Public Participation in Needs Identification and Prioritization at Local Level Annual Plan: Experiences from Kirtipur Municipality, Kathmandu

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Abstract

The aim of this paper was to examine the preferences of people in needs identification at the ward level annual plan, and to enable the participants in the ward level planning process. The focus area of the study was Kirtipur Municipality ward no 8. The research followed a qualitative method characterized by workshops and mock session methods considering the constructivist standpoint. The words form of data was converted into tabulated form and interpreted accordingly. More than 100 stakeholders participated in the three days long workshops and mock sessions continuously for primary data. As per the policy provision, community people have no access in ordering except needs/programs identification is considered as big policy deficiency. This study found that all the decisive roles have been done by the government officials and hired consultants. The findings of this research suggest that community people's voices and, more intensively, their ideas must be incorporated while setting the priority orders by training and awareness. The findings suggest that political representatives and government officials must enhance their personal and institutional capacity in relation to understanding the overall planning process. To address the existing policy deficiency, people's participation in every stage of planning is the best way of sustainability in planning and becomes the good benchmarks for theoretical and applied contribution.

Keywords: local planning, participation, needs analysis, prioritization, Tole-Bhela

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Introduction

Planning is a comprehensive term that focuses on the growth, allocation and utilization of resources in a systematic way to achieve pre-design goals and objectives within a time horizon. Engaging community people as subjects build trust in local-level planning, which is why, participation is an approach that put people at the center of development and participation helps to minimize the cost of the project and maximize transparency, accountability and inclusion (Sapkota & Malakar, 2021). The global human development report (1993) has strongly argued that people's participation is becoming the major issue of the 21st century (UNDP, 1993). To identify the felt needs/programs of locals alongside the distribution of resources for their betterment (Bhusal & Pandeya, 2022) people's participation is a lubricant of planning (Lekhi, 1990/2005). In the context of local development, creating employment opportunities to address people's needs is a basic premise of the local-level plan. More specifically, the annual plan /budget is not only a prediction of government revenue and expenditure, rather it is a medium of livelihoods of people. There is a straightforward relationship between annual planning and people's daily life. Thus, this paper mostly focused on policy benchmarks and people's action/desire to determine the priority order of the programs at local level short term planning in the Kirtipur Municipality, Ward no. 8, Nepal.

Under the current democratic practice local people's vision, ideas and organizations are becoming key yardstick. Defining, preferring, and prioritizing needs or programs not by outsiders but by the local community members from within is expected. The current issues, needs and programs related to the annual plan, particularly at the local level must be collected by the active involvement of local people including women, Dalit, and people with disabilities, indigenous nationalities, youth, subject experts, civil society members, and the people living in poverty (NLC, 2017).

Priority areas are outlined under the five subjective areas (Physical infrastructure, economic, social, forest, environment, and disaster management, and institutional development and good governance) and selection benchmarks have been clearly defined by the policy documents while formulating the annual development plan. It is mandatory to articulate the local people for whom the planning is going to be formulated as per the principle of bottom-up development perspective. Local people are chief agents to identify the felt needs, preferences and priorities for their development. Thus, planners and policy-makers should relate the desire of local people and use people's knowledge because people are development experts. In addition, federal and province level policy related documents such as the Constitution of Nepal (2015), Local Government Operation Act (2017), Inter-governmental Finance Management Act (2017) National Natural Resource and Fiscal Commission Act (2017), Local level plan formulation direction (2021) are the millstone while determining the needy programs and priority at the local level (NPC, 2021).

Community people are involved in planning at the local level to identify and prioritize the needs or programs/activities that are most required in their locality. The priorities and preferences may vary depending on the context, culture, geographical area and demographic structure. Rural development rhetoric has evolved from top-down to bottom-up, reversing centralized standardization to local diversity, and embracing learning processes (Chambers, 1994). Planning practice which is made according to local people's desires/ wants and aspiration and their active involvement while exploring essential needs is considered as participatory planning. Participatory planning is an asset to accelerate the path of

development and the ultimate destination of any type of planning is to achieve a decent life. Robert Chambers (1994), the proponent of the participatory model defined participation as a "family of approaches and methods that enable people to share, enhance and analyze their knowledge of life and condition to plan and act". Further, he has logically opined that the participation of local people is a way that enables grass-root people to get access and to take decisions about key assets and resources such as power, materials, money, experiences, skills, ideas, local knowledge, and visions on behalf of their betterment by setting up appropriate systems, structures, and relationships in society (Dahal, 2019). Locals are more likely to share and own it. On the one hand, people's participation has become a mandatory or even inseparable part of development planning (Sapkota & Malakar, 2021) and on the other hand, planning is an appropriate development path to improve the life of common people (Shakya, 2007).

