Local Governance Based on Citizens' Opinion Method in Municipalities of Madhesh Province

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ABSTRACT

The local-level election took place in 2017, marking the first such event after two decades following the restructuring of Nepal following the new Constitution. Subsequently, a second local-level election occurred in 2022, facilitating the selection of municipal representatives. Over six years, citizens have had the opportunity to benefit from the services provided by the local government (LG), aligning with the constitutional principle of delivering quality services directly to the people. Achieving this objective necessitates a well-established structure, efficient processes, and competent actors, all guided by the principles of good governance. Nepal's performance, as measured by the World Bank based on World Governance Indicators (WGI), has consistently fallen below the global average across six key indicators spanning from 1996 to 2022. Against this backdrop, efforts have been directed towards assessing the status of local governance in the Madhesh Province and offering viable suggestions for improvement to bolster the federal democratic system. Hence, this study focuses on the intellectual community within the province as its sample population. As opinions were collected, the research revealed that local governance in the Madhesh Province falls below the average standard. In light of this circumstance, local governments should enhance and reinforce local governance to support the institutionalization of federalism and democracy.

Keywords: governance, local government, Madhesh Province, citizen, indicators

Introduction

Governance refers to the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes (a) the process by which governments are selected, monitored, and replaced; (b) the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and (c) the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them (Kaufmann et al., 2010, p. 4). Governance refers to the mechanisms and frameworks for making and managing public policy decisions, involving constructive engagement across the boundaries of public agencies, governmental levels, and/or the public, private, and civic sectors (Ysa, Colom, et al.,

2014). This collaboration aims to achieve a public purpose that would be challenging to accomplish otherwise. The term governance is employed in various situations and scenarios viz. as the minimal state, corporate governance, new public management (NPM), good governance, socio-cybernetic system, and self-organizing networks (Mishra, 2020a). Governance has three legs viz. political, economic, and administrative power. It encompasses intricate systems, procedures, connections, and establishments that enable government, public sector, private sector, and civil society to voice their concerns, uphold their entitlements and responsibilities, and resolve their disagreements (Decode IAS, 2022; Islam, 2017). As Wilde et al., (n.d.) express that it is about the processes by which public policy decisions are made and implemented. However, the OECD (2009) assumed that gaps in governance, such as information, capacity, fiscal, administrative, and policy gaps among different levels of government, may lead to inefficiencies. Hence, regular assessments of governance are necessary to eliminate these gaps. Annex 1 demonstrates the factors of governance for assessing governance. In terms of measuring local governance, local governance, decentralization processes, local democracy, and local government are four broad focus areas (Wilde et al., n.d.).

Article 51 (b) (4) states that the Nepal government pledges to uphold good governance by facilitating equitable and uncomplicated public access to public services and amenities. This commitment involves fostering a public administration that is just, proficient, unbiased, transparent, devoid of corruption, accountable, and inclusive of citizen participation (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015). Therefore, the constitution of Nepal has entrusted executive authority to LGs and tasked the Rural Municipal Executive and the Municipal Executive with the issuance of overall directives, as well as the supervision and regulation of the governance of both village bodies and municipalities. The constitution has established a distinctive

connection between the local government and the citizens since LGs in Nepal are ready to progress as platforms for wielding powers and authority, involving legislative, executive, and a restricted set of judicial functions within their specific regions (Dhungana, 2019). LGs and their leaders directly elected by the people, along with the civil service operating within them, bear a significant responsibility to function as crucial actors in fulfilling constitutional obligations, including various "fundamental rights," and public services. Given the extensive political context, it is expected that LGs will also conform to the principles of good governance. This includes maintaining the separation of power, allowing space for opposition and dissent, and ensuring accountability and transparency—elements widely acknowledged as essential requirements for a constitutional democracy.

Under the Constitution of Nepal, the Nepal government has enacted the Local Government Operation Act. The act aims to provide efficient and high-quality services by guaranteeing the participation, accountability, and transparency of the people while adhering to the principles of the rule of law (Local Government Operation Act, 2017). As per Local Institutions Self-Assessment (LISA), the status of LGs of Madhesh Province in their self-assessment in ten thematic areas is about 52 points, 59 points, and 65 points out of 100 points in aggregate in the fiscal year 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 respectively (MoFAGA, 2023b). The LISA tool has slightly covered the functional dimensions of the World Governance Survey Discussion Paper. However, it is the best tool developed by the Nepal Government to measure the status of local governance in LGs in Nepal. According to Adhikari et al. (2021), there is a consistent rate of citizen participation in the activities of the LGs of Madhesh Province. This involvement includes 5% of citizens actively participating in ward and village assembly sessions, 3% engaging in user committee meetings, and 2% attending meetings associated with local-level planning and budgeting.

Moreover, 14.2% of the population of Madhesh Province admitted to offering bribes to access public services. According to their findings, 61% of Madhesh Province citizens are unfamiliar with public hearings, while 65.4% have not witnessed or heard about public audits. Only 44% of Madhesh Province citizens are aware of the constitution of Nepal, and a significant 75% have no knowledge of political party activities. A notable 64% acknowledged receiving public services successfully on the first attempt without external assistance.

While discussing the gaps in local governance, Ogunnubi (2022) expresses that institutional inefficiency, limited room for discretion, insufficient financial openness, incomplete decentralization in both political and administrative aspects, and corruption are some of the numerous challenges in governance. Challenges of governance in Nepal include inadequate accountability, limited responsiveness and transparency, widespread corruption, non-inclusive governance, diminished credibility of public institutions, excessive politicization in governance practices, and insufficient innovation in governance (Baral & K.C., 2023). The situation described in Madhesh Province reflects a pessimistic outlook on governance within LGs. This negativity is resonating significantly at the grassroots level of LGs in Madhesh Province, possibly due to constraints such as limited manpower and resources, a lack of fiscal autonomy, ineffective monitoring, insufficient accountability and transparency, the influence of elite power, political manipulation, and potential non-cooperation from both provincial and federal governments.

