



PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE OF BESISHAHAR MUNICIPALITY OF LAMJUNG DISTRICT IN WESTERN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

The key aim of this article is to look into the current state of people's participation and immersion in local governance of Besishahar Municipality of Lamjung district. Outlined by purposive non-probability judgmental sampling techniques, qualitative data saturation procedure was adopted so that it would help to make valid understanding of local governance. Fifteen sample respondents were ascertained. Elected officials, Mayor, Deputy Mayor, intellectuals, and government officer, Ward members, intellectuals, and public workers were among the 15 respondents. Primary data was accumulated mainly through formal and informal field and telephonic interviews. The study findings deduced that people's lively participation in many areas of government and development activities at the local level has been progressive and encouraging impacts. The legislature plays a significant role in Municipality assembly lawmaking. The executive body's primary responsibility is to provide day-to-day service delivery to the people at the local level. However, there are numerous problems and possibilities. They lack the necessary resources and budget for social and economic development. Amid tribulations, the elected representatives have made altogether seventy-one local laws. Local governments have 22 rights under the Nepalese constitution of 2015. At this juncture, they can start building capability at the grassroots level. The local government can help them develop their leadership skills. Broadly, amidst shortcomings, prospects and challenges, this Municipality's innovative works in social, political, and economic development through infrastructural operations are commendable.

Keywords: Development - innovative - legitimacy - people's participation.

INTRODUCTION

Gandaki province's Lamjung district headquarters lies in Besishahar Municipality. There are eight local bodies in Lamjung. Besishahar Municipality is one among them. It is not connected to any districts and is located in the midsection of Lamjung district. The *Annapurna Pad Marga* (Tracking Route) begins from this Municipality. This Municipality consists of eleven wards. After the municipal election held in 2017, the elected body of the Municipality passed 71 laws, 16 Acts, 7 Regulations, 35 Procedure Laws, Code of Conducts, Directions, and so on (Besishahar Municipality Office 2078). It is a fantastic success on the part of the local government. Participation of the general public in the development process which has become a worldwide phenomenon (Rijal 2011).

The constitution of Nepal was promulgated in 2015 by the Constitutional Assembly. It allocated the local level more authority so that an increasing number of people may participate in local planning and policy making bodies. It aims a great local accomplishment for the all-round development of the local areas. At present, Nepal is a country that is governed by a federal democratic republic. It decentralizes power to provinces and local governments. All provinces and local governments have rights under the Nepalese constitution of 2015. It is a significant aspect of the distribution of power and authority at the grassroots level. As a result, the Nepalese government delegated power to provinces and local governments (Government of Nepal, 2015). People's participation in planning has been exercised by Annapurna Rural Municipality (Dahal 2020).

Good government is crucial, and people can benefit from it if they have local dominance. Local government has numerous advantages; it is the foundation of democracy. It provides a chance for grass root leadership to emerge in a similar vein. The neighborhood unit's services are welcomed by the general population. In terms of local development initiatives, the concept of good governance is a relatively new one. Collaboration built on public trust is required for people-centered municipal governance systems (Dahal 2021). The Nepalese government will make the necessary preparations to ensure that services are provided at the province and municipal levels (MOFALD 2017).

METHOD AND MATERIALS

Sandelowski (1995) argues that qualitative sample sizes of ten may be adequate for sampling among a homogenous population. Hence, in the logic of small samples in interview-based qualitative study, using fewer than 20 participants results in better data, result, analysis and findings. Given this reasoning, qualitative method was espoused for this study. Besishahar Municipality of Lamjung district of Gandaki Province (in western Nepal) is the study site.

Framed by purposive non-probability judgmental sampling techniques, qualitative data saturation technique was adopted and consequently fifteen sample respondents were selected ultimately for primary data collection. Saturation as a core qualitative principle was used so that to determine and make valid understanding of the study phenomenon of local governance and to provide indication of data validity in a small sample size context. Elected officials, Mayor, Vice Mayor, intellectuals, and government officer, Ward members, intellectuals, and public workers were among the 15 respondents.

Bjorgvinsson, Ehn & Hillgren (2010) affirms that a participative method implies that the person in charge of addressing a problem and producing an innovation includes others who are both directly and indirectly affected by the outcome of their work. Schwarz, Groves, & Schuman (1999) argues that the collection of primary data is more expensive and time-consuming when compared to secondary data. Pedestalled mainly on participatory primary field data. This article provides a summary and analysis of local governance in Nepal hence the facts are supported by both participative primary and secondary data. Secondary data was gathered from a variety of sources, including books, journal papers, and research reports. Primary data was accumulated through various participatory field methods. One of the primary method used was interview. Interviewing subjects is the key strategy. Consequently, informally conducted telephone interviews, as well as in-person interviews, were employed. Among these interviews, telephonic interviews, one-on-one interviews, small-group interviews, and in-person interviews were commonly espoused. Key information on local people's participation was congregated mainly through individual interviews, phone calls, and emails. Other techniques employed for primary data collection were self-administered questionnaires and field

observations that provided first hand rich data on local people's perception and participation in local governance.