The successive implementation of the participatory approaches at both applied and policy level is always subject to discussion in the Nepalese development and planning sector. Against this context, development partners and real beneficiaries must enable to define actual needs which required planning effort. Likewise, conditions for an effective interplay between the planning work with an appropriate participatory environment (Hogstrom et al., 2021). The local actors and their power-sharing practice in state control mechanisms are contradictory and complex. Omitting these structural and institutional constraints, bottom-up development effort was born as an alternative way (Pieterse, 2009). Bottom-up development approach is a process in which local people, for whom planning and development effort, is made by their active engagement. To address the issues and challenges of development, participatory planning is not far from controversy (Bhattarai, 2016). Top-down and bottom-up efforts in planning are debatable. Doorman (1995) asserted 'social participation' and 'social action' as two schools of thought to participate. Doorman has logically argued that social participation is generally used to moderate development initiation with the active involvement of outsiders and social action relies on the moral obligation in which enabling people not for providing but for promoting concept (Ibid).

Local people's participation has been a central theme in development practice since the 1970s when the alternative development paradigm (Pieterse, 2009) was practiced and flourishing worldwide. Under democratic practice, the local government is considered a cornerstone (Bongiwe, 2022) because it is directly attached to service receivers and the community people. Thus, while screening the essential needs and programs among the alternatives, as much as local community people and their involvement are mandatory (NLC, 2017). Local development planning is a bottom-up approach to planning initiatives that are led by local government incorporating all stakeholders, for instance, political parties, civil society, government officials, local representatives, ordinary people, community-based organizations, planning experts, non-governmental organizations, and both internal and external development partners in response to finding the best ways to achieve long term development vision.

Participation of the public is a tool that aids in the realization that people have control over their life and means of subsistence. Local people must have access to defining their needy programs, prioritizing them as well as setting long-term vision, mission, goal/s, objective/s, guiding strategies, and working policies whereby people will realize substantial ownership of overall planning. Local development planning aims to increase local people's destinies through their significant influence in the decision-making

process. When local people become active decision-makers in the entire planning process, then only, local development planning efforts accelerate the quality of life for all the people residing in a specific spatial zone, for instance, rural municipality and municipality.

The plan should address the socio-economic, political, ecological, institutional, and psychological domains of the area and people. For this, community-based organizations (CBOs) can encourage local people's participation as per specific principles such as self-mobilization, encouragement, understanding, and determination. Local people's knowledge, ideas, skill, and experiences are insightful sources for development practice, especially, identification of needy programs, analysis, and prioritization of the needs/programs. The roles of local beneficiaries in need assessment and prioritization at the localized spheres are crucial to the development of the local communities (Bongiwe, 2022). Under this background, local beneficiaries can effectively examine requirements and give accurate information while formulating the annual plan and policy instruments.

Demand Driven Approach: The Theoretical Foundation

Community-based demand-driven development emphasizes that real beneficiaries can access in decision making process including needs identification and prioritizing in order. This model is upheld to be practically applicable when the government mechanisms become failure to address the people's felt needs and aspirations (Wong & Guggenheim, 2018). Community-driven development approach provides valuable insights to the planners, government officials and political representatives while defining and organizing the needy programs that are directly associated with people's lives and livelihoods. This paper, is absolutely, guided by the principles and guidelines of bottom-up thinking: the demand-driven approach. The central theme of this approach is community people are not only consumers and audiences but actual producers, and decision-makers while formulating the local-level annual plan. Furthermore, local people have charismatic ideas, knowledge, and experiences and they can provide problems solving strategies not only at the time of plan formulation but also during implementation, monitoring, evaluating, benefit sharing and giving feedback for further planning. Against this background, this paper claimed that in every local government, especially at the ward level all concerned stakeholders must respect the people's voice, choices and rights while defining the programs and prioritizing them.

