

# Efficient Service Delivery Practice at Local Government Administration of Nepal

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## Abstract

*This paper investigates administrative service delivery practices in Nepal's local government and the relationship between governance, service delivery, and citizens. And, it emphasizes collaboration, people-centric social development, and engagement highlighting the need for policy interventions. Public administration aims to achieve efficiency at local levels providing necessary services without discrimination based on affordability. It is a historical perspective expected to influence local people significantly. Using a qualitative approach, it reveals the satisfaction of local people with the efficiency of administration, the vision of leadership for efficient administration, and interpersonal communication adopted by leadership for addressing silo mental problems. However, gaps exist in knowledge and perceptions among people and societies. To achieve efficiency at all levels, it is necessary to provide necessary public goods and services without discrimination based on affordability. Performance should not only be a cost-benefit analysis but also provide value to citizens. In a scarcely available world, understanding efficiency's historical perspectives and future role is crucial.*

**Keywords:** Efficiency, Public administration, Local government, Common people, Social development

## Introduction

This paper examines the efficient administration of service delivery practice and the functional hierarchy of the local government of Nepal. It focuses on policy formulation for service delivery, the vision of leadership, interpersonal communication skills of leadership, responsibility, accountability for preparing legal frameworks, and administrative structure for addressing silo mental problems. It aims to trace the state input process and community-level output scenario, analyzing the roles, responsibilities, and accountability of the local government (LG) of Banganga Municipality of Kapilvastu, Lumbini Province. Banganga Municipality is a strategic municipality in Nepal, and it has a population of 96,714, with 11 wards. The Municipality is named after the Banganga River, a symbol of the ancient Bhagirathi River. The Tapobhumi of Maharishi Kapilmuni, a pioneer of Shaky philosophy. The main occupation of the mixed castes in Banganga Municipality is agriculture, trade, industry, employment, and wage-earning.

The paper identifies challenges in providing effective service to service receivers due to unclear legal rights, lack of coordination, and a lack of collaboration in level government. The paper calls for radical changes in service delivery institutional structure and functional mechanisms to make the system more accountable, responsible, transparent, and service delivery-friendly. For these, public administration aims to achieve efficient administration by providing necessary public goods and services without discrimination based on affordability. Performance should be a cost-benefit analysis and provide value to citizens. Efficient administration is historically rooted in Wilson's essay (1887) and is a permanent part of the study of public administration. It takes on a new perspective when studying it in a system of the LG of Nepal based on systems, values, inspirations, and human perceptions.

Organizations must evaluate their performance, which is related to their mission and activities. Efficiency in public administration focuses on achieving efficiency in public departments to provide goods and services. However, studying efficiency in a value-based environment with traditionally measured quantities offers a unique perspective. Outputs are not easily measurable in monetary terms and have a value base, making it crucial to be cautious when exploring efficiency in public administration. Frederickson (2010) identifies three pillars of public administration: equitable, efficient, and economical. Scholars have categorized efficiency into two main aspects: increasing output and adding values to meet citizens' expectations.

Manzoor (2014) perceives that equitable qualities include fairness, justice, and equality. Efficiency in public administration is more than a numerical input-output relationship, and its ultimate output is not easily identifiable. It focuses on efficiency in public administration to provide public goods and services. It takes on a new perspective when studying it in a system based on values, inspirations, and human perceptions, offering a unique perspective on efficiency in public administration. Nepal's federal system, established in 2015, aims to create adequate governance, long-lasting peace, and prosperity by dividing the country into federal, state/province, and local levels. It focuses for efficient administration to drive the country on the path of development and fulfill the needs of common people. Adhikari (2023) writes that the Article 50 (1) of Constitution of Nepal, 2015 states about governance decentralization for running efficient service delivery practice at local government administration of Nepal:

By acknowledging the sovereignty, independence and integrity of the country to be of utmost importance, the property, equality and freedom of the citizens are to be protected ensuring the rule of law, norms and values of fundamental rights and human rights, gender equality, proportional inclusion, participation and social justice through which a just system is to be maintained in all the spheres of national life along with the establishment of a government system aimed at public welfare and while the relations between the federal units are to be maintained on the basis of cooperation between them, the principle of inclusion in the governance system on the basis of local autonomy and decentralization is to be internalized.

