# CONTEXT MAPPING FOR INTEGRATED URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN NEPAL: A CASE STUDY OF AATHBISKOT MUNCICIPALITY, RUKUM

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## Abstract

*The world is undergoing the largest wave of urban growth in history, particularly since 1950s that accelerated further after 2000s. However, Nepal is experiencing a new political system of federalism, it is yet to be equipped with appropriate Acts and policies to foster the spirit of development and constitution at large. In this context, the present study sets a research question as of how a context mapping can be done before integrated urban planning of the municipalities. Methodologically, the study was conducted in Aathbiskot municipality of Rukum district. Involving both qualitative and qualitative techniques under the social constructivist epistemological position, the study was conducted on the basis of participatory approach through analytical methods, including SWOT analysis, Trend analysis, Ward analysis and Linkage analysis. The findings show that as an aspiring city, Aathbiskot Municipality has diverse prospects and sectors of development that would drive its future growth but identifying some lead sectors and potential development opportunity of the municipality based on its own strength and individuality would what make municipality grow better and prosper. The study strongly claims inferences for the homogeneity in the long-term vision setting, however, maintaining through heterogeneity in the specific plans and strategies for the different wards of the municipality.*

**Keywords**: Aathbiskot, Context mapping, Integrated urban development plan, Local governance, Urban planning

## Background

The world is undergoing the largest wave of urban growth in history, particularly since 1950s that accelerated further after 2000s. As per the estimation of UN agencies, more than half of the world's population now lives in towns and cities, and by 2030 this number will swell to about 5 billion. Much of this urbanization will unfold in Africa and Asia, bringing huge social, economic and environmental transformations (UNDESA, 2018). The similar sources claim that the world's rural population has already stopped growing,

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but the world can expect to add close to 1.5 billion urbanites in the next 15 years, and 3 billion by 2050. How the world meets the challenge of sustainable development will be intimately tied to this process (UNFPA, 2018).

Following this, Nepal is one of the ten least urbanized countries in the world. However, it is also one of the top ten fastest urbanizing countries, and rapidly urbanizing country in the South Asia. In 2014, the level of urbanization was 18.2 per cent, with an urban population of 5,130,000, and a rate of urbanization of 3 percent. A simple projection is that for the period 2014-2050, Nepal will remain amongst the top ten fastest urbanizing countries in the world with a projected annual urbanization rate of 1.9 percent (UNDESA, 2014). However, with the promulgation of new constitution of Nepal in September 2015, there has been subsequent changing in the local level unites in the federal context. The Constitution has provisioned a three-tier of government: federal at the center, provincial at the meso-level and the local at the bottom (Art. 56, Part 5). The elections of all levels were held in 2017. Before that, the government of Nepal has set up 753 local units in total which include460 rural municipalities, 276 urban municipalities, 11 sub-metropolitan cities and 6-metropolitan cities in different parts of country.

However, as a Nepal is experiencing a new political system of federalism, it is yet to be equipped with appropriate Acts and policies to foster the spirit of development and constitution at large. The local elections held in 2017 has fulfilled a huge gap in the service delivery system which was virtually vacant since 2002 to 2017 with the absence of local representatives. Rapid rural-urban migration, diversification of livelihood strategies and emerging urban cultures in Nepali society have created many issues over the urban planning and development in Nepal. In this context, the present study sets a research question as of how context mapping can be done before integrated urban planning of the municipalities. Methodologically, the study was conducted in Aathbiskot municipality of Rukum district.

**Review**

Conceptual issues

An integrated urban development plan (IUDP) comprises a system of interlinked actions which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and

environmental conditions of a city or an area within the city. The key to the process is "integration", meaning that all policies, projects and proposals are considered in relation to one another. In this regard, the synergies between the elements of the plan should be such that the impact of the plan as a whole adds up to more than would the sum of the individual parts if implemented in isolation (Wheeler & Beatley, 2014).