The benchmark criterion to measure planning efficiency is its result. Demand-driven planning effort works the best and achieves the greatest results when it is a part of an overall planning scheme that encompasses requisites of to the local governance, optimum allocation of resources, productive investment, service delivery mechanism and finally improves the quality of life of grass-root people (Wong & Guggenheim, 2018). Prior empirical and theoretical studies have shown that many planning and development efforts have failed to achieve the goal/s and objective/s. Bhusal and Pandeya, (2022) conclude that the involvement of ordinary people in needs identification and priority determination is the best way to succeeding the plan. Thus, this paper focused on a demand-driven approach to determine the felt needs of the locals through their free minds and community-level discussion for making plans successful.

The demand-driven approach is also not far from criticism. Critics pointed out that local communities are not homogeneous, and it is difficult to get a common consensus about the common

problems that need to be addressed by planning efforts. Consequently, the stages of local-level planning are often captured by the local elites who are continuously moving around the power circle (Wong & Guggenheim, 2018). Participatory thinking assumes that people who are living in poverty have creative ideas and are capable. They should and may conduct a good deal of their problems, analysis, and planning-not for the benefit of others but rather for themselves. Further, this approach assumed that the role of the outside is merely a facilitator, not a decision-maker. According to this strategy, people who are weak, marginalized, and living in poverty must be empowered (Chambers, 1994). The greatest way to pinpoint practical issues is to empower people. People may be socially isolated, politically powerless, economically vulnerable, physically weak, and depressed by someone else but not irrational. So, when they get access to the planning process, then they can be defined real problems.

Issues of the Study

Since 2015 the federal practice has been implemented in Nepal. Under the federal democratic practice, federal, provincial, and local; three tiers of government are smoothly running in Nepal. In contrast, it has bundled theoretical, intellectual, institutional, and structural challenges that are triggering. In developing countries, it is so difficult to address people's needs and desires because as compared to people's needs, the size of the budget is small. In Nepal, the small size of the capital budget, indeed, can't meet the people's needs. Thus, every policymaker and ordinary people should rank their needs as per the policy provisions (MoFAGA, 2017). This scenario has been continuing for decades, although the planning effort hasn't reached its expected targets and objective yet. Up to the Panchayat regime, entire planning effort was led according to the principles of the top-down model where people's voice was ignored. Departing from prior studies, scholars strongly raised several arguments and counterarguments on the top-down practice of planning (Wangchuk & Turner, 2019). Although, prior academic and non-academic contributions conclude that, there has been a high gap between people's actual needs and planning efforts. It means local needs and their selection, determination and prioritization were attempted by outsiders. Pandeya & Shrestha (2016) conclude that expected needs and problems are determined not by local but by local political elites. Passive participation has appeared. Consequently, actual problems are avoided and only those programs are defined whereby local contractors are run around the power center. To eliminate this mal-selection process, the people's engagement or bottom-up model was introduced in 1990, when the restoration of democracy came into practice.

Screening the needs according to priority order with the active involvement of local people is the best way which gradually accelerates the path of development over a long period. Prior research show that people's participation in priority setting in developing economies, more focused on local government, is characterized by weak institutions, weak governance, corruption, low level of people's participation, weak information dissemination, and low public awareness (Kamuzora et al., 2013), as a result, many socio-economic and political dilemmas become debatable issues in development discourse. Institutional, bureaucratic, socio-cultural, economic, and structural bottlenecks including political interferences are acute at the local level annual planning process. Political interference has impacted negatively on local government, especially when it comes to service delivery (Reddy, 2016 as cited from Bongiwe, 2022).

Thus, the focus of this study was to explore the community-level practice of participatory planning and operationalize its challenges and explore policy-level deficiencies.

Participatory planning is a critical and indeed very broad spectrum and comprehensive process that all forms of government need to be undertaken. It is a continuous process made by all three tiers of the government (federal, provincial, and local) and allied stakeholders are key to enabling local beneficiaries to participate in annual programming under the guidelines and provisions accounted for in the local government operation Act (2017) in Nepal. Being mandatory, local participation remained at the level of tokenism or non-participation (Thapa, 2022).

The focus of this paper was how ordinary people ranked their needs while developing local-level annual plans at the ward level: the lowest administrative unit of the local government. The central claim of this study was ordinary people have significant ideas for ranking the needs collected from Tole Bhela/cluster planning meetings as per the policy guidelines and benchmark. Thus, a detailed study on this issue was the logic in this regard. Local people's needs and desires are multiple, contextual, and relative, thus, this study assumes that realities are subjective (ontology). To incorporate in planning, the multiple ideas and needs of people need to be interpretation (epistemology) in a narrative way, considering the constructivist standpoint.