The Madhesh Province, established with the enactment of the new Constitution of Nepal in 2015, comprises eight districts: Saptari, Siraha, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Sarlahi, Rautahat, Bara, and Parsa. Situated in the flat plains of Tarai and Chure, to the south of the Siwalik hills, it covers an area of 9661 square kilometers (Madhesh Province Policy and Planning Commission, 2020). As of 2022, the population of the province stands at 6,126,288 (CBS, 2022), with 136 LGs and a recent selection of 6,621 elected representatives. The province experiences temperatures ranging from 38-40 degrees Celsius in the summer to 5-10 degrees in the winter. Major rivers in the region, including Koshi, Bagmati, Kamala, and Lakhandei, serve as potential sources of electricity, drinking water, and irrigation. The province features a passenger serviceable railway connecting Janakpur to Jayanagar in India, and important roadways include Mahendra Highway, Postal Highway, Tribhuvan Highway, and BP Highway. Additionally, the province is served by three airports: Rajbiraj Airport, Janakpur Airport, and Simara Airport. According to the Madhesh Province Policy and Planning Commission (2020), the Madhesh Province boasts an average economic growth rate of 6.5%, with a per capita income of USD 645. Its contribution to the national GDP is 12.8%, while 47.9% of its population falls under the poverty line. The human development index for the province is recorded at 0.497.

The purpose of this study is to pinpoint potential shortcomings and limitations, offering policy recommendations to guide subsequent actions for local, provincial, and federal governments regarding local governance.

This research focused on the perspective of citizens rather than considering the opinions of various stakeholders. However, relying solely on the citizens' viewpoint could introduce bias, as they might lack comprehensive knowledge about the legal processes, procedures, and provisions governing municipal management. As a result, the findings mayn't be more accurate and reflective of the actual state of local governance in the municipalities of Madhesh Province. Additionally, this study selected participants who have completed graduate-level education or above to ensure a comprehensive understanding

of governance and accurate responses. This form of selection could result in identifying research participants who are not actively participating in municipal activities. Moreover, time constraints and resource limitations prevented me from establishing broad sub-indicators for each component. The unavailability of documents and difficulties in contacting municipal authorities further hindered my ability to collect quantitative data from all municipalities. For a more comprehensive and accurate analysis, it would have been beneficial to gather documents from each municipality and engage with the relevant authorities to discuss governance issues. Consequently, this study is confined to citizens' perceptions and experiences regarding the receipt of services and municipal coordination in addressing political and economic challenges.

Local governance is a broader idea that involves formulating and executing collective action at the local level (Shah & Shah, 2006). As Ysa et al. (2014) state the interpretation of governance remains subject to variation based on the approach, field of study, discipline, and theoretical framework. Wilde et al. (n.d.) have explained many methods of measuring local governance. However, this research paper has addressed eight elements of governance, which serve as fundamental principles for citizen-centric local governance. These include the rule of law, effectiveness and efficiency, transparency, accountability, participation, responsiveness, equity and inclusiveness, and strategic vision.

Review of Literature

Local governance is a diverse and geographically rooted organization dedicated to attaining social, economic, or political goals. It functions with financial support from higher authorities or self-generated revenues, overseeing and regulating various facets of public services within the local community (Ndreu, 2016). Keping (2017) has noted five major propositions on governance as theory: 1) governance encompasses a collection of institutions and participants sourced from both within and outside the official government, 2) governance recognizes the merging of borders and roles in addressing social and economic challenges, 3) governance highlights the power dynamics inherent in the interactions among institutions engaged in collaborative endeavors, 4) governance underscores the significance of self-regulating networks comprised of independent actors, 5) governance acknowledges the ability to achieve objectives independently, without necessarily depending on the government's authority to command or exercise power. In measuring governance, the LISA tool developed by Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA) based on Local Institutions Self-Assessment Procedure 2020 has demonstrated ten thematic area to be assessed to know the performance of LGs (Local Institutions Self-Assessment Procedure, 2020). Sahamies et al. (2022) have stated that the evolution of public governance in the Western world is commonly illustrated in three sequential stages: 1) Traditional Public Administration (TPA), 2) New Public Management (NPM), and 3) New Public Governance (NPG). NPG is deemed effective as it operates within multi-actor networks.

According to Bertelsmann Stiftung (2022), in 2017, the Bayesian Corruption Index (BCI) scored Nepal 54.3 out of 100 (where 100 = totally corrupt). Notably, federalism is gaining traction, and its application in Nepal is compelling political parties to innovate beyond the realm of elections since The Asia Foundation (2019) reports that slightly under half of the population (46.4%) is familiar with the services offered by local governments. According to The World Bank (2023), the status of governance of Nepal is as follows. The World Governance Indicator (WGI) Estimate ranges from approximately -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong) governance performance.

Figure 1(a)

Status of Governance of Nepal
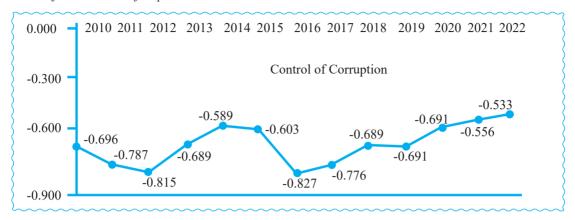

Figure 1(b)

Status of Governance of Nepal
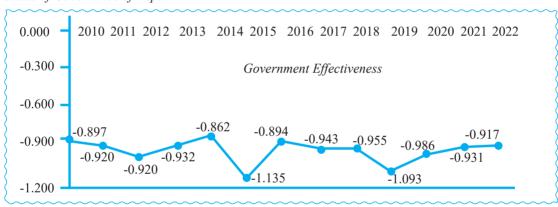

Figure 1(c)

