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# Governing TVET in Federal Nepal: Centralized or Decentralized Management ?

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## Abstract

*With the increasing recognition of the need for skilled human resources in developing countries, the role of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) has been an important part of the education system. However, in spite of such a vital role of TVET, challenges exist in designing, planning and implementing it while governing effectively. Such context has raised the issue of governing TVET among educationists, policy makers and all stakeholders to achieve its intended goals. The TVET governing issue has been of serious concern to its stakeholders in Nepal with the introduction of the federal structure in 2015. Hence this paper aims to explore the governing issue of TVET in the context of federal governance of Nepal. For this, this paper employs qualitative research approach in analyzing policy and practice of TVET in Nepal. This paper explores that the process of governing TVET in Nepal has remained highly centralized in spite of rhetoric of decentralization as the main agenda of governing development over the decades. Arguably, there is a reluctant tendency in devolving TVET as per the new structure of federal governance. Instead, conflicts among three levels of governments – federal, provincial and local – are emerging in the case of TVET similar to other development sectors. Hence, for sustainable operation and management of TVET this paper argues that the policy and practice of the TVET need to be guided by the concept of multilevel governance with collaboration among the three levels of government as envisaged by the new federal constitution.*

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**Keywords:** Centralist mentality; Decentralization; Federal Nepal, Policy implementation; TVET governance,

## Introduction

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) has been an important priority of the educational policy since a long time ago with the recognition of the role of knowledgeable and skilled

human resources for economic development (Almeida, Behrman & Robalino, 2012). With this recognition, along with the generic education, the role of TVET has been an important part of the education system. Furthermore, the shift from

vocational schooling as an academic course to the specialized skills training focused on employment has established TVET as an important educational program. For the popularity of the TVET there are multiple reasons – curbing youth unemployment, augmenting economic growth, reducing poverty and developing human capital (Singh, 2005). Thus, the concept of TVET is associated with the economy and employment. This is the aspect that distinguishes it from general education. Hence, there would not be the rationality of TVET if it had no direct linkage with the economy and employment.

However, in spite of such a wide range of benefits attributed to TVET, challenges exist in designing, planning, implementing and addressing the skills needs in developing countries (Russell, 2015). It is argued that TVET has been facing a challenge for economies whose labor market is highly dynamic (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2009). Particularly, as the study further states, TVET is not only a subsector of education, it has linkages with both the formal and informal labor markets and dealt by various ministries for its development resulting into complexity of planning and implementation for educational authority. One of the problems of TVET is that often the government performed both roles – policy making and regulating and providing training which has caused inefficiency of TVET sector and not meeting the needs of labor market for the economy particularly in developing countries (ADB, 2009). Indeed, Russell (2015) argues that fragmented TVET has affected the efficiency in management and maintaining quality of TVET sector (Russell, 2015). In his view, it is highly complex in bringing coherence in the effective coordination among multiple aspects and stakeholders of TVET in the absence of clear vision and goals. Such context has raised the issue of governing TVET among educationists, policy makers and all stakeholders to achieve its intended goals.

The challenges of TVET emerged in many developing countries resonate in the context of Nepal. The goal of the government of Nepal is “Prosperous Nepal

and Happy Nepali”. It demands for the effective management of the dynamic TVET sector in Nepal for the economic development and employment. This goal entails an excessively higher role of TVET in economic development. Since the development has been the main agenda of the country, the importance of education in general and technical and vocational education in particular remains high. It is reflected well in the 15th Plan (2019/20-2023/24) of the government (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2020) as it states that on the one hand, there is the need for human resources required to the market, which is not available, and on the other hand, the human resources developed are not getting jobs. To address this situation, the 15th Plan aims to “ensure expansion and quality of inclusive and equitable access in technical education and vocational skills development”. To achieve this objective, Nepal has to restructure the TVET governance from the past centralized governance system to federalized governance as per the constitution. However, there is no clear direction for governing the TVET in federal Nepal (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2018; Renold, Bolli, & Caves, 2018). With the above background of TVET and its governing, this paper discusses the emergent issues from the past practice and the possible framework in governing TVET in the newly introduced federal governance. Hence this paper aims to explore the governing issue of TVET in the context of the federal structuring of Nepal.

This is an analytical paper on TVET governance informed by qualitative research tradition. It draws data from the literatures relevant to developing countries and studies on policy and practices of TVET in Nepal. Documents, particularly policy-related and relevant literature on both theoretical and empirical findings were reviewed. In addition, this paper is embedded with professional experience and insights of the researcher. I have organized this paper into four sections. First, I will discuss conceptual and emerging issues of governing TVET. In the second section, I will make an analysis of the TVET governance in Nepal. In doing so, in the

beginning I discuss the evolution of TVET governing policy and practice, particularly focusing on the past TVET policy of 2012. Then, I generate discussions on the possible framework of TVET governance in federal Nepal considering the new TVET Policy which is integrated into the Education Policy of 2019. Finally, I conclude the paper drawing insights on the federal form of TVET governance.