The pivotal research question is who does identify the felt needs/programs at ward level annual plan? How to make lists of priority orders and who does make this priority list? The aim of this was to examine the preferences of people in needs identification at the ward level annual plan, and to enable the participants in the ward level planning process. Using a participatory observation, interaction note and group discussion method, required primary data has been obtained. Furthermore, this study attempts to analyze the techniques of screening the needs collected by the Tole Bhela as per the given weightage while developing the rank order in the annual planning in Kirtipur Municipality ward no 8. This paper focused on ward level practice as a very tiny study and the result would not be generalized.

Method and Materials

This paper was based on the empirical study in Kirtipur municipality ward number 8 considering the survey cum case study method to examine the role of Tole Bhela in mainstreaming local people into defining the felt needs and prioritizing them (needs) into a local-level annual plan. It was the workshop model and mock session between local representatives and concerned stakeholders to familiarize themselves with the planning procedure. The workshops were conducted for three days from June 30, 2021 to July 2, 2021) continuously. More than 60 ordinary people including different Tole or settlement areas, 5 ward-level political representatives, 5 government officials, 6 school-teachers, 3 university teachers, and 25 civil society members participated in workshops and mock sessions. The entire workshop was facilitated by 3 facilitators using a participatory facilitation approach including conversation method, and mock session that aimed to cultivate insight from a wide range of involved stakeholders.

During the three days long workshop and mock sessions, the participants were engaged in taping rational and intuitive thought processes. The facilitator rigorously created a conducive environment to integrate diverse ideas, generate practical and creative solutions and developed group consensus on the

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activities related to needs identification, organizing and ranking the needs: the basic components of the annual plan under the given criteria, technique, and methods. Both the primary and secondary sources of data have been used in this paper. Overall conversation, discussion, and mock session held among the participants, subject-wise interaction, and Tole-wise discussion were the sources of primary data. This paper simultaneously reviewed secondary materials to support the objective. For secondary data, the Constitution of Nepal (2015), Local Government Operation Act (2017), Local Level Plan Formulation Direction (2021), Inter-government Fiscal Management Act (2017), National Natural Resources and Fiscal Commission Act (2017) and Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030) were reviewed accordingly. This paper considered local people's needs and desires are multiple, contextual, and relative, it assumes realities are subjective (ontology) and need to be interpreted (epistemology) in a narrative way, considering the constructivist standpoint. The word form data were converted into tabulated form and interpreted accordingly. Minimum similarity index, professional ethics and confidentiality have been maintained for the validity and reliability of the study. Furthermore, verbal consent was taken from the ward chairman of Kirtipur municipality, 8. Being so, its conclusion may not represent the other context because it was a very small study.

Results and Discussion

Are Theoretical Benchmarks used in Needs Identification and Prioritizing Needs?

Planning is looking ahead and deep thinking before moving ahead based on what, where, why, when, how, and for whom. Planning is a process of the intellectual journey where vision, mission, goal/s, objective/s, strategies, working policies, programs, projects, activities, and expected outcomes derive collectively through the comprehensive study of the economy. Rational and productive use of scarce resources in the productive sector is the central theme of planning. Every economy's goal is to fulfill human wants and desires by mobilizing the scarce resources that are available in the economy (Frank, 2010). But it is so difficult task to realize all economies in the world either developed or developing. English economist Lionel Robbins (1898-1984), and his followers critically argued that 'scarcity is mother of all economic problems'. In this regard, economists Watson and Getz pointed out that, "how to get more and how to make the best use of what is available is the economic problem." It means economic problems arises from both interdependency cause namely, (i) men have the unlimited desire to achieve goods and services, and ii) productive resources to produce goods and services are limited. Thus, economists conclude that the best solution is alternative uses. To support this, English economist Lionel Robbins (1898–1984), and his well-known publication entitled 'Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science (1932) became remarkable in this regard. According to him, "economics is the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses". If it is decided to use more resources in the line of production, the resources must be withdrawn from the production of some other goods. The scarcity of resources, therefore, compels us to choose among the different channels of production to which resources are to be devoted (Ahuja, 2007).