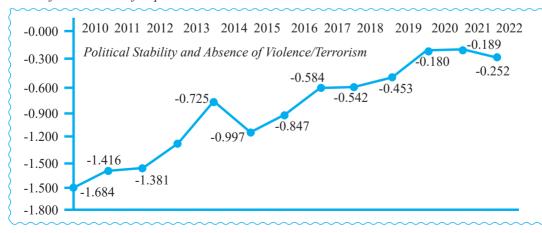*Status of Governance of Nepal*

Figure 1(d)
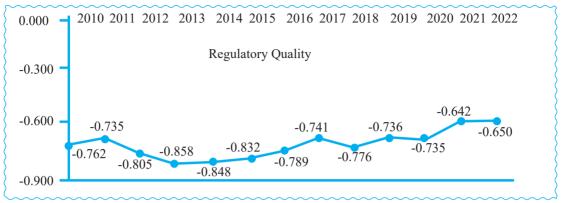
Status of Governance of Nepal

Figure 1(e)
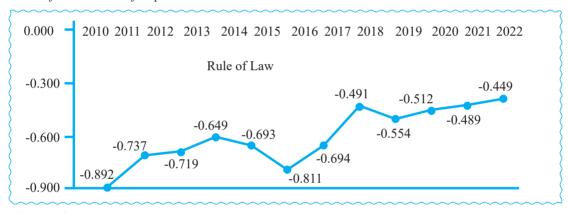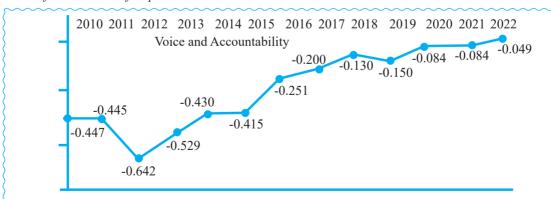
Status of Governance of Nepal

Figure 1(f)

Status of Governance of Nepal

Source: (The World Bank, 2023)

(Asian Development Bank, 2017) briefed that Nepal's administration of public finances faces systematic delays and suboptimal performance in vital areas such as budget approval, release, and implementation. Additionally, shortcomings are evident in expenditure reporting, auditing, and various other aspects of financial management. Furthermore, the existing anti-corruption system often focuses on addressing minor corruption issues involving low-level bureaucrats, rather than targeting the political elite, high-ranking officials, and the private sector. Despite a few high-level convictions in recent years, the emphasis remains predominantly on lower-level corruption cases.

Status of Governance in Madhesh Province

The performance of Madhesh Province is as follows as per LISA.

Table 1

Status of Performance of LGs in Madhesh Province as per LISA

Thematic Areas	Percentage			Score		
	2076/77	2077/78	2078/79	2076/77	2077/78	2078/79
Governance arrangement (9%)	74.42	80.67	84.09	6.70	7.26	7.57
Organization and administration (8%)	54.57	65.9	71.58	4.37	5.27	5.73
Annual budget and plan management (11%)	54.41	61.13	66.69	5.99	6.72	7.34
Financial and economic management (11%)	63.08	69.94	74.72	6.94	7.69	8.22
Public service delivery (16%)	54.24	64.51	71.24	8.68	10.32	11.40
Judiciary performance (7%)	71.93	75.93	78.82	5.04	5.32	5.52
Physical infrastructure (13%)	37.65	43.94	48.44	4.89	5.71	6.30
Social inclusion (10%)	40.66	49.35	58.34	4.07	4.94	5.83
Environment protection and disaster management (9%)	37.91	42.89	47.7	3.41	3.86	4.29
Cooperation and coordination (6%)	31.66	33.61	36.93	1.90	2.02	2.22
Total (100%)				51.97	59.11	64.41
Level of indicators						
Overall status (21%)	53.05	60.01	64.56	11.14	12.60	13.56
Procedural status (34%)	45.92	52.71	58.71	15.61	17.92	19.96
Quantitative status (45%)	56.04	63.49	68.53	25.22	28.57	30.84
Total (100%)				51.97	59.09	64.36

Source: (MoFAGA, 2023b)

The minimum scores of LGs in the fiscal years 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 were 5.25 points, 11 points and 13.25 points respectively. Likewise, the maximum scores of LGs in these fiscal years were 79.50 points, 85.75 points and 89 points. In fiscal year 2019/20, 1 LG was excellent, 9 were good, 33 were weak, and 93 were very weak. In fiscal year 2020/21, 4 LGs were excellent, 24 were good, 68 were weak, and 40 were very weak. Likewise, 9 LGs were excellent, 37 were good, 65 were weak, and 25 were very weak in the fiscal year 2021/22 according to the LISA assessment.

According to Adhikari et al. (2021), in response to civil service experiences, 21% of Madhesh Province citizens stated that civil servants often do not address the concerns of service recipients. Additionally, 25% mentioned
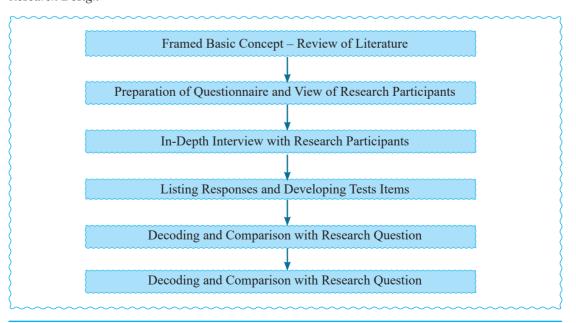
delays in service provision, and 29% claimed that civil servants create unnecessary problems during service delivery. Moreover, 37% of Madhesh Province citizens feel that caste serves as a barrier to accessing services. Regarding the nexus between documentation and service reception, 52% of citizens believe that proper documentation alone is insufficient, and bribes are necessary when dealing with public entities. In terms of public participation in planning and development processes, 49% of Madhesh Province citizens have some level of belief, while 22% have full confidence in the involvement of the public in LGs. Similarly, 53% have partial confidence, and 20% have complete trust in LGs for safeguarding public rights. Only 11% of Madhesh Province citizens believe that elected representatives in LGs will bring about significant improvements. As per the literature, the factors of governance are given in Annex 1.

