

Governance for Sustainable Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Services in Rural Nepal

Bishnu Bahadur Khatri

Associate Professor, Central Department of Rural Development,
Tribhuvan University, Nepal.
Email: bishnu.khatri@cdrd.tu.edu.np (*corresponding author*)
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4777-1307>

Madan Bahadur Bhandari

WASH Specialist,
Plan International Nepal, Lalitpur, Nepal
Email: bhandarimadanbahadur@gmail.com

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Abstract

Governance for sustainable water supply, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services in rural Nepal is a major challenge that requires continuous efforts to improve coordination, delivery of quality interventions, and community participation. Issues related to governance in the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sectors are globally significant, with the consideration of the functionality of WASH services in rural Nepal. This article explores the relationship between distinct cases and the underlying causes of governance issues in Nepal's WASH sector, emphasizing the need for more effective delivery and response mechanisms. Additionally, this article analyses existing issues related to inclusive governance and the role of community people to ensure inclusive and appropriate WASH governance. The governance framework is shaped by historical practices, existing policies, and socio-cultural values within society. The article also provides a perspective on historical and socio-cultural transformations, policy analysis, and shared learning based on published articles on WASH, governance, sustainability, and development theories. Furthermore, it addresses issues of inclusive participation, decision-making, and financial transparency as integral components of good governance, which play a significant role in ensuring the sustainability of WASH services in communities. In conclusion, this paper asserts that the functionality of WASH services often fails due to inadequate governance, whereas governance is directed by the history of the places and applied development theories and approaches up to the timeframe.

Keywords: WASH services, Inclusive, Governance, Sustainable, Functionality

1. Introduction

The history of progress in the WASH sectors, both in globally and in Nepal, spans several decades. In Nepal, initiation of the WASH sector development can be traced back to 1981 when it officially declared sanitation decade that spanned from 1981-1990. However, considerable progress was realized after Sanitation Master Plan, 2011. The Sanitation Master Plan introduced a highly effective framework characterized by strong leadership from local governments, improved coordination, and collaboration of stakeholders, and the establishment of strong joint monitoring mechanisms with a central focus on community participation. The country has declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) in 2019 and hand-washing practices in critical time is impressively increasing in both rural and urban area. As per the Joint Monitoring Project, United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO) 91 percent of households have access to basic water supply facilities in comparison to 79 percent in 2000. Similarly, the country has also remarkable progress in developing water and sanitation policies and laws to establishment of good governance in the WASH sector and achieves national target and global commitments.

However, achieving the institutionalization and long-term sustainability of WASH services remains a significant challenge. Various factors are analyzed in different research related to the functionality of water supply systems and sustaining ODF status. Essentially, these dimensions are observed as economic, institutional, natural resource

degradation and physical infrastructure sustainability (Neupane et al., 2018). WASH Sector Status Report (SSR) 2016 reported only 25.4 percent of rural water supply systems are well functional (Adhikari, 2019) and there are similar problems in sustaining sanitation and hygiene services in households, schools, healthcare facilities and public places.

Another, prominent challenge in a country is the sustainable functionality of water supply services adhering to regulatory standards in terms of quality, quantity, accessibility, and reliability. Additionally, there is often a lack of practices related to safely managed sanitation and consistent hygiene practices, these issues are closely connected to the prevailing governance practices. Governance indicators are basically considered as voice and accountability, political instability and violence, government effectiveness, quality in regularity, rule of law and control of corruption (Kaufmann et al., 2005). Ensuring the sustainability of WASH services requires a governance-centred approach to guarantee equitable and enduring access to these services within communities. It is crucial to emphasize effective and accountable governance structures, particularly violence-free and rule of law is sustained. Such governance environments can provide essential support for enhancing the sustainability of WASH services.

Good governance is characterized by its emphasis on transparency, stakeholder engagement, and responsiveness within decision-making processes aiming to prevent corruptions and considers minority voices (Papadopoulos & Warin, 2007). Gender-based inequality is a longstanding challenge in water governance (Adams et al., 2018). Despite women playing a central role in water collection within households, their voices are often marginalized in decision-making processes. This issue extends not only to women but also to minority and marginalized populations, facing barriers in accessing and influencing decisions regarding water resources and WASH services. This lack of inclusiveness can have disadvantageous effects on the sustainability of WASH services. The cultural values of male-dominated societies and elite-centred conceptual development contribute to inequality and hinder sustainability.