Departing from previous literature, it is concluded that every society must make resource-efficient choices at all levels (Frank, 2010). This central theme must be remembered by the planning authorities at the time of planning while taking the local people's voice, choices, and experiences. Additionally, local

representatives, government officials, consultants and planning authorities must not forget the following key questions: what determines the position of economic activity at the grass-roots level? Besides this, what determines how many goods and services an economy (local economy) produces? What are the current production possibilities at the local level? What is the possible size of resources? What are the expected possibilities demanded by the local community? What strategy supports improving local people's standard of living? All these questions must be kept in mind by all concerned stakeholders while planning and prioritizing the needs. Likewise, planning authorities must observe the real scenario of a local economy focusing on what exists now and what is not, and deeply analyze the problems and prospects not alone by the economic lens but by other different perspectives too, for example, sociological, anthropological, environmental, political, spiritual, and local. Thus, local-level planning authorities must allocate resources with a high degree of priority order as per the given policy instruction and provincial, federal, and international priorities. Being such theoretical bases practiced internationally, the study area didn't follow the theoretical guidelines. This study has concluded that ordinary people and local representatives have no such theoretical ideas and techniques. Beyond the theoretical insights, they prioritized the needs based on policy instruction, local level glorious plan/projects, periodic plan, sectoral master plan, special programs listed by ward committee, conditional and complementary subsidy, and bases of development, and recommended by the resource estimation and budget ceiling committee.

Bases and Benchmarks of Prioritization

The local development planning and budgeting process under the current federal system delegates full power and authority to local government. Accordingly, the local government has the right to develop planning efforts from the settlement level moving up through the ward to the municipality (NLC,2017). Local-level annual planning has seven steps provision whereby local beneficiaries have direct access to engage in participatory planning to make their destiny (MoFAGA, 2017 & NPC, 2021). Participation is the heart of democracy. Therefore, the local government should have a comprehensive discussion with the people before releasing the annual policy and program, and budget. For this, a public meeting should be held in each ward to collect opinions and suggestions. Policy instruments have provided basic benchmarks while determining the priority order in local-level annual planning (NPC, 2021). Compulsorily, local needs, problems, and possibilities should be reconciled, otherwise planning efforts do not exist in real life.

The constitution of Nepal (2015) and its fundamental rights, directive principles, theories, schedules, and Local Government Operation Act (2017) are the basic benchmarks of the local-level annual plan. Likewise, objectives, strategies, and priorities mentioned in local, provincial, and national periodic, strategic, sectoral, and master plans should be followed. In addition to this, Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) roadmap (2015-2030), the least developed countries' graduation action plan, Sendai Framework (2015-2030) and Paris Agreement (2016) should equally be given to planning and prioritizing the needs and programs (NPC, 2021). Local Government Operation Act (2017), chapter six, clause 24 and sub-clause three strongly mentioned the basic benchmarks for prioritizing the local level plan. The benchmarks are the use of local resources, skills, economies, social security, poverty alleviation, productivity, economic growth, sustainable development, climate change, food and nutrition security, gender empowerment and inclusive development (NLC, 2017).

Basis, Criteria and Method of Priority Setting: Experience of the Workshops and Mock Session

The needs of people are the foundation of any plan. To address the people's needs planning effort is valued. Needs have grown from the settlement level and actual problems can be collected by the residents. At the time of collecting the actual needs from the community, the local government must cover the maximum participation of local people, subject experts, and the private sector as much as larger numbers. In this process, planning authorities must follow the concept of inclusive development and the guidelines Local Government Operation Act (2017). According to the provision mentioned in Chapter 6, clause 25, and the sub-clause of the act (NLC, 2017). Through the workshops and mock sessions, the collected needs and program have listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Tole-wise Collected Programs and Needs Based on Participatory Methods

S. N.	Programs/Needs
1	Prepare ward profile.
2	To regulate the information and information of the ward through the notice board.
3	Combining and promoting Newari culture with homestay.
4	Develop the ward as an internal tourism destination.
5	Building of open exercise and fitness centers in public places.
6	Upliftment of the Kapali community.
7	Development, promotion, and preservation of script, language, literature, culture and heritage.
8	Provision of CCTV, pole lights, and free Wi-Fi throughout the ward.
9	Beautification of public roads (planting plants on the roadside and potting).
10	Awareness and preparedness training related to disaster risk management at Shahidpath to Namakhwa.
11	Provision of appropriate open space and training for earthquakes and disaster times.
12	Bhujind Lab: Stone printing and brick printing on planks/Fulcha.
13	Well, management of wastage.
14	Sewerage, Deep Boring, and Management of Rain Water.
15	The road slopes from Ganeshman Pond to Gyanendra's house.
16	Box/belt construction from Hanumanghat to Dhokasi.
17	Arrangement of community house building in Namkhwa.
18	Reconstruction of the old/ancient pond at Sikukhe Gate.
19	Creation of Trust in PabitraKuti Vihar.
20	Employment-oriented programs and skilled manpower generation.
21	Construction of retaining wall on road above Bihar.
22	Provision of employment to women.
23	City-level DPR for water supply and management.
24	Training of creative awareness programs aimed at children.