Methodology

In my role as an expert with the Provincial and Local Governance Support Program (PLGSP) in Madhesh Province, I consistently engage with Local Governments (LGs), staying informed about their activities, including planning, budgeting, and implementation. Therefore, I believe that I am an appropriate person to study the governance of this region in current circumstances.

Governance can be assessed at multiple levels (Gisselquist, 2014; Hyden et al., 2003; Wilde et al., n.d.), but my focus is on the LGs of Madhesh Province. The majority of researchers and practitioners utilize national governance indicators, assessing aspects such as inputs, outputs, processes, outcomes, and impact (Wilde et al., n.d.). I have dedicated my efforts to examining governance using this narrative. Among 3 approaches for the assessment of governance, local governance assessments based on citizen (or single stakeholder) perspectives have been used in this research[1]. Uma (2020) emphasizes that the citizen opinion model offers a benefit in understanding quality public services, ensuring the active engagement of individuals in the governance process. Therefore, the investigation was carried out using this approach. The research design is framed in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Research Design

Framed Basic Concept – Review of Literature

↓

Preparation of Questionnaire and View of Research Participants

↓

In-Depth Interview with Research Participants

↓

Listing Responses and Developing Tests Items

↓

Decoding and Comparison with Research Question

↓

Decoding and Comparison with Research Question

The qualitative dominated the quantitative research methods in this study. A deductive research approach has been adopted in this study. First of all, the literature was reviewed. Then problems were identified and further actions were taken. The total number of research participants was 86 from 8 districts of Madhesh Province. This study followed the snowball sampling method. A total of 164,070 people hold a graduate degree or its equivalent, a postgraduate degree or its equivalent, and higher qualifications (National Statistics Office, 2023). The total of such people was perceived as the population size because they possess a better understanding of governance. The calculation of sample size for this research is as follows.

Population size (N) = 164,070

Critical value (95% confidence level) (Z) = 1.96

Margin of error (e) = 0.05

Sample proportion (p) = 0.05

Sample size (n) = 73

$$\text{Sample size (n)} = N \times \cfrac{Z^2 \times p \times (1-p)/e^2}{\left[n-1 + \cfrac{z^2 \times p \times (1-p)}{e^2} \right]}$$

A set of questionnaires was distributed to these educated individuals, and telephone interviews were also conducted. Secondary data were gathered from electronic publications, journals, policies, reports, laws, books, and newspapers. After collecting the data, they were processed, and a statistical data analysis tool was utilized for the analysis. A focused group discussion with intellectuals from the Madhesh Province was conducted to validate the findings.

The governance indicators were subdivided into 40 sub-indicators, each rated on a scale from Excellent (2 points), Good (1.5 points), Satisfactory (1 point), Need Improvement (0.5 points), to I don't know (0 points). The maximum total score for all sub-indicators was 80 points. Based on the responses of research participants, the scores achieved in each indicator and sub-indicator were calculated and converted into percentages, then mapped onto the WGI rating scale, ranging from -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong).

Characteristics of Research Participants

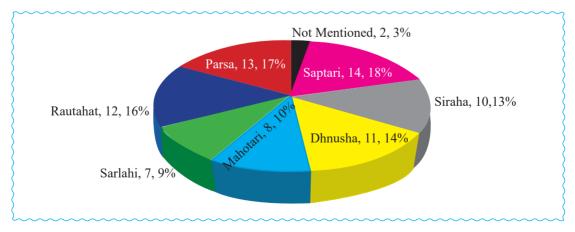The research participants were as follows.

Figure 3

Representation of Research Participants

Table 2

Details of Research Participants

Characteristic	Category	Number	Percentage
Age group	Below 20 years	0	0%
	21 years to 30 years	7	8%
	31 years to 40 years	35	41%
	41 years to 50 years	27	31%
	51 years to 60 years	13	15%
	61 years to 70 years	1	1%
	Not mentioned	3	3%
	Total	86	100%
Level of education	Literate	0	0%
	SLC passed	0	0%
	12 class (elementary) passed	4	5%
	Bachelor's degree passed	20	23%
	Master's degree passed	54	63%
	M.Phil. and PhD	6	7%
	Not mentioned	2	2%
	Total	86	100%

Results and Discussion

While discussing governance, my research is based on the eight principles of governance viz. rule of law; effectiveness and efficiency; transparency; accountability; participation; responsiveness; equity and inclusiveness; and strategic vision for studying the local governance in LGs of Madhesh Province. The status of the local governance in Madhesh Province is discussed in this section.

According to the criteria established by this research, the general state of local governance shows a 38% rating. The local governance of Madhesh Province is indexed at -0.598 as per the WGI range -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong). The rating based on the provided questionnaire is depicted in the figure below.

Figure 4

Overall Status of Local Governance in Madhesh Province

Figure 5

Sector wise WGI and Status of Local Governance in Madhesh Province
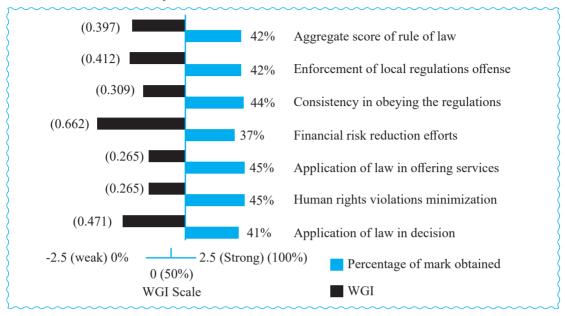

Rule of Law

The rule of law involves governance practices guided by legal principles, ensuring unbiased decision-making, free from corruption, collusion, and nepotism. It also aims to minimize human rights violations and achieve fair law enforcement for individuals or groups involved in committing offenses. The Nepal National Governance Survey (Provincial Report of Province Number 2) 2020 states that 13% of individuals fully believe and 42% partially believe that bureaucrats follow the rules. Figure 6 shows that the overall rule of law score in the Madhesh Province stands at 42% i.e. -0.397 (as per WGI) while the national index is -0.449 in 2022, with individual rates varying between 37% (WGI, -0.662) and 45% (WGI, -0.265) in different sub indicators. Guaranteeing lawful operations devoid of pressure, swiftly addressing audit backlogs, complying with legal mandates for timely planning, and enacting policies to activate thematic committees can effectively combat corruption, notwithstanding potential disparities between policy and behavior. The findings suggest that the enforcement of laws falls below the average, potentially undermining local governance.