Sustainability implies effective, efficient, and long-lasting use of goods and services, considering the demand of future generations (United Nations, 1987). The term 'sustainability' draws considerable attention to declining natural resources whereas this term here is used to address the agendas of sustainable development goal. Although the term sustainability is contested, now the sustainability is like a democracy (Holden et al., 2014). In the context of WASH, sustainability is defined in terms of long-term functionality and efficiency of services. The challenges related to sustainability in the WASH sector arise from a series of failures within water supply systems, sewerage management systems, and the malfunctioning of institutional and public WASH services. Proper governance plays a pivotal role in addressing these issues, as the lack of effective governance has a substantial impact on the functionality and long-term sustainability of WASH services. By addressing governance-related challenges, the WASH sector can work towards ensuring that water, sanitation, and hygiene services are not only functional but also enduring, benefiting communities in the long run.

Governance is pivotal in ensuring the reliability and effectiveness of services through proper monitoring and feedback mechanisms. WASH Governance encompasses not only the government's role in service delivery but also the societal, cultural, and environmental factors affecting service provision. It includes the collection of complaints and grievances from users to governments or service providers. The sustainable functionality of WASH services is determined by government standards, and both good and bad governance practices play a crucial role in determining the sustainability of WASH services. The absence of good governance has adversely affected WASH service delivery and sustainability, disrupting water supply and sanitation services' functionality.

The article aims to explore the connection between governance practices and the sustainability of WASH services by analyzing existing provisions and research on governance and sustainable WASH services in rural Nepal. This includes the historical aspects of policy and regulation to better understand how effective WASH governance has evolved over time. By delving into these aspects, the article strives to provide insights into the interplay between governance and the sustainability of WASH services in Nepal by reviewing existing literature, observations, and experiences.

2. Conceptual Review

The concept of governance is multifaceted, encompassing various issues within a range of disciplines, including the social and legal domains. Bevir (2013) defines governance as the process of governing, whether conducted by government, market, or network entities. This process revolves around decision-making and the subsequent implementation of those decisions (Sheng, 2009). Within this context, governance extends to the delivery, regulation, and monitoring of services. It not only comprises governmental decisions but also emphasizes the importance of involving concerned stakeholders in decision-making, although achieving meaningful participation remains a

complex undertaking (Botes & Van Rensburg, 2000; Muriu, 2013). Governance is a complex concept, with its interpretation influenced by legal provisions, public perceptions of the law, and the acceptance of services, which, in turn, can be influenced by technology transfer and innovation (Andrew & Goldsmith, 1998). Governance is, thus, a dynamic concept shaped by the perceptions of both the public and service providers.

Participation, decision-making, and the execution of governance actions are guided by social norms, legal frameworks, organizational structures, and the government's intentions. Government serves as the structural framework through which governance is enacted, addressing various societal issues through appropriate policies and processes (Bhandari, 2016). Nevertheless, governance goes beyond structures and policies, involving the actions of both state and non-state actors in addressing public concerns. Local governments, for example, play a significant role in addressing community issues by ensuring services, engaging with communities, and partnering with development workers and civil society (Acharya, 2018). Effective governance requires inclusiveness throughout all its processes.

The principles of governance extend to the delivery of services to the community. They encompass participation, decision-making, capacity building, and institutional development. Developing leadership is a core principle that shapes the quality of governance, fostering community involvement, government decision-making, and accountability (Pandeya, 2015). The democratic process, combined with equitable resource distribution and access through policies and rules, is pivotal in addressing the needs of marginalized populations and achieving inclusive governance. Effective governance is rooted in democratic participation, legitimacy, and regulation. These parameters are essential for fostering good and inclusive governance that focuses on people-centric processes and performance (Rai & Paudel, 2011). Inclusiveness in governance varies based on individual values, perceptions, and claims, making it a subjective concept. Policies, the government's role, inclusive participation, decision-making, and leadership are imperative for ensuring inclusive governance, whereas the governance is perceived as government determinations and local political and institutional dynamics (Faguet, 2009).