### **Governing TVET: Concepts and Issues**

Governance and governing have been defined as the “processes of management and rule” (Tiihonen, 2004, p.18). Furthermore, these terms refer to the process for identifying the common goals and achieving those goals (Sharma, 2018). According to the World Bank, governance has been defined as “management of a country’s economic and social resources for purposes of development” (cited in Wilson, 2000, p. 52). We can consider this concept of governance to discuss TVET governance as it is related to the economy and development through mobilization of human and natural resources. Governing TVET concerns the role of government and other stakeholders in the planning, implementation and management of skills development in the country. Hence, it is essential to note that governance entails distribution of power among the stakeholders at different level of governing tiers.

While discussing TVET governance, there can be found arguments both in favor of the state and market and some argue for the balanced role of the state and market in TVET governance (Russell, 2015). It is also argued that both the government and the market experienced failures in appropriately developing TVET as per the need of the economy (Almeida, Behrman & Robalino, 2012). Whatever the case, the context is important to pursue a specific policy of governance as the context varies from one country to another and one place to another place within a country. Therefore, it is viewed to involve local governments and both private and public institutions in providing training with a clear national regulatory framework (Almeida, Behrman & Robalino, 2012).

It is viewed that governance is an intricate and dynamic concept which is influenced by the socioeconomic and cultural context of a country (European Training Foundation [ETF], 2013).

In addition to the state vs. market’s role in TVET management, there is an issue of centralized and decentralized TVET governance. Indeed, both the centralized and decentralized forms of governance are in practice. Renold and Caves (2017) discuss the Rauner’s governance models that “range from fragmented to coordinated and from input-orientated to output-orientated” (p. v). The Rauner’s model is framed in terms of the mode of delivery rather than the decision making whether it is centralized or decentralized. There is higher degree of centralization in the TVET sector as the training providers face a number of controlling conditions in planning and managing the training institutions and enrolling the students (Almeida, Behrman & Robalino, 2012).

There is an increasing trend for favoring decentralized TVET governance over the centralized one. According to the ADB (2009), centralized systems suffer from lengthy decision-making processes, remoteness from clients, and rigidity to change (p.20). But there are many benefits attributed to decentralized TVET governance. Particularly, as ADB argues, the decentralized governance training programs are designed to meet the needs of the local market and the local resource is efficiently managed. Decentralized governance is justified and advocated in terms of various qualities it delivers – from equitable development to policy efficiency to democratic accountability (Muller, 2015). Involvement of various stakeholders across multiple sectors (ADB, 2009) has made the governing issue of TVET increasingly challenging. It is obvious that the effectiveness of TVET lies in its governance. The question arises what the appropriate mode of governing TVET can be. In discussing it, we cannot ignore the goal of TVET and the context where the TVET is being implemented.

Rationale for decentralized governance comes from

the reality of a gap between the production of TVET schools and the need for the economy when TVET is run through a centralized governance system. Langer (2013) argues “Needs assessment and the cooperation with the local economy ensure that produced skills match the demand” (p.12). According to ADB (2009), if designed well and implemented carefully, decentralized management can address the various shortcomings of centralized management of TVET as the centralized system inherits a rigid structure that is time-consuming and inflexible to the situation.

While the decentralized management allows flexible response to the local needs and matches local employment and can be innovative in designing training according to the local context (ADB, 2009). Graham and Dean (2018) have described the TVET governance from the perspectives of autonomy and responding local needs. They argue for high level of devolution in TVET governance that provides autonomy to TVET providers and allows them to work as per the needs of the economy of a country and helps TVET institutions to make responsive decisions as per the local need and prepare realistic planning at the local level. It is argued that central authorities will not be able to identify the local needs and be unable to build on local knowledge and address the different kinds of interests and local needs (Graham & Dean, 2018). For the effective working of TVET, it becomes essential to devolve the rights of fund management so that local level designs the training as per the local specific needs of the labour market as the needs differ from place to place (Local Government Association, 2017).