Figure 6

Sector wise WGI and Status of Local Governance in Madhesh Province

(0.397) ... 42%	Aggregate score of rule of law
(0.412) ... 42%	Enforcement of local regulations offense
(0.309) ... 44%	Consistency in obeying the regulations
(0.662) ... 37%	Financial risk reduction efforts
(0.265) ... 45%	Application of law in offering services
(0.265) ... 45%	Human rights violations minimization
(0.471) ... 41%	Application of law in decision

-2.5 (weak) 0% — 2.5 (Strong) (100%)
0 (50%)
WGI Scale
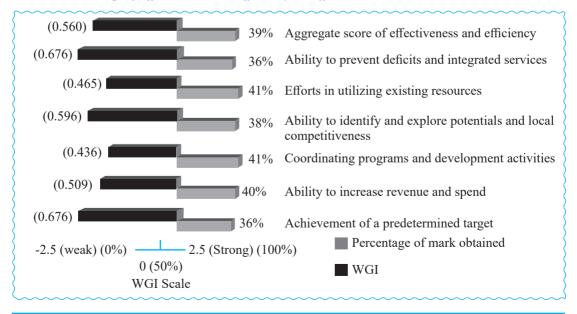
■ Percentage of mark obtained
■ WGI

Effectiveness and efficiency

Effectiveness is the attainment of a set objective through the coordination of programs and development activities. This includes exploring potential sources of local revenue, enhancing the quality of public services, promoting social welfare, and bolstering local competitiveness.

Figure 7

WGI and Percentage of Effectiveness and Efficiency in Different Sub Indicators

(0.560) ... 39%	Aggregate score of effectiveness and efficiency
(0.676) ... 36%	Ability to prevent deficits and integrated services
(0.465) ... 41%	Efforts in utilizing existing resources
(0.596) ... 38%	Ability to identify and explore potentials and local competitiveness
(0.436) ... 41%	Coordinating programs and development activities
(0.509) ... 40%	Ability to increase revenue and spend
(0.676) ... 36%	Achievement of a predetermined target

-2.5 (weak) (0%) — 2.5 (Strong) (100%)
0 (50%)
WGI Scale
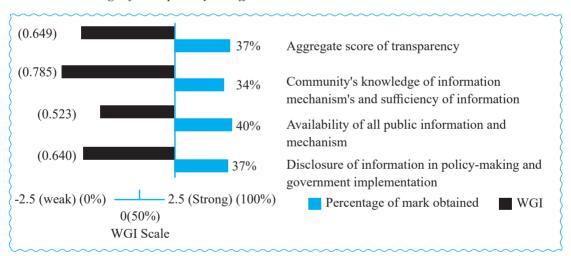
■ Percentage of mark obtained
■ WGI

The effectiveness and efficiency of the local government in the Madhesh Province is assessed at 39% i.e. -0.560 as per WGI while national WGI is -0.917 in 2022, with a range spanning from 36% (WGI, -0.676) to 41% (WGI, -0.465). The performance of local governments falls short of the average standard. The failure to meet predetermined targets is attributed to deficiencies in enhancing revenue and expenditure, coordinating programs and development initiatives, identifying and harnessing local potentials and competitiveness, utilizing existing resources effectively, and preventing deficits while ensuring integrated services.

Transparency

Transparency involves revealing information in the process of policy-making, making public information and the means to obtain it accessible. This encompasses the disclosure of financial allocations, the utilization of public resources, the provision of public services, and ensuring information is easily accessible, affordable, free, and timely. The transparency in the LGs of Madhesh Province has been rated 37% i.e. -0.649 (WGI measurement). The level of awareness within the community regarding information channels and accessibility stands at 34% (WGI, -0.785), while the accessibility of all public information and its corresponding mechanisms is rated at 40% (WGI, -0.523). Additionally, the transparency of policy-making processes and their execution is evaluated at 37% (WGI, -0.640).

Figure 8

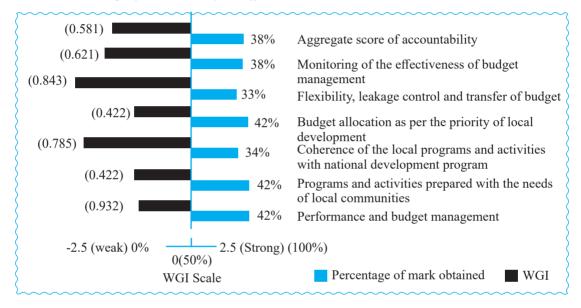*WGI and Percentage of Transparency in Different Sub Indicators*

4. Accountability

Accountability is clarifying and providing reasons for past actions, current activities, and plans to stakeholders. Additionally, it is answerable regarding the actions or behavior of the municipality. It manifests through effective performance and budget management, alignment between programs and activities, synergy with national development initiatives, anticipated performance levels, and the perceived benefits of programs and activities by the community. Budget accountability involves assessing the appropriateness of the budget concerning the public benefits received, adherence to the prioritized needs of local development in budget allocation, the capacity to minimize

budget management leaks, and monitoring the effectiveness of budget management. The Nepal National Governance Survey (Provincial Report of Province Number 2) states that 61% of citizens are unfamiliar with public hearings, and 65% have not encountered social auditing. The report elaborates on the enhancement of how bureaucrats, elected representatives, police officers, politicians, and courts conduct with citizens, with improvements recorded at 55%, 54%, 51%, 51%, and 48%, respectively. According to public perception, the accountability level of municipalities in the Madhesh Province is recorded at 38% (WGI, -0.581), compared to the national WGI of -0.049. Figure 9 gives the component-wise rate of accountability.