25	Training, promotion, and conservation of local folk and instruments.
26	Pollution-free Tole and settlement area.
27	Beautification of the plants available inside the ward and well management of the trees connected to the Falcha.
28	Provision of public toilet.
29	Arrangement of firefighting equipment.
30	Establishment of a public library.
31	Prevention of addictive activities.
32	Building child-friendly open space.
33	Arranging advice boxes and help desks at various places within the ward.
34	Reconstruction of Pati, Pauwa, temples and historical ponds.
35	Training on accounting management of income and expenses in the ward.
36	Reconstruction of Sikuche Falcha.
37	Training related to the Nepal language and Ranjana script.
38	Special plans and training for economic development.
39	Protecting the traditional arts and skills and connecting it with livelihoods.
40	Fanga Cab path slope.
41	Sewerage and block printing in the Doonikhya Tole.
42	Electric wiring and light management.
43	Handicraft Exhibition Venue.
44	Regular health check-ups and quality treatment of ward residents.
45	Involving the new generation in traditional musical instruments by providing training facilities.
46	Skilled self-employment training targeted at youth.
47	Regular programs and training in education, health and sports.
48	Kaushi/rooftop Farming.
49	Skill development programs.
50	Distribution of pure drinking water to an entire ward.
51	Cleaning management to clean Vishnudevi Temple.

Source: Workshops and mock sessions, 2022

Table 1 shows the long list of programs/needs collected by applying participatory methods representing each Tole or cluster. At the very beginning, participants have no idea how to express their own felt needs as per the policy guidelines. They have listed 51 programs including those without knowing the five subject areas (economic development, social development, physical infrastructure, forest environment and disaster management, and good governance and institutional development). Later, when facilitators trained them about the existing policy guidelines and minimum provisions on how to organize the collected needs into five subject areas, then they organized the needs into separate subject-wise clusters and marked them (see Table 2).

Table 2

Subject-wise Arrangement of Programs and Needs Based on Participants' Prioritization

S.N.	Subject Area: Forest Environment and Disaster Management	Participants' prioritization*
1	Arrangement of firefighting equipment.	3
2	Provision of appropriate open space and training for earthquakes and disaster times.	9
3	Beautification of the plants available inside the ward and well management of the trees connected to the Falcha.	7
4	Beautification of public roads (planting plants on the roadside and potting).	5
5	Provision of public toilet.	8
6	Pollution-free Tole and settlement area.	6
7	Sewerage, Deep Boring, and Management of Rain-Water.	2
8	Well management of wastage.	1
9	Awareness and preparedness training related to disaster risk management at Shahidpath to Namakhwa.	4
Subject Area: Good Governance and Institutional Development		
1	Provision of CCTV, pole lights and free Wi-Fi throughout the ward.	3
2	Arranging advice boxes and help desks at various places within the ward.	4
3	Training on accounting management of income and expenses in the ward.	2
4	Prepare ward profile.	1
5	To regulate the information and information of the ward through the notice board.	5
Subject Area: Physical Infrastructure		
1	Sewerage and block printing in the Doonikhya Tole.	5
2	Reconstruction of SikucheFalcha.	10
3	Reconstruction of the old/ancient pond at Sikukhe Gate.	6
4	Construction of retaining wall on road above Bihar.	8
5	Electric wiring and light management.	9
6	Fanga Cab path slope.	11
7	Reconstruction of Pati, Pauwa, temples and historical ponds.	2
8	Bhujind Lab: Stone printing and brick printing on planks/Fulcha.	3
9	Creation of Trust in PabitraKuti Vihar.	4
10	The road slopes from Ganeshman Pond to Gyanendra's house.	7
11	Box/belt construction from Hanumanghat to Dhokasi.	1
Subject Area: Social Development		
1	Training, promotion, and conservation of local folk and instruments.	16
2	Prevention of addictive activities.	4