In addition to the issue of whether centralized or decentralized form of governance is the best form of governance, there are other issues of TVET governance namely “institutional fragmentation, ineffective involvement of social partners and other non-state stakeholders, weak engagement of regional and local actors and gaps in policy implementation” (ETF, 2013, p.8). In order to address the problem of governance in TVET, multilevel governance is

increasingly advocated. It is viewed that the multilevel approach provides appropriate roles to all stakeholders and link with the TVET policy premise and emphasizes accountability and capacity building as important elements of effective multilevel governance of TVET (ETF, 2013). Furthermore, the most essential aspects of effective TVET governance are formulation of a common visionary goal, establishment of an effective institutional mechanism, provision of need-based capacity building and training program for all stakeholders and adequate use of technologies and networks (ETF, 2013). In this regard, a challenge that governments need to address is the issue of “the unhelpful dichotomy of state interventionism vs. neo-liberal laissez-faire regimen (Russell, 2015, p.14). For this, the role of government becomes vital. The main issue is strengthening the role of the state and its associated stakeholders at all levels for enhancing the governance and funding mechanism of TVET management and financing (Russell, 2015).

Another issue that comes often in TVET governance is establishing national authority to support and regulate the TVET sector. Particularly emphasis has been given for an independent national authority which does not involve in providing training itself but to regulate effectively the training services with autonomous decision making power for partnership building with all stakeholders including employers (ADB, 2009; Almeida, Behrman & Robalino, 2012). Almeida, Behrman & Robalino (2012) urge “to establish an effective institutional and regulatory framework with a clear delegation of roles and responsibilities between central and local governments and the different institutions (public and private) involved in the provision of training” (p. 60). They further argue that such organizations can improve the level of services of training providers using the roles assigned to them and promote competition among the providers coordinating all stakeholders of the subsector. However, they comment that existing practice across the countries reveals that there is a centralized mode of governance that curtails the independency of training providers

to design the contents of the training and arrange inputs as per the local level requirements (Robalino, Almeida, & Behrman, 2012).

Accountability has been a pertinent issue of TVET governance as beneficiaries do not have rights to make decisions over the schemes of training providers (Robalino, Almeida, & Behrman, 2012). Where lies the power and resources determine the decision making ability of any institution. Particularly fragmented accountability leads to many problems in TVET management, and to overcome this problem there is increasing practice of establishing regulating and advisory authority at the national level which is supposed to promote accountability and harmony allowing the decision making role to training institutions themselves (ADB, 2009). Hence, ADB (2009) advocates to provide the role of training provider to the private sector with the assumptions that this strategy will make the TVET cost effective and flexible in responding to the needs of the labor market with linkage to industry. However, it suggests that considering the capacity differences of training institutions while implementing decentralization policy as the training centers in less accessible areas may not benefit if the policy does not consider their particular needs.

Finally, according to Caves and Renold (2018), good governance “is a prerequisite for efficient and effective TVET processes and indeed for having a system of TVET at all” (p.2 ). They explain governance in terms of inputs and outputs orientation of TVET management where input-oriented governance appears more centralized as it provides low autonomy to stakeholders outside the central authorities while the output oriented governance concerns the results allowing autonomy regarding the process. Hence, they advocate multilevel governance that strengthens coordination instead of disintegration and focuses on results instead of inputs.

Much of the reform depends upon the effective policy making process. Robalino, Almeida, & Behrman (2012) argue that the policy making process relies heavily upon the role of political actors who have willingness to solve the issues and commitments for implementation. Furthermore, they argue that such actions depend upon the visionary leadership and the enabling environment for political collaboration. Making policy right is not enough, its implementation is crucial to produce impacts from the policy. Hence, it is argued that for the proper implementation of the training policy there needs to be a mechanism with policy makers to ensure the delivery of the training with the right content and quality (Robalino, Almeida, & Behrman, 2012).

With above conceptual background on TVET governance and its various issues, now I move to the next part of this paper where I discuss the TVET governance in the context of Nepal. In this part, at first, I present an overview of the evolution of TVET in Nepal focusing on the past TVET Policy of 2012. Then I discuss emergent issues of TVET resulting from the past policy and practices. After that, I discuss the issue of governance of TVET in federal Nepal, including the TVET policy as integrated in Education Policy 2019.

### **Evolution of TVET Governance in Nepal: An Overview**

It can be found in education history that Nepal has considered TVET an essential component of its education system since long ago (Adhikari, 2005). Particularly, it got high priority when the National Education System Plan (NESP) of 1971 introduced vocational subjects in the secondary schools throughout the country (ADB, 2015). However, the NESP did not go a long way. In the early 1980s, there had been an important shift from the school-level vocational education to a separate wing of TVET. This concept came into practice with the establishment of CTEVT in 1988.