The process of primary data accumulation was a daunting and tedious task for the researcher. However, the researcher made frequent contact over the phone and made all arrangements for the interviews. They accepted the request and made the time available for the interview. The researcher got and immersed himself in an in-depth interview based on the respondent's time. As a result, abundant primary data were gathered during the fieldwork, mostly through face-to-face interviews, as well as telephone and in-person interviews. The tedious and daunting task of primary data collection was accomplished himself by the researcher during November 25th, 2021 to January 25th, 2022.

Literature review

Nepal's local government is the country's grassroots government. Articles 214 to 227 of Nepal's constitution of 2015 deal with the executive, legislative, and judicial powers at the local level (Government of Nepal, 2015). The rural executive or municipal executive shall have local executive power, subject to the Constitution of Nepal 2015 and its prevailing laws. Subject to this Constitution, the local executive power shall be limited to the subjects listed in Schedules 8 and 9 under local level/level competencies (Government of Nepal, 2015). Local self-government has also been allowed to exercise some powers by the Local-Level Operation Act of 2017.

All power and functions of the chairman, vice chairman, ward chairman, and ward members have been specified by the local operating legislation. Similarly, the Municipal Self-Government Act of 1999 is a crucial document at the local level. Local governments were established in Nepal during the Panchayat era in 1960, although the Panchayat system was designed with a more centralized approach (Acharya 2018). Local government is making its practices to reap the blessings of democracy through maximum participation of the local people in the governance process through decentralization, institutionalizing democracy at the grass root level (Dahal 2020). The rational underlying the appearance of the participatory development method is that beneficiary groups' engagement and involvement in progress initiatives improve and strengthen their capacities.

A participatory rural assessment is a people-centered development strategy that strives to empower communities by involving them in the

processes of identifying concerns, implementing solutions, and evaluating outcomes (Allam & Newman 2018). In terms of knowledge, skills, and organization, participatory planning approaches strive to build local capacity for sustainable development.

Recognizing the importance of local knowledge in the design of project actions is one of the most important strategies to ensure that local capacity is developed (Garrod 2003). An examination of the literature exposed four basic elements of the participatory approach (conversation, participation, cultural identity, and empowerment), as well as how they are traditionally conceived. Democratic engagement in electoral democracy's structures and procedures (Dalton 2017). Voting, volunteering, participating in group activities, and community gardening is examples of participatory activities. Some are individual activities that benefit society (for example, voting), while others are group activities that benefit either the group members or society (for example, recreational soccer teams) (e.g., volunteer organizations).

By evaluating the assumptions and practices of the previous/classical/traditional view that generally delays the development of truly participatory democracy, participatory governance seeks to deepen citizen participation in the governing procedure (Fischer 2015). The Nepalese Constitution of 2015 was enacted with the goal of strengthening and empowering local governments. It is for establishing good governance and developing local democracy in order to alter people's rural livelihoods and ensure long-term economic development (Dhital 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Law making

Following the power and directions given by the constitution of 2015, Besishahar Municipality of Lamjung has enacted almost seventy-one pieces of legislation, including Acts, regulations, operating guidelines, policies, and codes of conduct. According to Mayor G. S. Aryal of this Municipality, his principal work is the political, economic, and socio-cultural development of this Municipality, as he stated in a telephone conversation. According to G. S. Aryal (personal communication, 25 November 2021), the Municipality has enacted the Cooperative Act 2018, the Financial Act 2018, the *Financial Biniyojan Act* 2018, the Agricultural Communication Operational and Direction Act 2018, the Agricultural Professional Distribution Act 2018, the Education Act 2018, the Administrative

Operation Act 2018, the Judicial Committee Act 2018, the Infrastructure/Construction Professional Act 2019, the Disaster Management Act 2019, and the Infrastructure/Construction Professional Act 2019.

It has also drafted the Besishahar Municipality's Education Act and Regulations of 2018, Health Regulation Act of 2018, Public School Distribution Operation Act of 2018, and Education Rule of 2018. L. D. Adhikari (personal communication, January 25, 2022) a suggestion made during a telephone interview made a suggestion that infrastructure implications, home construction policy, and codes of conducts have all been issued in the same way as the Local Health Sanitation Act 2019 and the Natural Resource and Disaster Act 2018. These rules and laws make it easier for the public to receive services. Pokharel, M. (personal communication, December 15, 2021) suggested that Municipality has adopted 16 Acts, 7 Regulations, 35 Procedural Laws, Directive 7, and four codes of conduct. The section that follows accommodations into the intricacies of laws passed on various occasions.

