was proclaimed a federal democratic republic. The practice of creating new laws from scratch is a notable achievement of the people's government. The federal system generates all executive, legislative, and judicial power at the local level. The authority of local governments has increased. Institutionalization is also necessary for democracy's foundation. Locals and leaders have long considered social and economic development as a type of local self-government. The Municipality's main duties are development and governance. Rara Lake has the capacity to sustain this community and its residents.

Rara Lake is a popular destination for both domestic and foreign tourists because of its natural beauty. It is a valuable natural resource for the Province's economic growth. Following the adoption of a new constitution, local governments have greater authority to enact 100 laws within five years, and residents must take ownership of the protection and preservation of Rara Lake. The Nepali government should construct the Karnali highway to the highest Asian standards to provide safe and convenient transportation. Likewise, connecting this road to Mount Kailas, a local site for religious tourism, would help the area's economic growth.

In a similar spirit, Talcha Airport, lodging facilities, and hotels all uphold guest

reliability and security standards. Locals are currently aware of how to treat visitors well. If the surrounding natural resources are managed well, Rara Lake can be a source of income. In order to promote ownership among the locals, it is necessary to establish a connection with them and safeguard and conserve their resources. The local population has been addressed in relation to the major issues of protection and conservation transportation from the Nepali Army and Rara National Park or jointly protect it.

Natural resources are wasted as a result of plants, fish, wood, and other things, all of which are essential for the local population's survival and economic development. It is a low-income area with poor health, education, and economic conditions. The leaders of the major political parties, including the Prime Minister of Nepal, the Chief Minister of Karnali Province, and other Members of Parliament, make announcements in speeches about the development of Rara Lake as Karnali Province, yet Mugu Rara Lake remains as it is. As of now, Rara Lake will be safeguarded and conserved by effective policy, local participation, and overall development.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study reveal that till now Rara Lake has been protected and preserved by the mechanism of the federal government, i.e. Rara National Park and Nepal Army. After the promulgation of a new constitution in 2015, governments at the local, provincial, and federal levels have been formed under the spirit of federalism. Both the local government and provincial government are expecting shared responsibility for the conservation and sustainable use of the Rara Lake. At the federal, provincial, and municipal levels of government, Rara Lake is being protected and conserved by employing a participatory governance philosophy as well as local people's participation in planning, budgeting, and management. The Chhayath Rara Municipality is dissatisfied with the way Rara Lake has been protected single-handedly by the mechanism of the federal government. The Municipality and the local residents argue that they should have some power and responsibility for the conservation and use of the Rara Lake so that they can integrate the local economy with the Rara Lake and extract local benefits from the conservation and sustainable development of the Lake. The firm belief of the local body is that for the sustainable development and use of Rara Lake, effective control and ownership of the local government is the most important.

Chhayath Rara Municipality and Karnali Province should be given some shared power and responsibility. The results show that for the long-term conservation and promotion

of the Lake, local communities, local government, and provincial government must adopt an integrated approach. If this strategy had been successfully put into practice, the Lake would have played a significant role in the holistic development of the entire Karnali region. There is no doubt that the quality of life of the local residents is affected by the policies that the local government puts into place.

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