Though the concept of Integrated Urban Development Plan (IUDP) is not new, many of municipalities in Nepal are driven by an old cliché of "thinking in silos". In many cases individual sectors do not take in account of co-operation or interdependencies with other sectors, hence leading to conflict of interests. The key to the process is integration meaning that all policies, projects and proposals are considered in relation to one another. IUDP is a process in which spatial, sectoral and territorial aspects of key areas of urban policy are coordinated. As an Implementation oriented planning tools, it mainly assists to

- Describe strength/weakness of municipalities

- Define consistent development objective

- Develop visions

- Co-ordinate/collaborate different sectoral plans, policies, and ensure planned investments to promote balance development of urban areas.

- Coordinate and spatially focus the use of funds by public/private sector plays.

- Coordinate at local and city regional level and involve citizens and other partners.

Thus, in order to improve urban living conditions in way to balance physical, social, cultural, ecological and economic development, IUDP tries to integrate:

- Coordinated territorial planning

- Collaborating actions from different actors and levels of government

- Cross sectoral cooperation

- Inclusion of relevant actors

Global Context

In the last few decades, urban development has been characterized with a more detailed systematic planning along with contextual and project-related implication. After the decade of 1960s, and 1970s, integrated urban planning enjoyed a first heyday, but few of these strategies were sufficiently implementation oriented. It was not uncommon for urban development plans to remain on the shelf as unrealistic and too expensive. There followed twenty years in which approaches like planning for (major) projects, neighborhood planning, sectoral strategies, grassroots processes under the local Agenda 21 or model development, urban marketing or urban redevelopment strategies were tested with varying degrees of success. Since the 1990s there has been a renaissance of integrated strategic concepts for cities and urban regions under much changed framework conditions (Mihaila, & Banica, 2014).

Most of the European cities have been following this method particuallry after 2000s. In case of European cities, "*Leipzig Charte on sustainable European cities, 2007*" has highlighted the high relevance of integrated approach to develop cities and their surrounding areas in sustainable ways (ADB, 2015; Hugo, 2007). In South Asian cities, however, IUDP has been a little bit new concept. A few cities in India and Pakistan were exceptionally built in European standard as strategic focus, though did not follow the IUDP.

In view of this complex framework of conditions for local authority action, seven challenges for cities and urban regions will become especially important in future:

- The globalization of markets

- Increased polarization of income

- Educational poverty

- Urban society is becoming more fragile

- Social and demographic change,

- Climate change

- The privatization of public tasks and economization of the administration

Issues and Challenges in Nepali context

Nepal has started modern urban planning after 1950s with international expertise of UN, when country was freed from century-long autocratic rule of the Ranas. Since then we have gone through series of new urban planning processes to control the haphazard urbanization, where the present doesn't shine as was planned in the past (KC, 2015). Many scholars (e.g. Devkota 2013; Sharma et al. 2014) believe that planning in Nepal were limited in papers without taking in consideration of ground reality and unexpected scenarios. So far, the first kind of master plan for Nepal prepared by UN experts in 1969, covering a number of aspects in planning and conservation for next 20-30 years was not really well accepted by government in its policies.

Local Self Governance Act, 1999 authorizes local bodies to prepare periodic plans and annual plans with support of guidelines by planning commissions, DUDBC and MLD which were also failed due to institutional incapability of the local authorities. Moreover, problems are similar for the both institutes in their inefficiency and incompetency of planning urbanization. Lack of co-ordination between private and public sector, national and international agencies as well as among the sectorial line agencies in the implementation of urban projects has been a problem since long time. Technical competence for implementing the municipal projects is also severely lacking (Devkota, 2018; Dhakal, 2004) where factors like privileged co-ordination of various actors, trend to violet laws, insufficient zoning regulations and improper planning consciousness are distorting the urban features.