Local governance is a system that empowers citizens to voice their needs, reconcile differences, and uphold community rights. Key components of it include citizen participation, cooperation, information exchange, accountability, and poverty alleviation (UNDP, 2004). Both local and national governance processes require synergy and coherence. Robust institutions are needed at both local government and federal levels to promote effective local governance and foster collaboration. Efficient mechanisms in local governance ensure social justice and drive economic development (Haque (2009). The practice of local governance is a public concern and administration strategy that improves administrative or managerial efficiency by redistributing authority and empowering local governments (Nepal, 2007 & Thapa, 2007). It involves a legal and administrative framework, delegating public service delivery responsibilities to local bodies, and enhancing their capacity to serve the community. This study aims to assess the effectiveness of the administration of LG in Nepal.

The LG, as the lowest unit in public administration, is expected to enhance service quality by utilizing skills and other capital. As a spearhead in community services, it strives to provide good services and create maximum services. The 21<sup>st</sup> century's administrative challenges focus on effective local governance, promoting social justice and inclusive development. This involves government bodies, social groups, communities, and civil society. Federalism, a governance administrative framework, aims to foster efficient administration to empower people at grassroots. This study investigates the extent to which LG as one of federalism elements have been implemented to improve local governance in Nepal. For this the research question: To what extent have the elements of efficient administration implemented to improve the local governance?

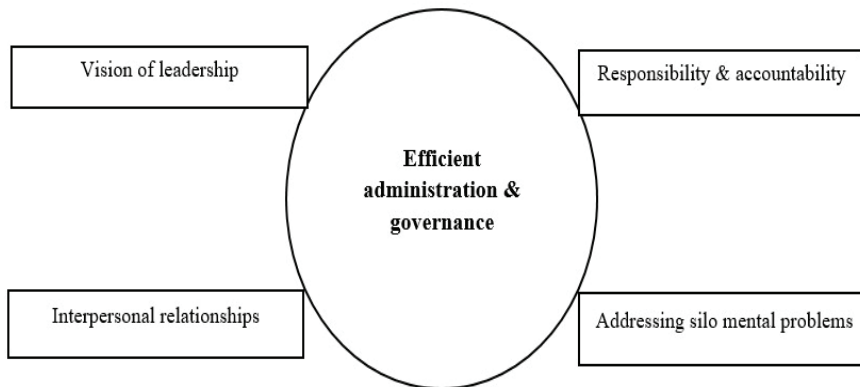
## Literature Review

Nepal is undergoing a significant transition towards a federal democratic republican state, with a new constitution being drafted by the Constituent Assembly. This change recognizes the importance of local governments in institutionalizing democracy and improving service delivery. Adhikari (2023) views good policy as a provision for efficient, effective, and responsive service delivery. However, a review of decentralization and service delivery highlights the need for support, greater autonomy, and accountability systems. Addressing weaknesses in accountability relationships is crucial for effective service delivery. Carefully designed decentralization and sequencing of reforms will be key challenges during this transition. Political economy and economic/resource considerations will remain critical in the debate on the federal structure in Nepal.

Wilson emphasized the importance of administration as a science, focusing on the government's sole purpose of accomplishing the objectives of an organized society. To believe him, every LG formed in Nepal is part of an organized society, and administration in LG is for implementing "government in action" (Wilson 1887, p. 198). He believed

that administrative reform could give government power without constitutional changes, requiring constant adjustment to changing social and industrial organizations. He writes, “Directly exercised, in the oversight of the daily details and in the choice of the daily means of government, public criticism is of course a clumsy nuisance, a rustic handling delicate machinery” (p. 215). Similarly, Agulhon, and Mueller (2022) states public criticism is essential in politics and administration, superintending formative policy forces. Administrative study should find ways to control and prevent interference with public criticism.