3	Development, promotion and preservation of script, language, literature, culture and heritage	3
4	Training of creative awareness programs aimed at children.	15
5	Training related to the Nepali language and Ranjana script.	6
6	City-level DPR for water supply and management.	2
7	Building of open exercise and fitness centers in public places.	10
8	Upliftment of the Kapali community.	13
9	Regular programs and training in education, health and sports.	5
10	Regular health check-ups and quality treatment of ward residents.	12
11	Distribution of pure drinking water to in entire ward.	1
12	Cleaning management to clean Vishnudevi Temple.	9
13	Establishment of public library.	11
14	Building child-friendly open space.	8
15	Arrangement of community house building in Namkhwa.	14
16	Involving the new generation in traditional musical instruments by providing training facilities.	7
Subject Area: Economic Development		
1	Special plans and training for economic development.	4
2	Handicraft Exhibition Venue.	2
3	Skill development programs.	6
4	Develop the ward as an internal tourism destination.	8
5	Skilled self-employment training targeted at youth.	7
6	Employment-oriented programs and skilled manpower generation.	10
7	Protecting the traditional arts and skills and connecting it with livelihoods.	9
8	Kaushi/rooftop Farming.	5
9	Combining and promoting Newari culture with homestay.	3
10	Provision of employment to women.	1

*= Participant's prioritization order according to their needs

Table 2 represents people's rank order according to their preferences or priority. To date, local political representatives also have no good ideas about how to priority order. The three days long workshops and mock sessions, deliver quick ideas and techniques to the government officials, political representatives, and community people about the base, criteria, and methods of ordering the needs. The criteria were discussed as per the guidelines provided in the local government operation act (2017), local-level plan formulation direction (2018) and local-level annual planning and budgeting direction (2018). The benchmarks of needs prioritization, according to local-level annual planning and budgeting direction (2018) are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Benchmarks of Project/Programs/Needs Prioritization Form

S.N.	Name of the Project	1. Direct contribution to poverty alleviation (20)	2. Productive and quick returnable (15)	3. Increase employment and income (15)	4. Achieving cost participation (15)	5. Use of local resource and skills (10)	6. Contribution to inclusive development (10)	7. Sustainable development and environment conservation (10)	8. Development of local language and culture (5)	Total Marks (100)	Priority Order
1.											
2.											

Source: Local level yearly planning and budgeting procedures, 2018

Remarks: *When determining the priority order of the projects, the project with the highest number of points should be determined in the priority order.*

Table 3 indicates the benchmarks of project/programs/needs prioritization form as per the guidelines of the local-level annual budget procedure act (2018) published by the national planning commission. New elected representatives and institutions undergo institutionalization (Adhikari, 2021). This study is based on the investigation of both previous and current body of knowledge related to participatory planning available in the literature (Cobbinah & Black, 2011). Thus, every local government should train about this benchmark to government officials, political representatives, and even other concerned stakeholders associated with the local-level planning and budgeting process. Table 3 provides valuable insights to the stakeholders while determining the priority order in planning. When needs are collected from the community through participatory methods, resource estimation and budget ceiling determination committee intensively read and follow these criteria while ordering the needs. The given eight benchmarks (see Table 3) measure the rank of needs. Out of 100, which needs to get higher marks becomes first and then after. Sector wise clustering and prioritizing after rigorously following the instruction of Table 3, participants change their earlier rank order (see Table 4).

Table 4

Subject Area-wise Clustering and Prioritizing the Needs According to the Participants guidelines

S. N.	Subject Area: Forest Environment and Disaster Management	Prioritization Marks
1	Awareness and preparedness training related to disaster risk management at Shahidpath to Namakhwa.	65
2	Provision of appropriate open space and training for earthquakes and disaster times.	60
3	Well management of wastage.	60
4	Sewerage, Deep Boring and Management of Rain Water.	50
5	Pollution-free Tole and settlement area.	50
6	Arrangement of firefighting equipment.	50
7	Provision of public toilet.	50
8	Beautification of the plants available inside the ward and well management of the trees connected to the Falcha.	38
9	Beautification of public roads (planting plants on the roadside and potting).	38
Subject Area: Good Governance and Institutional Development		
1	Prepare ward profile.	60
2	To regulate the information and information of the ward through the notice board.	48
3	Training on accounting management of income and expenses in the ward.	30
4	Provision of CCTV, pole lights and free Wi-Fi throughout the ward.	25
5	Arranging advice boxes and help desks at various places within the ward.	23
Subject Area: Physical Infrastructure		
1	Reconstruction of Pati, Pauwa, temples and historical ponds.	62.5
2	The road slopes from Ganeshman Pond to Gyanendra's house.	60.5
3	Box/belt construction from Hanumanghat to Dhokasi.	60.5
4	Reconstruction of SikucheFalcha.	52.5
5	Reconstruction of the old/ancient pond at Sikukhe Gate.	52.5
6	Bhujind Lab: Stone printing and brick printing on planks/Fulcha.	52.5
7	Creation of Trust in PabitraKuti Vihar.	47.5
8	Fanga Cab path slope.	40.5
9	Sewerage and block printing in the Doonikhya Tole.	35.5
10	Construction of retaining wall on road above Bihar.	35
11	Electric wiring and light management.	35
Subject Area: Social Development		
1	Distribution of pure drinking water to in entire ward.	75
2	Regular health check-ups and quality treatment of ward residents.	70