One of the major challenges, which piercingly stands in planning arena is lack of co-ordination and failing to take advantage of synergy between the development projects. Tendency to deal with overlapping issues like environment, land use and expansions zones as isolated sectors have made planning implementation more complex and disputable. Planners and politician acting as to opposite poles and blaming each other has been problematic by keeping people out of the center of interest (Subedi & CBS, 2014). While in present, dominance of improper urban plan due to haphazard development become the major reason about shortfall of basic urban services, which then explains why planning

has failed in Nepal.

In the context of federal set-up, the rationality of IUDP projects in Nepal has been increased, though it has not been included in the National Urban Development Strategies employed in Nepal (NUDS, 2015 and NUDS, 2017). Local agendas of development are on the way to affect the jurispondence of federalism at the grassroots. Neither the National Planning Commission nor the Local Government Operation Act has made significant policy departure on this issue, the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) is leading IUDP under the funded project of Asian Development Bank. The project is being implemented in different packages since 2016. The MoUD is the Executing Agency (EA), working through its Department of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC), which has established a project coordination office (PCO) headed by Project Director.

## Methodology

Research Design

In the literature or field study, expected framework is to come up with theorizing" why we need comprehensive plans and how can we improve the effectiveness and efficiency of plans, for sustainable development of emerging towns" and "How can we achieve?" Following Pauwels (2015), social construction of the reality under the context mapping holds true epistemological concern in this regard.

The setting of conceptual idea for this study has been informed by the participatory process of research and planning. Methodologically, it consists of both quantitative and qualitative approaches in the research methods, while adopting descriptive research design at first and then to saturate it, the analytical design has been followed to mapping the grassroots contexts. As reflected in the subsequent discussions, the scientific tools for data collection and analysis consists various subsequent stages, incepted with participatory rural appraisals, focused group discussions and induction workshops, including: -SWOT analysis, Trend analysis, Ward analysis, Linkage analysis.