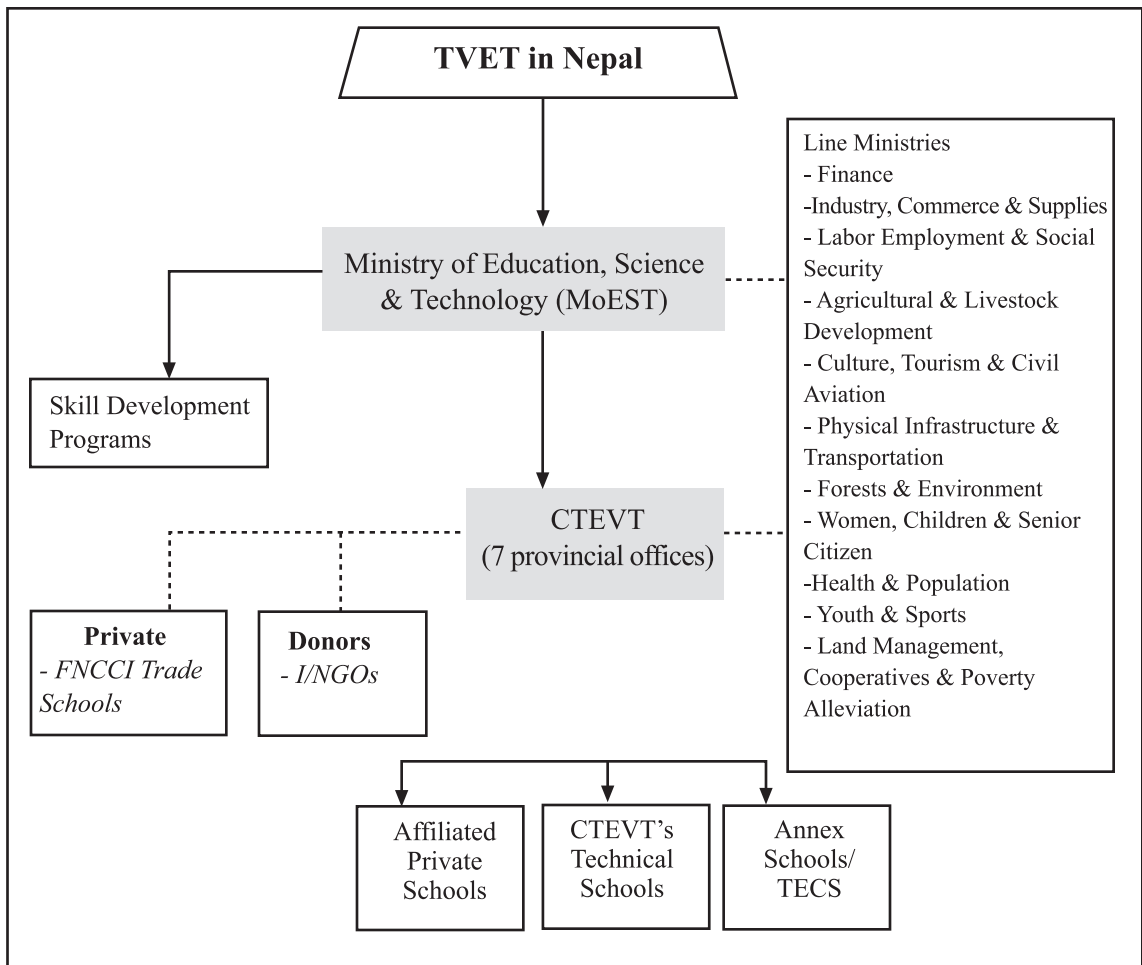


Figure 1: TVET governance's structure in Nepal (Author's construct)

(Sources:ADB, 2015; MoEST, 2018; CTEVT, 2020)

The Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) Act, 1988 mandates the CTEVT to work as the central authority for planning and managing of TVET sector in the country. Major responsibilities of CEVT are “(i) regulating and upgrading the standard of TVET; (ii) maintaining coordination among different agencies providing TVET programs; (iii) assuring TVET quality by producing qualified instructors, curriculum developers, managers, and professionals for TVET institutions; and (iv) assessing students and issuing certificates” (ADB, 2015, p. xi). In addition, the operation of technical and vocational education has

been the main task of the CTEVT. In addition to the CTEVT act, TVET Policy, 2012 was introduced to direct the whole TVET sector including the role of the CTEVT.

Though the CTEVT is the main entity for TVET in Nepal, there are various agencies working in TVET. Including the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) there are 12 central ministries which are running TVET in a parallel manner. It needs to be noted that MoEST, which is responsible for regulating the TVET, also runs TVET programs on its own. Similarly, there are private agencies and

donors supported INGOs that are running TVET activities. Within the CTEVT system, there are three types of TVET institutes. First, there are technical schools and polytechnic institutions that are run directly by CTEVT with the public funding. Second, there are private agencies' technical schools running by private agencies affiliated with the CTEVT, and third are the annexed public schools partially supported by CTEVT for their funding. Thus, it appears that both the profit making and non-profit making agencies have been working in the field of TVET. The situation is such that a large number of stakeholders working in the TVET sector without any common framework contribute to economy at large. It is viewed that "the many laws, policies, and plans related to TVET in Nepal create an unclear and conflicting framework" (Caves & Renold, 2018, p.17).