Efficiency has become a persistent theme in good government and has remained strong amidst political shifts. It has an intrinsic value in public administration and its two distinct schools are based on the Weberian model of ideal bureaucracy, which suggests that public administration is structured at the bureaucratic level, and public organizations pursue multiple value-based goals in a democratic system (Rutgers and van der Meer, 2010). Efficiency in public administration is more than just a technical relationship between resources and output. It has a connection with the vision of leadership, and establishing friendly communication to balance at the local level.



*Figure 1: Created by author on efficient administration & governance, 2024*

Efficiency in public administration is not a numeric input-output relationship, as organizations have multifaceted goals and the ultimate output is not easily identifiable. Rutgers and van der Meer (2010) discuss various views on efficiency, including Gulick’s axiom number one, and Slichter’s ratio between input and output. Frederickson (2010) identifies equitable, efficient, and economical as the three pillars of public administration. Scholars have argued that efficiency is a means of achieving other objectives, such as education, security, healthcare, or transportation, with the least possible effort. Rutgers and van der Meer (2010) trace the origins of efficiency back to Aristotle’s work on knowledge and the four aspects of causation. The term gained limited use in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with Jeremy Bentham connecting it to the efficiency of the oath. They find that the term was frequently used in the Report on the Organization of the Permanent Civil Service of 1854,

which did not provide a definition. The term was introduced in economic thought by Rankine in 1855 as a performance ratio for engines. Farrell's article identifies limitations in the use of price efficiency as instability. Over time, economics has expanded on the concept of allocative efficiency to address resource allocation.

Scientific management, promoted by Taylor (1992) focused on the quantity of output and finding the best way to do the job. It influenced the municipal reform movement in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but some scholars argue that efficiency was not a vital component of scientific management. Taylor equated productivity with efficiency as a capacity to produce. Despite criticism, scientific management was seen as a means to provide a relationship between citizens and policy, translating provision into the performance of public goods and services. This led to graft and cronyism in municipal governments. However, citizens and academia took over and initiated the progressive reform movement, which focused on improving government services and social and political reform. Lee's book *Bureaus of Efficiency: Reforming Local Government in the Progressive Era* (2008) evaluates four bureaus for efficiency, highlighting the impact of efficiency in bureaus on public administration.

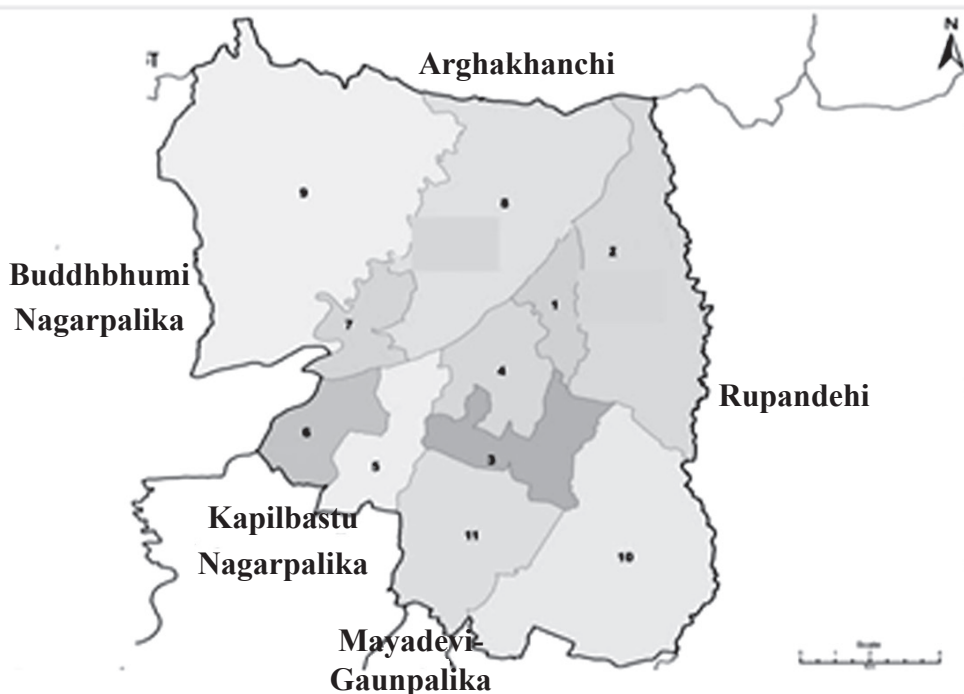
Efficiency has been a central theme in good government, and enduring political changes. Stivers (2000) suggests that men and women in bureaus laid the foundations for public administration and social work disciplines. Men chose public administration due to its technical scientific approach, while women chose social work. The scholars Waldo (1984) and Simon (1997) have different approaches to efficiency in public administration. The structuring of local government administration involves achieving a set value, achieving work on a predetermined time, or succeeding in human-led tasks for desired results. LGs carry out community service with officers focusing on their duties with orders.