Study Site Description

## Figure 1: Location Map of Aathbiskot Municipality
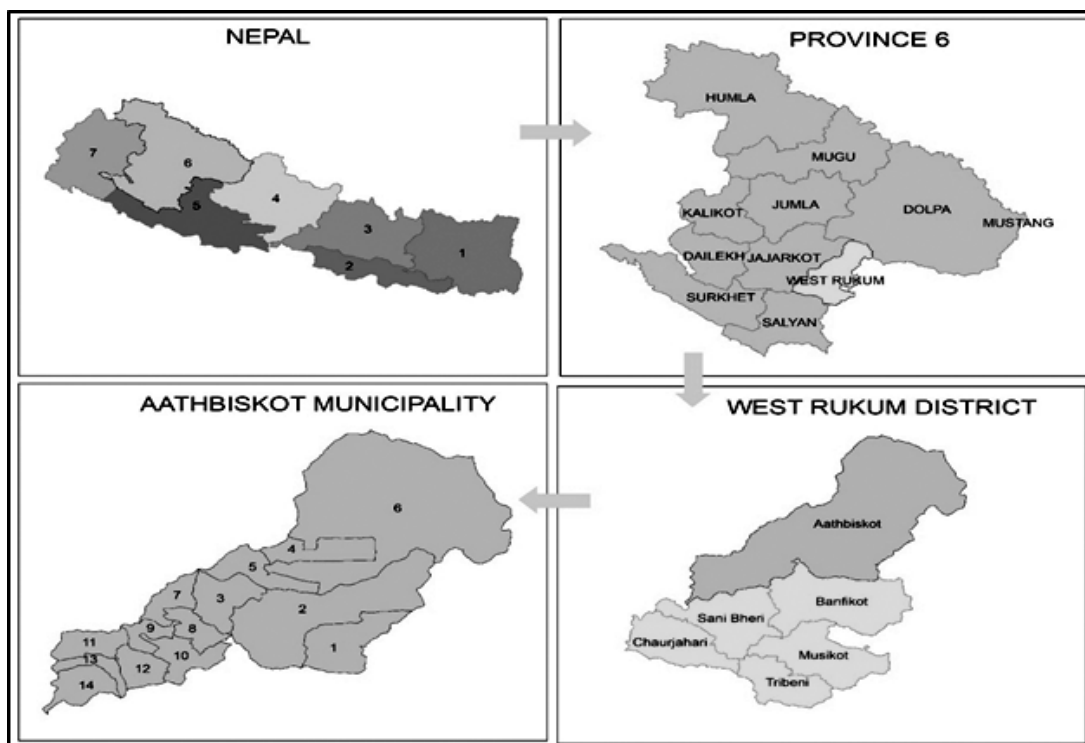
(Google, 2018)

Aathbiskot Municipality lies in West Rukum District in Karnali Province (Povicne no. 6) of Nepal. Sayalakhadi, Gotamkot, Aathbiskot, Aathbisdanda, Ghotma and Magma VDC were incorporated while making this municipality in 2017. It covers a total area of 560.34 sq. km. This local unit shares boarder with East Rukum district in the East, Jajarkot district in the West, Chaukune Rural Municipality and Dolpa District in the North, and Sanibheri and Bafikot Rural Municipality in the South (MoFAGA, 2018). Aathbiskot municipality lies on the closer proximity of Dolpa and Jajarkot district and the region serves as the market center for these districts. Linkage of the Aathbiskot unicipality is identified in two perspectives with inter regional (amongst the district, Municipalities) and intra regional (within district or amongst wards). Exchange of goods and services are common amongst the nearby districts or within districts.

According to National Census 2011, the municipality has 6,421 households and has total population of 33,601 (CBS, 2012). As per the census 2011, an integrated form of ward-specific population and households is further updated with recent database system on the

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basis of exponential population growth rate of West Rukum district for the 2001-2011, i.e. 1.01%. Following the same progression rate, the existing population in the municipality in 2018 is 36050, while this is projected be 37907 in 2023, 39861 in 2028 and 41915 in 2033.

**Findings and analysis**

SWOT Analysis

SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat) Analysis is useful technique to understand the existing internal strength and weakness of the municipality based on present scenario while also identifying its future potential external opportunity and threats for its development prospects in holistic approach.

Along with SWOT Matrix with different aspects, the exercise of analyzing SWOT of the municipality was carried out during the induction workshop held in 4th August 2018 at municipal level as well as during ward level Focused group discussions. Similarly, continuous discussions were adopted with key informants and the community to identify different aspects of strength, weakness, threats and opportunity of the municipality.

As a historic and natural landscape hill terrain site, Aathbiskot municipality provides some good opportunities to be developed as touristic and sustained ecological municipality. The settlements with its own vernacular architecture, drenched in the scenic beauty of nature is how Rukum district can be visualized from the planner's perspective. Providing the nexus between modern infrastructure without compromising the naturel topographical and ecological blessing of the municipality would be the major challenge as well as the strategy to be adopted while envisioning Aathbiskot municipality in the next 10-15 years' time. However, publicity and promotion of the gifted natural resources, culture, heritage and religious structures and settlement for potential development of Aathbiskot for tourism other than the terror and fear would remain major challenges to overcome. In lack of knowledge based skilled manpower, the development and management of the resources would face major crisis while municipality still suffers from providing and basic infrastructural services related to road, health, education, communication, to all wards.

**Table 1: SWOT Analysis**

| Indicators | Strength | Weakness | Opportunity | Threat |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Physical** | - Management of ward office<br>- Construction of road<br>- Sufficient supply of drinking water<br>- Improvement in education | - Lack of proper infrastructure facilities<br>- Lack of roads reaching to various destination<br>- Lack of community hall<br>- Lack of higher education system<br>- Lack of infrastructures in health post | - Opportunity for better education facilities | - No feasible roads, so no goods and proper market |
| **Economy** | - Provision for compulsory tax system<br>- Tourism flourishing areas | - Problem of high tax<br>- Lack of needed information for tourists (Local or international) | - Development in tourism<br>- Economic development | - Financial problem |