In such a context, Nepal has undergone significant governance restructuring in the federal model through the new constitution of Nepal promulgated in 2015. The new constitution has stated its policy in article 51 (h) "to prepare human resources that are competent, competitive...while making education scientific, technical, vocational, empirical, employment and people-centered" (Government of Nepal, 2016, p.36) which should guide and set the scope of TVET in Nepal. However, before entering into the discussion of the TVET governance in federal Nepal it is imperative and essential to explore the emergent governance issues of the existing policy and practice that provides insights for the governing TVET in federal Nepal. I, therefore, in the remaining sections of this part discuss four emergent issues, viz. centralized governance, poor coordination and high fragmentation, political hindrance in policy implementation, and quality issue and institutional capacity. Just after the discussion of these four emergent issues, I present a possible model of TVET governance in federal Nepal. In the final part of this paper, I draw a conclusion.

### **Centralized Governance**

The TVET sector in Nepal is highly centralized.

Looking into the practice of CTEVT and other agencies working in the TVET sector reveals that their activities are centrally managed and controlled. Since the new TVET policy 2019 is not implemented at its full extent, which largely depends on the new TVET act which is yet in formulation process, a discussion on the past governing practice is noteworthy here. So, while looking into the past, it is found that the TVET policy 2012 had some objectives that directed towards decentralization, but its implementation strategies were not sufficient to ensure the mechanism for the decentralization. It shows that in the past too though the country had been pursuing the decentralization reforms over the decades, it had not influenced the TVET sector for its decentralization. Furthermore, though the general education, particularly school education was decentralized to some extent, the TVET sector remained under the full control of central level agencies. As a consequence, the TVET governance in the past was highly bureaucratic and process oriented with no autonomy to local level institutions for their own planning and management (ADB, 2015).

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, TVET in Nepal is directly governed under MOEST through CTEVT. TVET outside the CTEVT is also controlled by the central agencies of the government, the private sector and INGOs. Though the CTEVT activities have been managed through its regional offices in the past and now through provincial offices, they were and are only the extended wings with central level's direct management. Since the province offices are fully controlled through the federal level instead of the province government, it remains centralized as it was in the past. As a consequence, the TVET programs have been supply-driven and centrally imposed that ignore the changing local needs of economy for skilled labors (ADB, 2015). Furthermore, it is viewed that the ministries which are involved in TVET make decisions at the central level without consulting the private institutions and local communities (ADB, 2015).

Thus, centralization of TVET governance has been a hindering tendency of TVET governing in Nepal. On the one side, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology seems reluctant to allow the CTEVT to act as an autonomous institution, and on the other side CTEVT itself did not exercise the local needs-based policy providing autonomy to the technical schools across the country. Even in the federal governance, the CTEVT's role has not been changed from the existing practice. And the MoEST has also been implementing TVET programs itself instead of focusing on policy and monitoring and regulation. As the whole education system in Nepal is crippled with centralist mentality, the TVET sector has also faced the same kind of tendency.

Thus, though there is popularity of participatory and bottom-up approach in other development sectors, TVET sector in Nepal has not practiced the "local participatory planning and monitoring practices to ensure efficient operation of TVET institutions" (ADB, 2015, p. 41). It is argued that the central level is unwilling to devolve the rights and responsibilities to sub national and local level institutions not to lose the privilege over resources accrued to the TVET sector (ADB, 2015). Overall, TVET in Nepal has so far remained in a highly centralized and non-participatory development practice.

### **Poor Coordination and High Fragmentation**

It is paradoxical that the TVET is not only centralized, it is also highly fragmented. It reflects the absence of a strong institution for policy making and regulating the TVET sector as all are equally involved only in implementation, including the ministry and CTEVT. Indeed, TVET governance in Nepal has been facing the problem of poor coordination among the various stakeholders working in TVET (Ministry of Education, 2017). Normally, centralization unifies and consolidates all agencies and activities with a strong central command. However, the TVET in Nepal is not organized well reflecting the lack of overall guiding framework committed by all stakeholders and weak institutional leadership of CTEVT (ADB, 2015). The situation is such that a

number of ministries and organizations have been working in the TVET sector (MoEST, 2018) without meaningful coordination. It is argued that poor coordination has not only disintegrated the TVET sector, but it has affected the quality of TVET and created parallel governance of TVET system (King & Palmer, 2010).