Figure 9

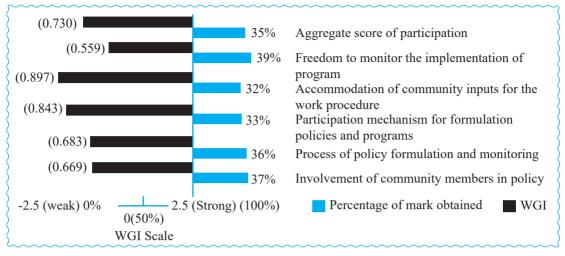*WGI and Percentage of Accountability in Different Sub-Indicators*

Participation

Participation entails engaging community members in the formulation of local policies, understanding the mechanisms of participation, and utilizing media or forums for involvement. Crucially, participation involves the incorporation of inputs from the community by the local government. The Nepal National Governance Survey (Provincial Report of Province Number 2) 2020 states that 22% of individuals fully believe and 49% partially believe that local governments ensure people's participation in development activities. The participation is rated 35% (WGI, -0.730). Community members' participation in policy-making is rated at 37% (WGI, -0.669); the process of policy formulation and monitoring stands at 36% (WGI, -0.683); mechanisms for community participation in formulating policies and programs are at 33% (WGI, -0.843); incorporation of community feedback into work procedures is at 32% (WGI, -0.897); and the freedom to monitor program implementation is at 39% (WGI, -0.559) within the LGs of the Madhesh Province. The below-average score across all sub-indicators has led to notably low peoples' participation in the local governments of the Madhesh Province. Such limited participation may erode democratic principles and weaken public ownership of anything undertaken by the municipality.

Figure 10

WGI and Percentage of Participation in Different Sub-Indicators

(0.730)	35% Aggregate score of participation
(0.559)	39% Freedom to monitor the implementation of program
(0.897)	32% Accommodation of community inputs for the work procedure
(0.843)	33% Participation mechanism for formulation policies and programs
(0.683)	36% Process of policy formulation and monitoring
(0.669)	37% Involvement of community members in policy

-2.5 (weak) 0%   2.5 (Strong) (100%)
0(50%)
WGI Scale

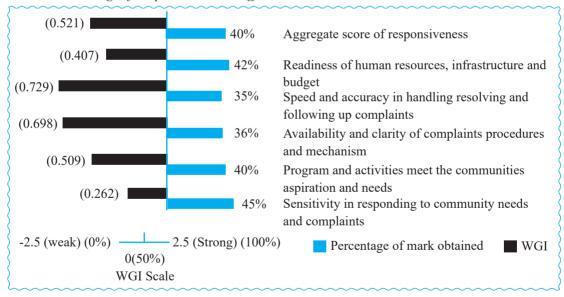■ Percentage of mark obtained   ■ WGI

Responsiveness

Responsiveness refers to the ability of local governments to promptly address community needs and concerns while effectively aligning programs and activities with the community's aspirations and requirements.

Figure 11

WGI and Percentage of Responsiveness in Different Sub Indicators

(0.521)	40% Aggregate score of responsiveness
(0.407)	42% Readiness of human resources, infrastructure and budget
(0.729)	35% Speed and accuracy in handling resolving and following up complaints
(0.698)	36% Availability and clarity of complaints procedures and mechanism
(0.509)	40% Program and activities meet the communities aspiration and needs
(0.262)	45% Sensitivity in responding to community needs and complaints

-2.5 (weak) (0%)   2.5 (Strong) (100%)
0(50%)
WGI Scale

■ Percentage of mark obtained   ■ WGI

The Nepal National Governance Survey (Provincial Report of Province Number 2) 2020 states that 16% of individuals fully believe and 42% partially believe that bureaucrats listen t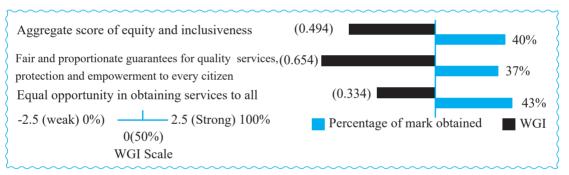o the citizens carefully. Similarly, 13% of people fully trust and 42% partially trust that bureaucrats provide timely service to citizens. Additionally, 18% of individuals fully trust and 42% partially trust that bureaucrats explain public services to citizens. Figure 11 discloses that the responsiveness

rate of LGs in the Madhesh Province is 40% (WGI, -0.521). The responsiveness to community needs and complaints is rated at 45% (WGI, -0.262); the implementation of programs and activities aligned with community aspirations and needs stands at 40% (WGI, -0.509); the clarity and availability of procedures and mechanisms for addressing complaints is at 36% (WGI, -0.698); the efficiency and accuracy in handling, resolving, and following up on complaints are at 35% (WGI, -0.729); and the preparedness of human resources, infrastructure, and budget stands at 42% (WGI, -0.407) within the LGs of the Madhesh Province. All these indicators have been rated below the average level. The quality of services provided to citizens is poor.

Equality and Inclusiveness

Equality entails that each citizen has an equitable and proportionate opportunity to access government services and assurances, ensuring the availability of quality services, protection, and empowerment for everyone. The Nepal National Governance Survey (Provincial Report of Province Number 2) 2020 states that 18% of individuals fully believe and 53% partially believe that LGs promote social inclusion. The state of equality and inclusivity in the services offered by the local government to the community is deemed poor, with an overall score of 40%, equivalent to -0.494 according to WGI measurements. This finding suggests that local governments did not prioritize a critical element of democracy, which is inclusion and equality, to a satisfactory extent.