| | Strengths | Weaknesses | Opportunities | Threats |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Social** | - Social harmony and people's participation in community work | - Lack of awareness in local people | - Planned urban development integrated with technology an awareness and education could enhance social security. | - Lack of coordinated and integrated development trend may increase threat to social well-being of the society in terms of safety to women and children and vulnerable population |
| **Environmental** | - Proper solid waste management | - Destruction due to natural disaster | - Opportunity to manage forest area<br>- Use of naturally available tools | - Effect in environmental quality |
| **Agricultural** | - Good provision for agriculture<br>- Agriculture as prime activities | - Lack of irrigation facility<br>- Lack of modern equipment in agricultural activities | - Modernization in agriculture and implementation of dairy products<br>- Research on opportunity of organic farming and alternate farming technologies | - Local products affected by imported products<br>- Growing trend of urbanization |

Source: Induction workshop (municipal level) and PRA/FGD (Ward levels)

Some Major Common Challenges of the municipalityPublicity and promotion of the gifted natural resources, culture, heritage and religious structures and settlement for potential development of Aathbiskot for tourism other than the terror and fear

- Less availability of flat land due to natural topography

- Management and utilization of available natural resources

Lack of knowledge based/trained manpower

- Major Problems

- Institutional problems related to capacity building, offices infrastructures.

- Lack of urban scale health institutions with basic facilities including maternity services and other emergency services.

- Lack of sufficient appointment of technical manpower in education and upgradation of existing social and physical infrastructure of existing schools and community schools.

Absence of Identification of the wards/villages for agricultural pocket zone and its promotion accordingly for commercial farming.

 Trend Analysis

From the year 2008 A.D. to 2017 A.D., we can see certain changes in the settlement pattern of the Aathbiskot municipality. The percentage of settlement area in the municipality in three different years is shown in the graph below:
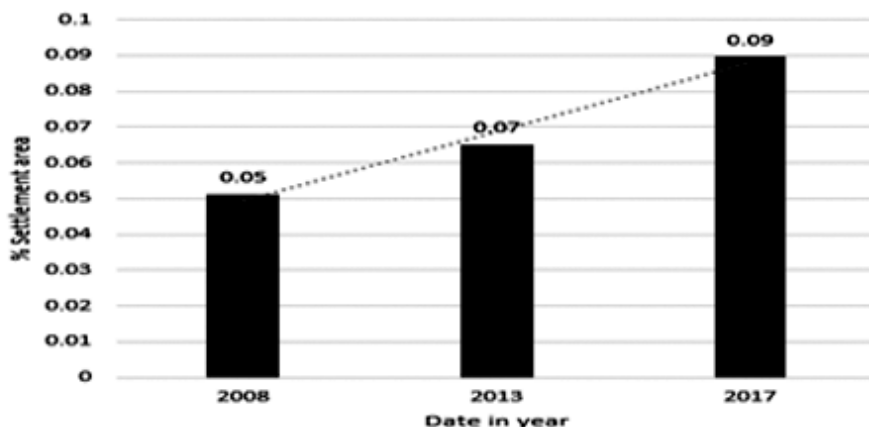
**Figure 2: Trend analysis Chart of Aathbiskot Municipality**

In the above graph, we can see the increase in settlement area of the municipality in different years. The area of the overall municipality is 560.34 sq.km. In 2008, 0.05% area covers the settlement pattern which is slightly increased in 2013 i.e. 0.07% and in 2017. i.e. 0.09%. There are minimum changes in the settlement pattern from 2008 to 2017.