However, coordination among TVET actors was complex in spite of TVET policy 2012 and operation of CTEVT since long ago. As the task force report states, the coordination is one of the challenges in the TVET sector of Nepal (MoEST, 2018). For such a situation different acts and rules with various ministries have played a role. There is lack of an overall framework to overcome confusion and conflicts among the TVET stakeholders (Caves & Renold, 2018). Thus, governing TVET has been a major challenge in Nepal as there is no coordination among the various ministries that are engaged in TVET.

Indeed, all stakeholders often do have tendencies to work in their own way and mobilize resources for their comforts instead of the overall priority of the country. This could not be checked due to the lack of efforts to create a harmonized TVET sector. Instead, activities that fragment the TVET sector are increasingly in practice. It is interesting to note that the ministry of education itself has been running TVET programs like EVENT as there is CTEVT under it for the same purpose. The poor coordination and fragmentation have been such problems that the CTEVT alone cannot address them as these problems are within various central level ministries. Though the CTEVT is an apex institution to govern the TVET, there are several ministries that are running TVET programs which cannot be regulated by the CTEVT as it is under the ministry of education but not as an autonomous institution with rights to regulate the works of other ministries.

Thus, there is a strong tendency to ignore the framework of professional autonomous institution (ADB, 2015) and fulfilling self-interests holding the



resources and facilities accrued for the TVET sector. Hence, it is rightly pointed out that “the government’s role in TVET must change from implementation to facilitation, from traditional to modern, and from rigid to flexible” (ADB, 2015, p.32). This past experience of poor coordination and fragmentation is a strong lesson to consider while restructuring the TVET governance in federal Nepal.

### **Political Hindrance in Policy Implementation**

Political interference has played a crucial role in weak implementation of TVET policy in Nepal. Such interference hindered the CTEVT to act and develop as a professional autonomous organization. It is viewed that in reality CTEVT “has become a political and formality institution rather than an autonomous, dynamic, and leading organization in charge with effective management of TVET” (ADB, 2015, p.43). It is ironic that the role of the liaison ministry itself is hindering the promotion of integrated TVET sector as mentioned above playing a role in implementation instead of policy development and regulation for quality technical and vocational education. Indeed, the MoEST itself has been running various skill development programs and introduced vocational education in the generic school system (MoEST, 2018) contradicting with the CTEVT’s role of apex professional organization for TVET. Thus, the role of the ministry is not for developing professional autonomous TVET sector but as a tool of political game in mobilizing resources and power through the interference to the TVET sector.

Excessive expansion of private schools without expanding the capacity of CTEVT to regulate them in maintaining quality standards is also the consequence of political interference. Such unplanned privatization has made the TVET expensive, excluding the marginal communities from its access (MoEST, 2018). For such practice, there is a role of attitude of politicians and high-level bureaucrats to hold power mobilizing resources accrued for TVET for their own interests. Indeed, there is “Excessive political interference and influence on all the organizations involved in TVET hinder their ability

to effectively carry out their activities” (ADB, 2015, p.43). This reflects the poor political commitment to promote TVET in Nepal (MoEST, 2018). Therefore, there is a need for commitment of all political actors on the nationally formulated policy and programs and the executing agencies must implement them efficiently with provision of adequate resources and proper mechanism for monitoring (ADB, 2015).

Indeed, policy implementation is an important governance issue which is less discussed in comparison to its impact. Contrary to this reality, there is excessive tendency in introducing new policies without proper implementation of existing policies and their reviews based on the experience of implementation. “In the past 10 years, TVET has undergone several experiments that aimed to develop and expand TVET with the assistance of various support agencies” (ADB, 2015, p.32). It doesn’t mean that there were not some efforts. The issue is that such reviews did not explore sufficiently the political dimension of TVET governance. Past reviews appear more technical and focus on formal institutional arrangements. Though it is clear that there is political interference in practicing TVET policy, the issue of autonomy of CTEVT for its functioning as a professional institute is lacking. This clearly suggests that there is a need for strong authority in federal Nepal to coordinate and manage the TVET sector in collaboration with the three levels of government – federal, provincial and local.

### **Quality Issue and Institutional Capacity**

There are certain implications of the present governance system of TVET in Nepal. The uncoordinated and fragmented TVET has produced skilled people that do not match the requirement of the market (ADB, 2015; MoEST, 2018). This reflects the inadequate quality of the TVET graduates. In addition, due to the centralized feature of TVET governance, it has been supply driven. Some of the issues of Nepal’s TVET are less access of marginal communities and the gap between market needs of skills and skill training programs (World Bank, 2017)

Specifically, the quality issue aroused with the rapid expansion of the CTEVT affiliated private schools. Private schools have been established without adequate physical infrastructures and instructors. But, the CTEVT has a limited level of capacity to regulate and monitor the private schools. The issue of quality is not limited only to the private schools. The problem is also observed with the community schools where MoEST has recently introduced vocational education.