Sustainability, as represented by the three pillars of social, environmental, and economic aspects, plays a crucial role in governance (Purvis et al., 2019). Achieving sustainability in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services depends on economic development, social harmony, and environmental protection, which are regarded as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars (Adhikari, 2019). Effective governance systems are vital for ensuring the sustainability of WASH services, although the specific governance practices may vary across contexts due to the diverse impacts on sustainability pillars. In this literature review, we have examined the multifaceted nature of governance, its key principles, and the role it plays in achieving sustainable WASH sector development, with an emphasis on the inclusiveness of governance for democratic norms and the challenges associated with different contexts.

3. Methodology

The primary objective of this article is to create knowledge and generate insights regarding WASH governance in Nepal. The methodology employed in this article incorporated a multifaceted approach using secondary sources, and historical, and gradual transformation analysis to comprehensively examine the development of WASH governance in Nepal. To establish a strong foundation, the study conducted an extensive secondary literature review, synthesizing insights from articles and books related to development history, WASH, and governance. Expanding on the foundation of WASH governance knowledge, the study employed historical trend analysis to structure WASH governance and its influence in the WASH governance framework in Nepal. A gradual transformation analysis complements to identify key milestones and shifts in governance that have shaped the WASH landscape.

Additionally, the study delves into international perspectives on WASH, governance, and development paradigm providing localized insights into the contemporary governance and WASH issues. Finally, it involves in a critical review of WASH-related policies shortly along with an examination of the WASH-MIS system, and regulatory framework governing WASH governance in Nepal. This comprehensive methodology aims to provide a holistic understanding of the complex interplay between WASH governance and policy development within the realm of WASH in rural Nepal.

4. Thematic Results and Discussion

Historical analysis of wash governance in Nepal: Governance practices is linked with the cultures, and governance established by social norms and value. Normally, culture is guided by the people of community. In general, people's thoughts and values are dictated by social customs. However, in this article, it is tried to prove the point of view, the

individual is the basis of culture creation. It is widely accepted that social values are created by power. Looking at the history of Nepal, power was kept in individuals rather than laws, which played a lead role in creating some kinds of social values and norms for that period which were later established as the culture and customary law in the society, and over time, the culture controls the society in term of social, economic, and psychological aspects. In Nepal, religion has always been a central feature of Nepali life where the class system is legitimized by the caste system (Bista, 1991). Bista (1991) argued that the most important effect in society and social rule is due to absolute belief in fatalism, which is determined by the divine or powerful external agency. The belief reflects the sense of time, the concept of planning, human dignity, and punctuality, whereas accountability and punctuality are core principles of good governance (Bista, 1991).

Nepal's journey of development encompasses unique history that also involves the enhancement of Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services improvement including WASH governance and policies formation. Nepal's developmental trajectory has undergone transformative shifts in line with global paradigms of development. The fundamental purpose of the theory of developments is to assess the systematic efficacy by evaluating various perspectives such as modernization, dependency, world systems, and globalization (Reyes, 2001). Nepal has also been passing through different phases of development. Principally each theories have convincing logic for social and economic developments, and each have during and post criticisms. Remarkably, these development theories have significantly influenced the shaping government policies, strategies priorities, and governance practices over the time. Constantly, Nepal's historical context reveals a peculiar trend. When tasks that ought to be completed according to established norms remains unfinished, tradition attributes the satisfaction to fate rather than resorting to complaints against the relevant authorities. Consequently, Nepali fatalism has played a prominent role, diverting culture away from actively addressing governance issues. Unfortunately, this fatalistic perspective has bound both the state and its people, discouraging them from adopting responsibility and accountability. This culture deeply rooted in the belief that changes or outcomes cannot be attained through individual efforts. Consequently, Nepali society has, over time, evolved to accept fate as the guiding force, leading to a tendency to avoid active engagement in governance issues (Bista, 1991). Nepal's historical development journey and its response to global development paradigms have shaped its governance practices and cultural inclination towards fatalism, ultimately impacting accountability and responsibility within the society.