3	Regular programs and training in education, health and sports.	70
4	Training, promotion, and conservation of local folk and instruments.	60
5	Arrangement of community house building in Namkhwa.	60
6	Establishment of a public library.	55
7	Building of open exercise and fitness centers in public places.	55
8	Upliftment of the Kapali community.	55
9	Development, promotion and preservation of script, language, literature, culture and heritage.	55
10	Prevention of addictive activities.	50
11	Building child-friendly open space.	50
12	Cleaning management to clean Vishnudevi Temple.	50
13	City-level DPR for water supply and management.	50
14	Training of creative awareness programs aimed at children.	50
15	Training related to Nepal language and Ranjana script.	50
16	Involving the new generation in traditional musical instruments by providing training facilities.	40
Subject Area: Economic Development		
1	Employment-oriented programs and skilled manpower generation.	83
2	Protecting the traditional arts and skills and connecting them with livelihoods.	82.5
3	Combining and promoting Newari culture with homestay.	75
4	Develop ward as an internal tourism destination.	67.5
5	Skilled self-employment training targeted at youth.	60.5
6	Special plans and training for economic development.	55.5
7	Handicraft Exhibition Venue.	55
8	Skill development programs.	55
9	Kaushi/rooftop Farming.	55
10	Provision of employment to women.	50

Source: Workshops and mock session, 2021

Discussion

The study aims to find out the most prominent practice of participatory planning at the local level under the current federal system of Nepal. Involving ordinary people is mandatory in planning practice. Although, ordinary people have no direct access to participate in priority setting. Under the seven steps planning process, community people can only participate in needs or program/s collection at the settlement level (the third stage of annual planning). This indicates that policy deficiency as well as nominal participation is practiced in Nepal. This study concludes that planning is a comprehensive process and the result of combined effort, hence, all concerned stakeholders should participate while collecting needs and subsequent stages. This study's findings are consistent with the study of Adhikari (2021). This study further concludes that there are institutional, political, and administrative barriers to participatory planning in cluster-level planning which is consistent with the study of Pacione (2013) and Bhusal (2020 & 2021). It

may be so because of policy deficiency, political or ideological conflict, poor administrative, institutional and communication dilemmas as well as the weak planning literacy of ordinary people. On behalf of participatory planning and development, Chambers (2013) concluded that the proposed responsible well-being concept in the development agenda focuses on participatory methods for ordinary people including marginalized communities.

Conclusion

Sustainability in planning is the function of public cooperation and participation. The higher the degree of participation by the stakeholders, the greater the possibility of the plan being successful, people get ownership of the plan and ultimately the objective will be achieved. Thus, every planning authority should provide more changes to participate in targeted beneficiaries in every stage of planning. The process, technique, and methods of panning under three tires of government are comprehensive and complex. Series of stages, benchmarks, bases, and procedures exist which frequently create confusion among community people. This study concludes that local ordinary people, political representatives and even government officials (at local level) have no sufficient theoretical, technical, and procedural knowledge, ideas and process while gathering needs from the ward level, organizing the needs as per subject-wise division, prioritizing order and marking to them. This study has strictly recommended that local-level political representatives and government officials must enhance their personal and institutional capacity by understanding the overall planning process. In addition, government mechanisms should disseminate information to the public on time via formal means of communication. This study suggests that further research should make intensive studies on capacity-building training for political representatives and civic education for the general public. The workshop and mock session became very fruitful to energize the stakeholders including local ordinary people about the planning process, articulating, and prioritizing the needs. To be so gainful, time was inadequate (workshops period) to cover all the dimensions, policy provisions, and priority areas of the local-level annual plan.

Conflict of Interest

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