Indeed, the introduction of TVET in the community schools without considering the provision of infrastructure has raised the question of quality issue. The ineffectiveness of the school-level vocational education under the MOEST parallel to CTEVT program was also indicated by a recent report on TVET (MoEST, 2018). It is essential to note that the quality issue is not only a technical matter, it is a governing issue. This is because this entails reviewing the existing capacity while expanding the TVET sector.

In such a context, the government is pursuing aggressive policy of establishing one technical school at one local level. This will aggravate the crisis of capacity with the increasing demand for TVET expansion and very poor institutional capacity of TVET authority. To address such discrepancy between demand and supply-side of TVET, there is a necessity of capable leadership and professional team to successfully drive the TVET sector in Nepal (MoEST, 2018). It needs to consider the past practice here that the both roles of CTEVT as implementer and regulator have raised the issue of maintaining professional quality and accountability (ADB, 2015). Overall, the problem is that the capacity of TVET institutions is not appropriate even to maintain the quality of ongoing TVET activities (MoEST, 2018). Hence, on the one hand, the present TVET doesn't meet the needs of the country at large while the capacity level is inadequate.

### **TVET in Federal Nepal: Centralized to Decentralized Governance**

Most of the studies have urged to restructure the TVET governing system to address the various problems accrued from the present policy and practice (ADB, 2015; MOEST, 2018; Renold, Bolli & Caves, 2018; Renold & Caves, 2017). But, “there is great uncertainty about how the TVET sector will be federalized” (Renold, Bolli, & Caves, 2018, p.36). The issue of governing TVET in federal Nepal is the question of whether to decentralize the existing centralized management of TVET or not. Indeed, the decentralization through federal governance is unprecedented in the history of Nepal's decentralization reforms as the power of the three levels of governments has been defined constitutionally. Decentralization of TVET though intends to provide autonomy to all specific levels of government, it becomes essential “to balance multilevel decentralization with central-level standardization” (Renold & Caves, 2017, p.5).

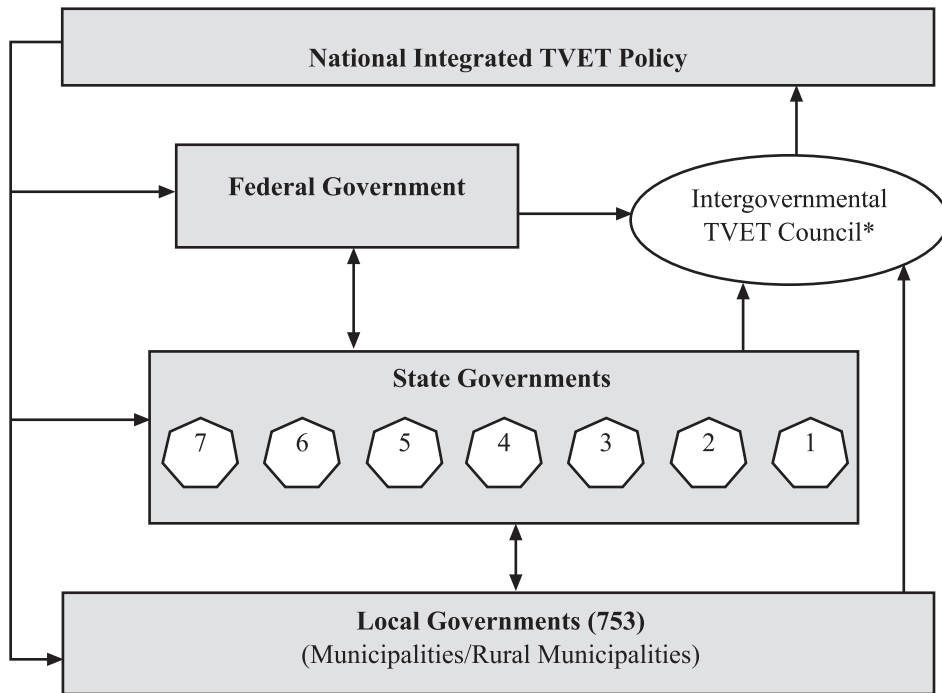
While considering a possible modality of federalization of TVET, it is essential to consider the need for an autonomous TVET entity in each province of Nepal to govern the TVET sector following the spirit of the constitution. Here, again, it becomes essential to consider the issue of fragmented TVET and develop an integrated framework to allow all levels of government to work simultaneously within the framework. While restructuring TVET governance in Nepal, it should be guided by the “principles of cooperation, coexistence and coordination” (Government of Nepal, 2016, p.150) as stated in the constitution for building the relationship among the three levels – federal, provincial and local.