Figure 12

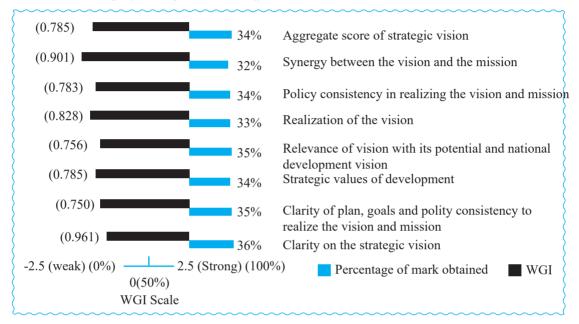*WGI and Percentage of Equality and Inclusiveness in Different Sub-Indicators*

Strategic Vision

Evaluating the strategic vision involves examining the accuracy of objectives in the local development plan and the consistency of policies aimed at achieving the envisioned goals. The precision of objectives in the local government's development plan is apparent in the clarity of the vision concerning strategic values, its alignment with potential and national development objectives, and the feasibility of realizing the local development vision. To assess policy consistency in realizing the vision and mission, one analyses the coordination between the vision and mission, the actions taken, and the alignment of local development programs and activities

with established development policies. The data in Figure 13 indicates that the strategic vision of LGs in the Madhesh Province is lacking, with a rating of 34%, equivalent to -0.785 according to WGI measurements. The transparency regarding the strategic vision stands at 36% (WGI, -0.691); the clarity regarding plans, objectives, and the consistency of policies to achieve the vision and mission is rated at 35% (WGI, -0.750); the strategic development values are at 34% (WGI, -0.785); the alignment of the vision with its potential and the national development vision is at 35% (WGI, -0.756); the realization of the vision is at 33% (WGI, -0.828); the consistency of policies in realizing the vision and mission is at

34% (WGI, -0.783); and the synergy between the vision and the mission is at 32% (WGI, -0.901) within the LGs of the Madhesh Province. This result suggests that LGs suffer from a deficiency in a robust strategic vision, alignment between their vision and mission, and comprehensive stakeholder understanding, possibly resulting in a lack of direction and misguided actions (Altiok, 2011).
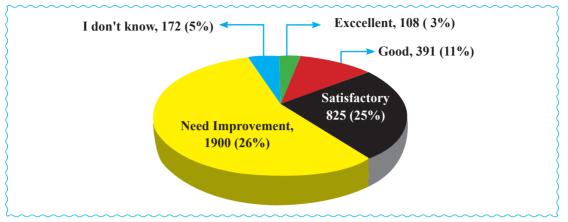
Figure 13

WGI and Percentage of Strategic Vision in Different Sub-Indicators

Findings

1. Each location has its unique context shaped by its social structure, educational attainment, religious beliefs, cultural practices, economic status, and political situation. Therefore, the administrative mechanisms, processes, and procedures should be tailored accordingly to suit the specific needs of each region. Similarly, Madhesh Province presents a distinct context characterized by its unique social, political, economic, and educational conditions. It's imperative to identify and cultivate an administrative and governance approach that aligns with the particular characteristics and requirements of this province.

2. Nepal has entered its sixth year since the implementation of federalism. Haldrup (2020) expresses that assessing governance levels contributes to capacity building or systemic development. Is now an appropriate moment to assess governance? However, if we want to know how LGs are facilitating the institutionalization of federalism, this research reflects, with only 3% of participants rating the performance as "Excellent", 25% as "Satisfactory" and 56% indicating a "Need for improvement". In the Nepalese context, it's deemed unfavorable when intellectuals respond with "I don't know". It's imperative to involve them in the development process of local governments rather than leaving them uninformed.

Figure 14

Overall Status of Local Governance in Madhesh Province

I don't know, 172 (5%)

Exccellent, 108 (3%)

Good, 391 (11%)

Satisfactory 825 (25%)

Need Improvement, 1900 (26%)

3. The coordination among federal, provincial, and local governments hasn't been smooth. LGs tend to rely heavily on assistance from federal and provincial governments for both administrative and financial matters.

4. There's a noticeable lack of vision, mission, goals, and objectives (VMGO) within local government bodies. Consequently, every aspect of local governance falls below par. While Madhesh Province's local governments score higher than the national average in various areas, accountability remains a notable exception.

5. Additionally, citizens have leveled accusations against elected officials, alleging them to be lacking in accountability, responsibility, and participation. Municipal authorities have been criticized for their self-centeredness and pursuit of personal gain. This conduct has led to a lack of cohesion among elected representatives, resulting in high levels of conflict even within the same political party.

6. Furthermore, the consistent rotation of staff, insufficient motivation, inadequate administrative skills among all municipal authorities, and unwarranted political influence have all impeded the effective operation of the municipality.

Conclusion

The government of Nepal has established legal provisions to promote good governance. These provisions aim to make public administration more citizen-oriented, accountable, transparent, inclusive, and participatory (Good Governance (Management and Operation) Act, 2008). The government seeks to achieve these goals by embracing fundamental values of good governance, including the rule of law, a corruption-free and efficient administration, financial discipline, and effective management of public works and resources. The objective is to create a conducive environment for delivering public services promptly and cost-effectively. The government aims to enforce citizens' rights by translating the principles of good governance into practical realities, transforming the administrative mechanism into a service delivery facilitator. Local government offers services to residents; however, citizens have limited chances to impact local government, resulting in an ineffective governance relationship (Wilson, 2000). A result below 50% in each of the eight indicators suggests a deterioration in the state of democratic values in the Madhesh Province. Hence, within Nepal's framework of cooperative federalism, reliable intergovernmental support is essential. For this to happen, all levels of government must come to agreements politically, administratively,

and financially, with dedication and altruism. If political parties fail to grasp this condition, I can anticipate a decline in democracy.

The successful administration of our complex and interlinked societies relies on shifting the individual sense of responsibility among diverse social participants towards a collective sense of co-responsibility (Ysa et al., 2014). Governance involves the redistribution of power in different directions—upwards, downwards, and laterally. A challenging issue in governance involves intricate interconnections, encompassing actors from multiple levels and sectors, along with diverse interests. These complexities hinder decision-makers from easily reaching a unanimous and straightforward solution to the problem. However, I'd like to offer the following recommendations concerning local governance, derived from the findings.