In the pursuit of a more comprehensive understanding, it is essential to delve deeper into the underlying factors that have contributed to the emergence of these cultural norms. Nepal's history has been marked by the rule of numerous dynasties, each exercising their power until their eventual demise. It is a recurring theme in history that individuals in positions of authority seek to establish and enforce rules and norms that benefit and often force the public to serve their interests, usually centred around the acquisition and perpetuation of power. Nepal's historical narrative contains a notable chapter in the form of the *Rana* Regime, which introduced the culture of "*Chakari*" – a system where individuals engaged in various forms of service to satisfy the ruling class (Bist, 1991). Even though the *Rana* Regime eventually deteriorated, the culture it cultivated remained deeply embedded in Nepali society, entering not only the social fabric but also governmental practices. A significant aspect to consider is the role of power dynamics within the context of feudal systems. Those in positions of authority possess the capacity to shape and perpetuate cultural practices over extended periods.

This historical power dynamic has left a permanent symbol in Nepali society, displaying a culture deeply rooted in dependency and subservience. Governance, in its broader sense, transcends the mere provision of services by the government and service providers. It encompasses the critical dimension of trust that individuals place in these institutions and the satisfaction derived from the services they deliver. From this perspective, it is reasonable to argue that the dominance of feudalism in Nepal played a pivotal role in fostering a sense of fatalism among the population. This, in turn, hindered their ability to assert their fundamental rights in their interactions with the government, perpetuating a culture of subservience. In summary, Nepal's historical experiences, characterized by the rule of various dynasties, the dynamics of power, and the legacy of the *Rana* Regime, have been influential in shaping cultural norms, including a culture of service, trust in governance, and the prevalence of fatalistic attitudes among the people.

In Nepal's Extensive history, marked by the rule of different dynasties, including *Kirat*, *Lichhivi*, *Malla* and *Shah*, the management of water resources and water politics played a significant role during their respective tenures. The earlier dynasties, such as the *Kirat*, *Lichhivi*, and *Malla*, contributed to the development of sustainable and indigenous techniques and knowledge for water resource management in the Kathmandu Valley (Acharya, 2016). However, the *Shah* dynasty, particularly during the *Rana* regime, played a significant role in undermining these traditional practices

and water governance culture (Acharya, 2016). The *Rana* regime introduced pipe water supply systems after damaging the traditional water supply and conservation practices in 1895 for Kathmandu and Bhaktapur, and in 1904 for Lalitpur (UN-HABITAT, 2008). Unfortunately, these systems primarily focused on providing water to government officials, *Rana*'s palaces, and relatives. This selective approach led to a culture of poor governance characterized by unequal distribution of water, discrimination among the population, and a lack of government accountability and responsibility in service delivery.

The *Hiti* system of Kathmandu Valley was ideal for water resource management and water supply technology enduring social and management sustainability perspectives (Molden, 2019). It operates based on traditional knowledge of water resource management and water governance. Unfortunately, many of these *Hiti* systems were demolished during the Shah dynasty and the *Rana* regime, which further deteriorated traditional water resource management practices and the entire water governance system in the Kathmandu Valley. Similarly, those feudal rulers disrupted the equitable distribution of water by demolishing communal water supply systems and introducing pipe water supply systems that favoured elite groups, including government officials and *Rana* relatives only (Boukalová et al., 2018). Evidence illustrates that, like as governance in other sectors, WASH governance is also being affected by the governments policy, provisions, and actions, which have led to the perpetuation of detrimental cultures across generations and a culture of acceptance within the people of the next generation. Consequently, individuals with the same mentality and approach now hold positions as representatives and employees, resulting in ongoing challenges for the people.

Water services are communal services in the history of Nepal which is gradually transferring into household services. As per the Joint Monitoring Project (JMP), only 19 percent population has access in households. Water is a social asset, and social values and norms have also an impact on WASH governance. In the case of Nepal, caste system has existed for a long period. Social discrimination and untouchability are altering inclusive governance (Bista, 1991; Gurung et al., 2014). The study showed various restrictions as per Caste in water resource distribution and accessibility to communal water points with deep roots in the society directly affecting functionality and sustainability of water supply systems.