It is argued that centralized TVET governance with its rigid institutional arrangement which follows the top-down approach of bureaucratic management is less effective in mobilizing TVET providers providing autonomy to them to address the local needs (Russell, 2015). The discrepancy between the local needs and supplied skills is considered the consequence of

centralized TVET governance. So, instead of it, “A multi-level governance system covering and linking policy making (macro), institutional administration (meso), as well as training delivery and assessment (micro) of TVET” (Russell, 2015, p.4) has been suggested. Exploring the best model of TVET governance according to Caves and Renold (2018) depends upon addressing the problem of governance and absorption of TVET graduates into the economy.

Based on the discussions made above in this paper, it appears essential to restructure the TVET governance in Nepal both to address the existing emergent issues and to follow the spirit of federal governance. Recent research by Renold and Caves

(2017) recommends an Umbrella Act to integrate the TVET activities and establish multilevel governance in federal Nepal. However, their suggestion to bring TVET under a single ministry can be problematic in view of past practice of MoEST. Instead, the suggestion “to set up a steering committee headed by someone with strong leadership capabilities to organize buy-in from all relevant stakeholders to organize the transition process from the current state to the implementation of a new TVET Umbrella Act” (Renold & Caves, 2017, p.ix ) appears appropriate to address the problem of ownership and fragmentation of TVET and to overcome the monopoly leadership of MoEST in the past.



\* (Renold, Bolli, & Caves, 2018)

Figure 2: A possible structure of TVET in federal Nepal

The role of MoEST needs to be reviewed while federalizing TVET in Nepal. Though it appears a straightforward possibility in view of past practice to give a lead role to MoEST and its TVET division

in formulating TVET policy in federal Nepal (Renold, Bolli, & Caves, 2018). This needs to be acceptable for all stakeholders of TVET as the role of MoEST was to centralize the TVET within its controlling

grip as discussed above in this paper. It is rightly pointed out that “there are major threats from the tendency to favor the status quo, fear of losing power to control over a function that moves to a different level, and resistance to change” (Renold & Caves, 2018, p. viii). Indeed, there is a high possibility that central authorities use all three kinds of powers – decision making, agenda setting and ideological power (Lukes, 2005). It needs to be noted here that if the policy formulation is given only to the central level, the agenda setting power can be used by the authorities in their favor over the provincial and local level governments.

Meanwhile, there is a new education policy recently introduced (MoEST, 2019) that has TVET component. The education policy has envisioned an entity at the federal level – the National Technical and Vocational Education Training Council (NTVETC) – through which TVET sector will be operated to produce skilled technical human resources (MoEST, 2019). The policy further mentions that there will be legal provisions which will include all aspects of TVET for its development. Regarding the role of the province, the education policy, 2019 states that the provinces need to formulate their own acts aligned with the federal act to conduct TVET programs in their respective provinces. While the role of the local government as per the Education Policy is to closely manage, monitor and inspect the programs conducted (MoEST, 2019, p.22). Though the policy has indicated the role of federal, province and local level, there is no clarity as all levels are deemed responsible for conducting TVET which needs to be clarified in the forthcoming act to avoid duplication and to make each level accountable for a specific set of tasks as per the spirit of the constitution. The 15th Plan has also stated that “an integrated technical and vocational education and skills development laws will be formulated (National Planning Commission, 2020, p.235).

In such a context, considering the need of restructuring the TVET sector in the federal governance system, the TVET governance framework

as it is depicted in the figure 2 seems plausible. Considering the multi-sectoral linkages of TVET, it is essential to have a national integrated policy to guide the multi-stakeholders involved at different government levels. Based on the national integrated policy, the essentials act, rules and regulations can be derived. There can be active participation of all levels of government and stakeholders through the intergovernmental TVET council. This council will be instrumental in building common ownership of the TVET sector and act as a professional leader of the sector too.

### Conclusion

Nepal’s TVET sector has undergone through a highly centralized mode of governance. Hence, it’s restructuring in the new federal governance structure faces challenges as the process of restructuring entails losing power and resources from the central authorities who have enjoyed these hitherto. The federalization of TVET governance therefore needs to be radical instead of incremental as the latter one can be diluted in the course of time through the nexus of politicians and bureaucrats. Multilevel governance is helpful to the functioning of the TVET sector with the clear roles and responsibilities assigned to each level of government as per the national integrated policy. This concept provides an avenue for power sharing and overcoming conflicts among the stakeholders. This can be possible with strong willingness and commitment of the leaderships with both the political and bureaucracy fronts to develop enabling collaborative culture for the working of TVET sector.

### Note

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