Ward Analysis

As from the first day of field visit and informal interviews that we've conducted in every wards, the categories of ward are done according to the ten criteria of selection. Ward analysis shows the developed and under developed wards in the Aathbiskot municipality. Following table shows the ward analysis of the municipality:

**Table 2: Ward Analysis**

| Ward | 70 | 65 | 60 | 55 | 50 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 5 | Total | Group |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 430 | C |
| 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 295 | B |
| 3 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 375 | C |

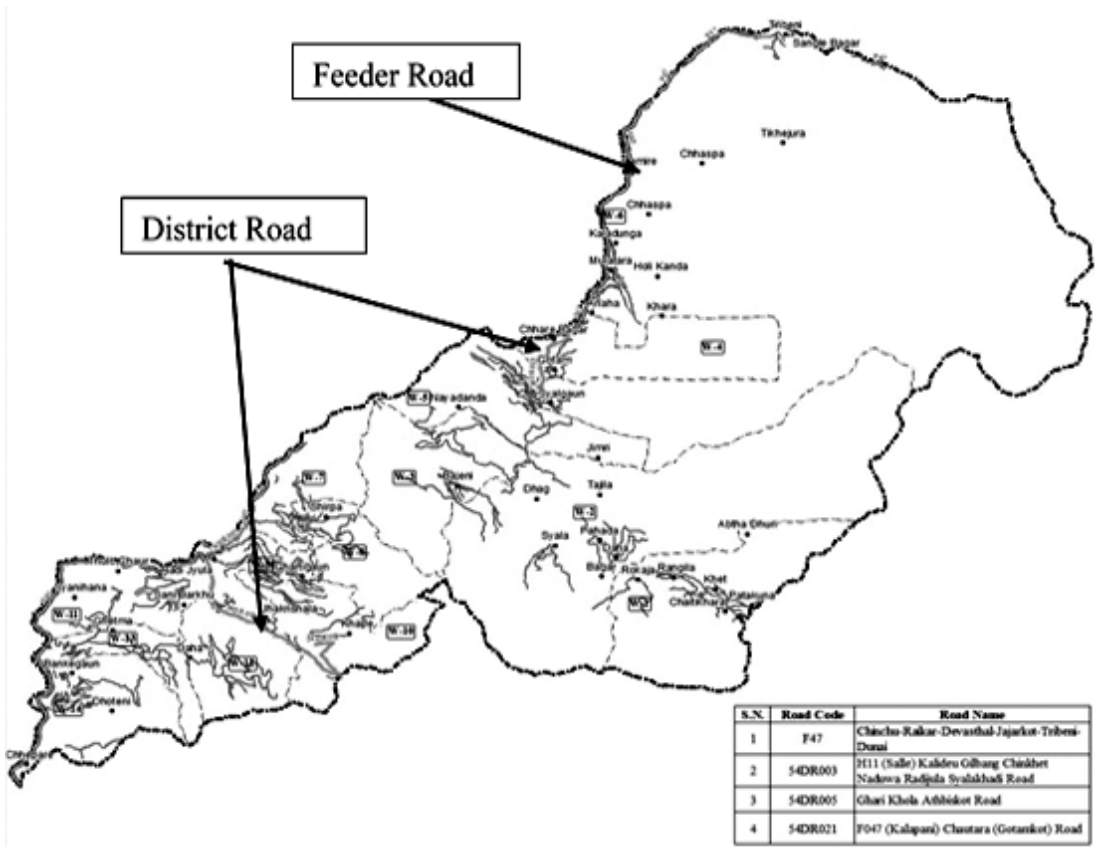| 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 410 | C |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|---|
| 5 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 415 | C |
| 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 475 | C |
| 7 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 290 | B |
| 8 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 460 | C |
| 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 135 | A |
| 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 320 | B |
| 11 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 430 | C |
| 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 360 | B |
| 13 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 450 | C |
| 14 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 405 | C |

(Source: Induction Workshop, 2018)

The lowest rank is shown by the highest number. So, those wards having grade "C" is the less developed ward. According to the above chart, it is shown that wards 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 13 and 14 are less developed wards of Aathbiskot municipality. They lack the proper facilities of accessible road, health, education. Etc. and they should rely upon other wards for their common needs. Ward 9 is developed in comparison to the other wards. So, during planning phase, the less developed wards should be given much priority. This analysis shows the level of presence of infrastructure and facilities in every ward of Aathbiskot municipality.