1. The majority of intellectuals and capable citizens should lend their support to the municipality's development initiatives. However, it was discovered that they are unaware of these mechanisms. Therefore, federal, provincial, and local governments need to initiate awareness programs to support municipal functions as soon as possible. Authorities should not be fearful of protests. They need to seek the support of the citizens.

2. As Mishra (2020b) suggests government operations and activities should be carried out openly and transparently, without secrecy, to cultivate trust among the public in the fairness and integrity of their elected representatives. It promotes accountable governance, prevents arbitrary administration, and ensures responsiveness to citizens' needs.

3. Municipalities must delineate the role of civil society, enhance capacity, and promote participation in municipal planning, program development, and policy formulation.

4. Roberts (2000) has expressed about 1) type I simple problems (low level of conflict), 2) type II complex problems (conflict over solutions), and 3) type III wicked problems (conflict over problem and solutions). She has added (1) authoritative (limiting the stakeholders), (2) competitive (keeping the power circulating among the competitors for defining the problem and present the solution), and (3) collaborative (engaging all stakeholders to find the best possible solution for all) strategies to handle wicked problems. Therefore, municipalities are advised to adopt any of these approaches to address the issues encountered in achieving good governance. Moreover, LGs should organize awareness programs for citizens regarding their support for the municipality.

5. As per Uma (2020), the citizens' involvement takes various forms such as a) communication (through information sharing), b) consultation (gathering information and experiences for outcome), c) participation (involving citizens in policy/project), d) representation (include citizens to help in determining choices), e) collaboration and partnerships; and f) co-decision and co-production (balanced sharing of power). The municipality has the flexibility to implement any suitable mechanism from among those available.

6. Municipalities should recognize the capabilities of individuals, ensure selfless dedication from elected representatives, foster intergovernmental relations and cooperation, promote job creation to empower citizens, bridge gaps between elected officials and bureaucrats, implement targeted job assignments, provide doorstep services, offer governance training to elected representatives and staff, educate everyone on monitoring methods, and optimize resource utilization.

7. The environment, culture, social dynamics, and economic conditions establish the community's standards. In the context of the

Madhesh Province, it is essential to conduct research on these themes and establish suitable governance strategies.

8. Local governments are advised to bridge the divides between elected officials, political parties, and bureaucrats and establish a collaborative performance mechanism.

9. The frequent rotation of municipal chiefs and staff poses a challenge to local governance. This issue may arise due to pressure from elected representatives and political parties, rule violations, dissatisfaction, and low motivation. To address this, local governments must create a conducive work environment and ensure job continuity.

The insights and recommendations provided in this paper will afford readers only a partial comprehension, considering the numerous facets within the domain of local governance that require ongoing exploration. These encompass the following domains.

1. The context of each municipality varies. Researchers can study the most appropriate governance approaches and strategies for further research.

2. Studying local governance and policies for fostering sustainable democracy is another important area of research.

3. This research is limited to the opinions of the citizens (single-sided approach). Comprehensive local governance assessment approaches based on multiple stakeholder perspectives can be very effective for further research.

4. Based on the discoveries of this study, another area for research is exploring methods to enhance the capacity of local governments.

5. The progress of local governments toward achieving self-reliance could be a subject of future investigation.

6. Investigating the factors contributing to the

low attainment of targeted plans is also a research focus in the Madhesh Province.

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Annex 1

Key Factors of Governance in the Literature

UN University, Hyden & Court (2002)		USAID, Bloom et al. (2007)	World Bank, Kaufmann et al. (2010)	GoN, GGMOA²(2008)
Institutional Areas	**Educational Dimension**	**Key Factors of Good Governance**	**Dimensions of Governance**	**Basic Good governance**
Civil Society	Socializing	Rule of Law	Rule of Law	Interest of Nation and People
Political Society	Aggregating	Accountability	Voice and Accountability	Equity and Inclusiveness
Government	Executive	Effectiveness	Government Effectiveness	Rule of Law
Bureaucracy	Managerial	Participation and Citizen Entanglement	Regulatory Quality	Human rights
Economic Society	Regulatory	Equity	Control of Corruption	Transparency, Objectivity, Accoutablity and honesty
Judaical System	Adjudicatory		Political Stability and Absence of Violence / Terrorism	Financial discipline, corruption-free, lean (smart) and people–oriented
				Impartiality and neutrality
				Access and decision of people
				Decentralization and devolution
				Participation and optimum utilization of local resources

Mursyidah & Abadi (2018)	MoFAGA (2023a)	HDPC (2020)	Keping (2017)	Council of Europe (2018)	UNDP (2004)
Principles of good governance	Essentials of Accountability	Transparency and rule of law	Rule of law	Rule of law	Gender equality
Rule of Law	Rule of law	Accountability	Accountability	Accountability	Corruption
Accountability	Accountability to Citizens	Effectiveness and efficiency	Effectiveness	Efficiency and effectiveness	Civil society
Effectiveness and Efficiency	Effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery	Participation and citizen engagement	Legitimacy	Participation, representation, fair conduct of elections	Electoral systems
Participation	Transparancy in action and decision		Transparency	Openness and transparency	Public service delivery
Transparency	Corruption free society		Responsiveness	Responsiveness	Human rights
Responsiveness				Ethical conduct	
Equity				Competence and capacity	
Strategic Vision				Innovation and openness to change	
				Sustainability and long-term orientation	
				Sound financial management	
				Human rights, cultural diversity and social cohesion	

Notes:

A user's guide to measuring local governance has provided users with a resource to draw on for developing new assessment tools or for adapting existing assessment approaches to specific contexts. The sources are grouped into three categories: a) comprehensive local governance assessment approaches based on multiple stakeholder perspectives, b) local governance assessments based on citizen (or single stakeholder) perspectives, and c) local governance and performance self-assessments by local government institutions.

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