Efficiency is the first principle of any organization, Waldo questions its purpose, and Simon sees it as a basic criterion for managing an organization. Their approaches highlight the tension between efficiency and other values in public administration. Technical efficiency is a complex concept that is not just a ratio but a link with other values, focusing on public agencies' objectives and responsiveness to stakeholders. It includes aspects such as social services, citizen involvement, workflow improvement, accounting, cost reduction, and personnel administration. Efficiency is often associated with costs due to the influence of business sponsors in bureaus. Effectiveness, defined as the extent to which the government produces output with minimal resource use, is also important (Sofi & Mutiarin, 2018). Efficiency and effectiveness are often used interchangeably and are sensitive to environmental factors affecting outcomes.

## Research Methodology

This qualitative descriptive research was conducted in Banganga Municipality, Lumbini Province using natural settings for in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis

involves several stages including data reduction, display, and final verification, to ensure comprehensive and accurate data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 2014; Ningi, 2022). The Tharu community in Banganga Municipality comprises about 40% of the municipality's total population, is followed by Brahmin-hill, Chhetri, and Magar as dominant caste/ethnic groups. The study aimed to understand efficient administration in local government administration. The research area is:



**Figure 2: Banganga Municipality, Kapilvastu**

Banganga Municipality in Kapilvastu District, Lumbini Province is located Buddhist archeological site (Municipal Transport Master Plan, 2022). It was established in 2017 and the municipality is home to various rural and urban communities. It has 11 wards –the smallest unit of municipal government. For evaluating the trend analysis of efficient public administration, the interviews are conducted with 13 representatives including Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Ward Presidents, 7 officials from the Municipality, and 103 common people representing teachers, farmers, social activists, etc. Data were collected from January to March 2023. Data analysis involved categorization, reduction, and interpretation, with the final stage being conclusion verification.

## Discussion and Findings

Efficient administration with the support of e-governance has revolutionized government services. It reduces communication time and makes governments more accountable. It makes public services more efficient in developing countries. As long as there is a systems

approach, combining technology and values can lead to a better future (Frederickson,1994). Public administrators are obligated to serve future generations for moral and practical reasons. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, public administration faced challenges like urbanization, industrialization, and immigration. Despite these challenges, utilities were provided and a focus on future improvements was maintained. Citizens were also engaged through surveys to improve services. Today, public administration can draw on decades of experience to generate solutions for future changes. Technological advancements and societal changes are crucial for public service (Denhardt, 1999, & Klay, 1998). Reducing reliance on fossil fuels and focusing on renewable resources and sustainability measures are essential.

### **Service Delivery and Local Government**

For efficient governance, it is necessary to make a balance between information and communication technologies which are crucial for public administration. Representatives of LGs in Nepal are crucial in implementing national legislative policies, formulating development policies, and providing administrative services. Leadership should be accountable and transformative with strong willpower and determination. The education and occupational status of representatives are important for institutional capacity. In the course of a visit to the research area and focus group discussion, the study reveals that good governance requires a strong foundation of constitutional provision, human resources, and physical resources. Out of 103 service receivers, 67 respondents reported insufficient service facilities, 21 had sufficient service facilities, and 15 had adequate facilities for administrative service delivery. The people who responded insufficient service facilities is alarmingly high compared to both sufficient service facilities and adequate facilities. Most of the staffs of LGs responded that the leadership of municipality has a good vision to address the problems of common people. The leaders are committed for efficient administration. The elected representatives expressed that they have insufficient infrastructures and due to the lack of efficient staffs, in some cases, it has been a problem to address the problems of service seekers immediately. One of the respondents from Tharu community expressed the following ideas:

The situation before and after the promulgation of the new constitution in 2072 is different at the local level. There is also a problem in service delivery due to the rapid transfer of employees. The problem is that the employees of the federal government and the employees of the local level do not agree. Sometimes we are the common people who get hurt even when the ward president and the municipality head have some problems. There has been so much budget at the local level, but there was talk of fattening empty contractors. When the representative at LG is the contractor and the contractor is the stakeholder in the political party, there will be problems in developmental activities. There is a policy rift in such cases. Common people are hopeless in this case. It is clear to see the poor condition of government schools and health posts. There are too many Tharu people here alone.

Counting the population of Tharu and Magar, the population is more than 50 percent. But, the municipality has not paid much attention to how to improve the condition of the Indigenous community and how to protect their culture. (Based on the discussion with the participant on 9 February 2023).

The study found that local government-controlled community development it aligns better with fulfilling community needs. LGs play a crucial role in social development through efficient service delivery. It fosters cooperation with citizens. The discussion identifies barriers between perceived demand of people and service delivery of LG. It has a linkage with issues between common people's expectations and delivery of services of LG.

### **Service Delivery and Local Representatives**

Effective local governance is crucial for people-centered service delivery. It promotes social justice and cultural preservation, equality and equity. It works with all government bodies, private sector, socio-cultural groups, and community people. The Nepalese Constitution 2015 has divided the country into seven provinces and three levels of government. It aims to establish a governance system upholding justice, gender equity, proportional representation of local people, and fairness. Keeping all these constitutional aspects one of the representatives expressed the following ideas:

The constitution of 2015 has granted rights to the local government and with this local people are empowered. Local government act 2017 is about the practical aspect of LG to implement the provisions related to the powers of the local level as per the Constitution of Nepal. It ensures to promote cooperativeness, co-existence and coordination between the federation, province and local level. In the case of deliver efficient services, the municipal government is committed for quality services. We have some problems of human resources as well. Yet, we have ensured people's participation in all activities. The LG in Banganga Municipality is committed for accountability and transparency. Everyone can go and see the infrastructures of schools and health posts. (Based on the discussion with the participant on 17 March 2023).

Participation in of staff and representatives in Banganga Municipality is crucial for successful local government implementation. They organize activities and programs for local people, and encourage participation in decision-making processes. It indicates a gap between the expression of common people and policymakers. By identifying a defined mission, vision, resources, and community support, local governments can actively plan for efficient service delivery.

### **Conclusion, Implications and Limitations**

The study on efficient service delivery in Banganga Municipality reveals weaknesses in the policy level. The administrative framework and institutional arrangements are strong, and committed to promote service delivery. The elected representative are less accountable and there is weak transparency in public participation and developmental work. Areas like human resources management, and establishing interpersonal relationship is weak.



Strengthening these elements requires regular review of policy, strategic planning for capacity-building of bureaucrats, initiatives of local party leaders to address the silo mental problems, transparency-enhancing measures between municipal government and contractors, and effective coordination among all government levels are necessary. Addressing these issues can be part of efficient service delivery from day to service delivery to developmental activities. The municipal government in Banganga Municipality should address the problems of ethnic people who are the strong stakeholders to strengthen social development rather than modern developmental activities. It can drive a successful service delivery to promote LG's overall functioning at the administrative level.

The local governments should support basic needs, ensure inclusion, and promote learning for all. LGs play a crucial role in creating these communities by promoting awareness of social needs, fostering responsibility for social well-being. It should build relationships among the different stakeholders, integrating services effectively, and collaborating with key partners to tackle major issues of service delivery. This study is about improving the local governance system through service delivery. The small data collected from a single LG area may not represent the LG activities of Nepal. The study's findings may be influenced by respondents' understanding levels. It focuses on the success of efficient administration for service delivery and does not investigate the cause-and-effect relationship. Further research is recommended to better understand these factors.

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