 Linkage Analysis

One of the important aspects of this IUDP is to grow the municipality with ambitious target of making it physically, socially, culturally and economically benefited and also making the municipality sustainable for long run. It also ensures equal opportunity for different sub-areas and different social and age groups. It is well known fact that it is only possible with induced development plans. It is also necessary to understand that most of the people flowing to the region are from the nearby wards and districts. Hence, study of the linkage has been done with aspect of flow of good and flow of people. Basically, Radijyula (lying in the edge of Thulobheri River and Gijaagaad Khola) is a market center for nearby VDCs.

**Figure 3: Map showing road network of Aathbiskot municipality**

| S.N. | Road Code | Road Name |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | F47 | Chischu-Raikar-Devasthal-Jajarkot-Tribeni-Dunai |
| 2 | 54DR003 | H11 (Salle) Kalideu Gdhang Chiakhet Nadowa Radjula Syalakhadi Road |
| 3 | 54DR005 | Ghari Khola Athbiskot Road |
| 4 | 54DR021 | F047 (Kalapani) Chautara (Gotamkot) Road |

(Google, 2018)

Exchange of goods and services are common amongst the nearby districts or within districts. Exchange of any of such has direct impact in economic development of the region. Some of the linkages are explored in two different perspectives as mentioned below:

Inter- Regional

Aathbiskot municipality lies on the closer proximity of Dolpa and Jajarkot district and the region serves as the market center for these districts. Tourists are attracted to this place due to the "Yarshagumba", Mt.Sisne, various ponds located and notable temples Barah and Sibalaya and may help in the development of the area by entering foreign currency.

The majority of goods are imported from Kathmandu, Musikot, Jajarkot and Surkhet. The goods come from Kathmandu and are redistributed to other municipalities. It is also

important market for the people of Dolpa, when they come as the seller of their local products. Mainly, goods from Birendranagar, Nepalgunj and Kohalpur are exported to the Aathbiskot municipality.

**Figure 4: Map showing linkage of goods**
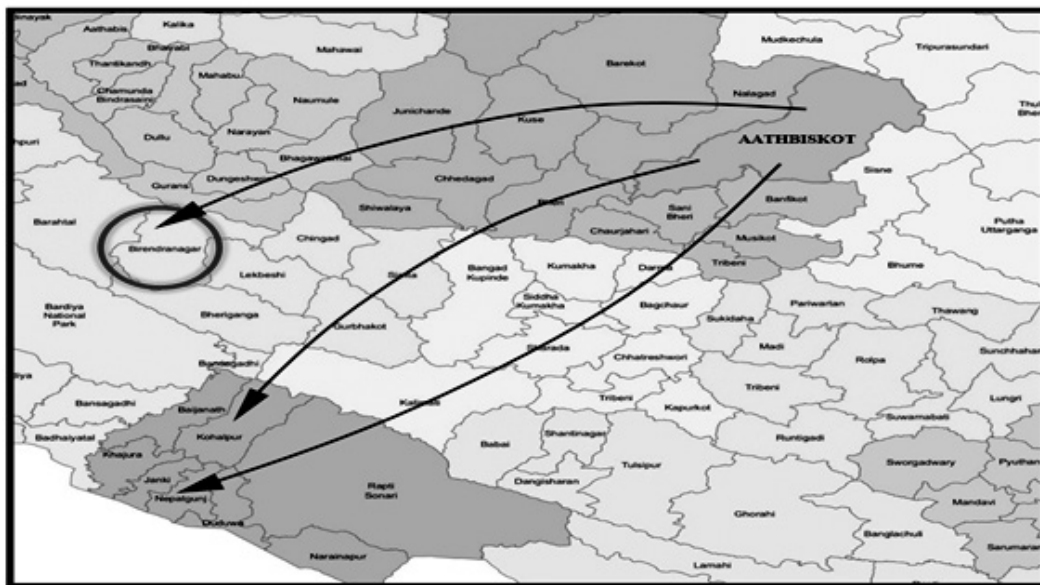


(Google, 2018)