Table 1: Laws made by Besishahar Municipality

SN	Description	Years	Number
1	Acts	2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021	16
2	Regulations	2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021	7
3	Procedural Laws	2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021	35
4	Directive	2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021	7
5	Laws		2
6	Standard		1
7	Policy		1
8	Code of Conducts		2
Total			71

Source: *Besishahar Municipality Office, 2021*

Table 1 shows that the local government has made 16 acts within five years. Similarly, it has made 7 regulations for their easy goods and service delivery. All these acts and regulations have contributed to the social, political, economical, socio-cultural, and overall development of the local level. Likewise, local government made 35 procedural laws. Thapa, P.R. (personal communication, December 5, 2021) suggested in a telephone interview that the local government has made Education Act, Financial Act, Cooperative Act, Disaster Management Act, and Health and Sanitation Act.

Similarly, management, rural Municipality assembly, and essential code of conduct directive for their people's interest and day-to-day service

delivery are essential to the people. The elected government is responsible for the sovereign people at the local level.

The representatives of Besishahar Municipality are responding to the people because they made more than six dozen laws. These laws are made for their people's needs and interests. So far, these laws are very popular with their people. Directly and indirectly, people's participation is taking place far making laws at the local level. It is an important opportunity for the grass root people. In other words, it is an important achievement of the federal system. All power and authority are used by the central government in the unitary system. But in the federal system, the people as well as the local level leaders both are empowered at the local level. The 2015 Nepali Constitution has given the populace a great opportunity to take part in all local units' activities both directly and indirectly. It is taking part in development, administration, and government. These are the fundamental traits of the participants. Through this procedure, it is presumable that the people exercise their sovereign right to choose their representatives for governing them. On a municipal level, the elected body performs legislative, executive, and judicial functions. The local assembly of that country performs the legislative function of establishing laws.

Similarly, the executive role is played for day-to-day service delivery and the judicial role is played for maintaining any disputes arising among the locals and for regulating the cases where the rules of the Municipality have been found violated. These are the important roles of the local level representatives. They have a close relationship they can meet almost every day and discuss matters related to their personal and social life. Then, they can communicate their problem for their betterment or overall development at the local level. The representatives are more responsible and accountable to their local people. They know the needs of the people and act for them accordingly. The people are happy with their daily services at the grass root level. It is the most important achievement at their local level. They made laws required for themselves. At the local level the people are directly or indirectly participating in administrative affairs for the implementation of their good policies and projects designed themselves. In this way, the people are active participants in infrastructure development at the local level. These are the major parts of people's participation on the local level.

People's participation in local planning

A list of powers at the local level is provided in Schedule 8 of the Nepalese Constitution of 2015. This covers topics like providing public services and fostering the growth of languages, cultures, and festivals. Authorities designated with the power to register cooperatives may be appointed at the local level. Local government is a planned social entity with a feeling of oneness. By definition, local government means an intra-sovereign governmental unit within the sovereign state dealing mostly with local affairs, managed by local authorities and subordinate to the state government (Jahan 1997:92). In this Municipality, people are active participants in the local planning for their infrastructure development as road, drinking water, irrigation Kanal, G. (personal communication, November 28, 2021) suggested in a telephone interview that the local government's first aim is the fulfillment of the basic needs of the people, the second aim should be poverty alleviation, the third aim is an increase in employment, the fourth aim is to increase production and growth. Similarly, the local government has been developing social and economic equity on the grass-root level and creating equitable distribution mechanisms for goods and service delivery. Substantially speaking the local government can contribute to the optimum utilization of local resources for sustainable economic development and ultimately contribute to developing the living standards of the people.

The People of Nepal are sovereign according to the constitution of Nepal. The constitution of Nepal introduces a federal democratic republic nation. In such a constitutional system, there is power sharing between the federal government and the local governments. Accordingly, the constitution provides various rights at the local level. The people are powerful in their local development and governance. After 2017 elected local governments try to make good management on the local level so as to provide good governance and development. The local government tries to practice and empower the people in the various sectors through their active participation. For this purpose, the local governments follow the bottom-up approach to planning. Before it, local government used to apply a top-down approach to development. Thus, for the first time democratic system in Nepal, the grass root people have empowered themselves for their local development. It is a real democratic practice to strengthen the federal political system. Also, all political parties follow and exercise the democratic culture for their internal way of institutional development. It supports comparative ability and the

people follow which parties are more democratic and more responsible for the constitutional provision and local as well as national development. So, the people are participating in local planning.

Similarly, Besishahar Municipality have enacted legislation relating to cooperatives. There are certain criteria regarding the classification of cooperatives, those who fall under the criteria of local cooperatives can be registered and renewed by the local level government. Similarly, they are accepting their ownership through local planning and active participation in the program, supervision and monitoring, and evolution. In the end, the people have achieved the benefit of the project. Thus, the people are enjoying democratic achievements.