As we all know, Aathbiskot is not complete and sustainable on its own. There are still many things that the town depends upon starting from basic higher education facilities and health services. People from Aathbiskot have to move to Kathmandu, Kohalpur and Birendranagar for good higher education and complicated health issues. Trend of moving students for higher education is common in the place where as people also move to other districts for seeking better job opportunities. Growing number of out migrations is also one of the major problems either that be within the nation or out of nation.

Intra-Regional

Majority of settlement is seen in Radi Jyula and it is also the main market center of the municipality. This market serves for other wards and places of the municipality like Ghartigaun, Khape, Bankegaun, Dhoteni. The feeder road passes along the market center so the market is in growing trend.

Vision Setting

Planning of any city is based on the analysis of present situational trends, past historic events and future prospective goals to reach. As part of planning process, vision setting executes the participatory approach of setting out aspirational destination of city. This becomes true for any cities, towns or country. But to the newly formed municipalities like Aathbiskot Municipality, setting out the vision of the municipality at its initial phase of formation of municipality is itself an important opportunity to direct municipal goals, plans, and program which will direct whole municipal activities towards the focused direction of set vision. All development activities that would be carried out in the future would be and should be in line with the set municipal vision set.

Through the participatory process of discussion and induction, the team of researcher carried out vision setting exercise along with objective to brief the civil representatives and the key persons of the Aathbiskot Municipality about the initiation of the integrated urban development plan. The major participants during the workshop included Mayor of municipality, Deputy Mayor, Chief administrative officer of the municipality, Section chiefs of the municipality office, Political representatives, Ward chief of the municipal ward, and Representatives from various social, community and economic organizations. Furthermore, the ward level FGDs and discussion with key informants additionally clarifies the potential development prospects of the municipality along with the different GIS mapping studies and trend developments of the municipalities for last 10/20 years and with further discussions and analysis on different perspectives at ward levels, the final statement for long term visions is selected as:

> *"Desire of prosperous village and town; a healthy, neat,*
> *peaceful and well-governed Aathbiskot municipality"*

With the above stated slogan, the vision of the Aathbiskot municipality is to make the municipality productive and clean. Aathbiskot Municipality for-sees for their sustainable development. People of Aathbiskot Municipality wish to visualize their city as beautiful and picturesque, which clearly suggest their intentions of clean and healthy city environment. A city can never prosper with proper and strategic investment on education and health of its citizens.  In fact, education and well-being of its citizens are key indicators of

development index (HDI) of the sustainable city to mark its prosperity.

## Conclusion

As an aspiring city, Aathbiskot Municipality has diverse prospects and sectors of development that would drive its future growth but identifying some lead sectors and potential development opportunity of the municipality based on its own strength and individuality would what make municipality grow better and prosper. The key conclusions can be summarized as:

- Potentiality of Aathbiskot as a resourceful area in terms of economy and tourism, in particular, along with the elected representatives and federal delineation in the country

- Poor governance and service delivery giving spaces for elite structure as a threat of project designing and selection

- Out-migration is rapid inviting some settlement issues and linkage trends unfolded

- Different potentialities and opportunities for different wards- making sense of heterogeneity in the planning within the municipality itself

- Long-term vision setting as a guiding principle of the development- though it should be strategically outlined in different development plans, including multi-sectoral investment plan, physical development plan, economic and financial development plan, environmental management plan, social development plan and cultural and tourism development plan, etc.

With the researcher's team working during site he inferred that most of the people are not aware about the ambitious government project hence which is also the reason for lesser public participation. Extreme involvement and interference of political parties and raising political issues during the presentation had been some bad experience in the site. Apart from some minor hindrance and confusion in the site, whole process went on enthusiastic reflection.

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