Governance system

People who actively participate in making decisions are representative of those processes. Regular community meetings are conducted. Every decision is open and founded on meeting the needs of the populace and providing them with services. In their daily lives, people need a range of advice. A citizen charter has been made available by the Municipality and each ward office in Besishahar. Similar to that, it is working to establish a well-organized system for providing goods and services via a nearby administrative hub.

Critical examination

The Municipality of Besishahar strives to give the greatest local governance as far as possible. It has devised a sound strategy based on its budget and resources. They allocated 90% of their budget to local development. It has made significant progress in the field of road transportation. Local government created a ward-link road that works in the same way as an inner connectedness road. Shrestha, B. (personal communication, January 15, 2022) suggested in a telephone interview that Besishahar Municipality strives to create education legislation, regulations, and model schools that are recognized for their achievements. It had allocated 15 lakhs in its budget, however, it was not used for their objective. Besishahar Municipality, according to their intellectuals, failed to enhance the education system and could not be fruitful for the welfare of schools and teachers. This is an area where they are lacking. Adhikari, S. B. (personal communication, January 5, 2022) suggested in a telephone interview that the quality of local schools has remained the same. The local body made a policy but it is not applied in action. Comparatively other sectors are

benefiting from the same plan and policy but the education sector is lagging behind.

People's participation in infrastructure expansion

Lamjung Besishahar Municipality is situated on a hilly topography. On-road transportation is used by a large number of people. People must walk on foot and be transported from each ward to the Municipality's main office. The construction of the road is a top priority for the people Rimal, B. B. (personal communication, January 21, 2022) suggested in a telephone interview that they devise a strategy to quickly connect with the main office as well as the Besishahar district headquarters. In 2017, the people elected representatives to rule at the local level. The people and their representatives then made plans using a bottom-up approach. First, the ward assembly was called to choose a plan for their general development. They prioritized the plan for road development. The road is a vital component of development. Because there are so many issues with people's livelihoods. The road is a means of resolving the problem by providing convenient transit from one region of the country to another, as well as globally. Different highways connect different regions and provinces to the capital city Gurung, L. B. (personal communication, December 2, 2021) suggested in a telephone interview. Similarly, internal roads connect municipalities within a district.

However, in Lamjung Besishahar Municipality, ward connectivity for their main office has been established and selected. The residents of Besishahar Municipality prefer to build their road transportation systems by using buses, cars, motorcycles, and other conveniently transportable modes of transportation. The Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model's theory is known as PPP. As a result, they employed their PPP strategy to build roads in Besishahar Municipality. The Besishahar Municipality made the policy for all people's participation in the planning of road construction. The people are investing fifty percent and the local government invests fifty percent grants for road construction. This formula is applied and well implemented by the Besishahar Municipality of Lamjung district.

Finally, engagement in local planning benefits people's development. It is excellent evidence of LG's institutionalization. The people have significant influence over the development of their communities. It is used by local elected officials. They are chosen in a direct election. The people's representatives maintain close ties with the locals. Because it is a government that goes door to door. Its main activity is delivering goods

and services to the local population. As ward offices, people have taken goods and services near the administrative center. The ward office gave information on how to register for events as well as other recommendations. In the same way, great service delivery can play a neutral role in overall development. In a welfare society, the Besishahar Municipality performs a critical role. Similarly, active people's involvement grows over time.

CONCLUSIONS

The local government being very close to the people, they can quickly analyze the functions of their representatives. In Nepal, the practice of a federal democratic republic is relatively recent. In Nepal, unitary systems (that of the Kings and Ranas) have a history of almost 240 years. The federal democratic system aims to empower individuals from the ground up. Since the election of the Constituent Assembly in 2008, the Nepali people are sovereign. As a result, the people are taking part in self-governance. The people themselves choose their plan at the local level. The cooperative is the most effective means of local income generating through people's participation. It has supported communal responsibility among people in several programs. It has helped and activated the unemployed residents, enhanced their skills, raised their ownership, and promoted the local government's economic growth. However, this study has realized and deduced that this public-private partnership model requires citizen's active and vibrant participation.

Finally, this study substantiates that Besishahar Municipality tries to involve more people in their development efforts. Local governments are also attempting to be more accountable to the public. The mayor and deputy mayor, as well as the ward chairperson and members, are attempting to be accountable to the public. Their efforts are considerably focused on their governance and development. They enacted 71 laws aimed at improving government and infrastructure. The Besishahar Municipality can be proud of these accomplishments. People participate in planning and production sectors such as agricultural, business, and political developments as decision-makers with full public participation and discussion. Local governments have so far distributed social justice at the local level. As a result, the local government met the community's demand for products and services.

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