WASH governance, policies and plan: Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) is taken as an important part of development in the world. United Nations Organization (UNO) General Assembly also recognized water and sanitation right as Human Rights in 2010 (Brown et al., 2016). The Constitution of Nepal also endorsed the rights to safe water and the rights to a healthy environment a fundamental right of people. Similarly, policies and programs have been focusing on achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)-6, through effective and good WASH governance practices. Government policy is a prime pillar for WASH governance like other development sectors.

Before the federal system in Nepal, in compliance with the 1990 constitution of Nepal, local governance was carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Local Self Governance Act (LSGA) of 1999, Enhancing autonomy and giving local bodies a bigger role (Rai & Paudel, 2011; GoN, 1999). However, there was a contradiction in the role of different bodies such as the District Development Committee and Village Development Committee and those bodies of government are not totally autonomous for function. In accordance with the new federal constitution of Nepal, the country has the Local Government Operation Act, 2017, which stipulates the functions of the federal, province and local governments. Local governments are recognized as being the "doorstep government" which is accountable to ensure people's fundamental rights. The Local Government Operation Act, 2074 which was passed on October 15, 2017, has paved a solid legal foundation for local government operation and control (GoN, 2017). This legal framework was enacted in accordance with Article 296 (1) of the constitution of Nepal to institutionalize legislative, executive, and quasi-judicial functions of local government. It explained municipalities' and rural municipalities' right to create water supply and sanitation laws, regulations, and environmental protection standards. Similarly, it has provisions to function the local government related to authorities, duties and responsibilities ward committee, municipality level committees, assembly, plan formulation, meetings and decision makings and implementation procedure in local government level including inter-government relations among local government and maintaining relations with province and federal governments.

Nepal practiced systemic development practices from its first five-year plan from 1956-1961. The country also practiced development activities with internal budget and external support before the establishment of the Planning Commission in 1956, however, it was not systematic, and people-oriented. The development activities were emphasized to accomplish the personal interests of the rulers and relatives during that period. Similarly, it has a development history of water resource management and WASH governance since its evolution. However, the country

is tackling cultural values, social norms, and policy to start a Systematic Planning process to achieve effective and efficient governance in WASH sector development.

Similarly, the fifteenth plan developed for fiscal year 2019/22-2023/24 is the second plan after Nepal has new constitutions with the provision of three-tier government and national agendas to achieve good governance, development, and prosperity (NPC, 2019). The learning of the fourteenth plan is based on the fifteenth Plan which encompasses the Fourteenth Plan's progress, lessons learned and improving points. Similarly, the government's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), 2015-2030 is also part of this plan which also ensures democratic values and norms. The main aim of this plan is to ensure prosperity, economic equality and social justice and the long-term vision is a prosperous, independent, and socialism-oriented economy with happy, healthy, and educated citizens enjoying equality of opportunities, dignity, and high standards of living. The plan has a vision and is targeted for each sector of development including WASH and aligns with fundamental rights in the constitution through the optimal mobilization of resources. However, governance challenges are also permeable around the plan.

Appropriate development approach addressing WASH governance: Federal WASH laws have provisions of selecting approaches to WASH sector developments by the local governments as per context. The local governments can decide to go through community-based management, private/corporate sector, utilities, and government management approaches. However, the Community-Based Management (CBM) approach is widespread and deeply rooted in rural areas of Nepal and local governments basically prefer a CMB approach, because it is an easy way for government to divert their attention to other parts. CBM model is adopted even though communities do not have the technical capacity, financial capacity, and human resources to look after and operate the systems, whereas local governments are accountable and responsible toward the community for economic development, social harmony, improved socio-economic status, and infrastructure development.

On the contrary, an alternative approach to WASH service delivery is explored through the mobilization of private sectors or public private-partnerships. The approach aims to ensure WASH governance that aligns with the principle of corporate governance, representing an alternative development paradigm (Rana, 2019). Corporate governance is described as the maintenance of an effective and balanced relationship between the board of directors and the chief executive officer, as well as between the board of directors and stakeholders. It can manifest in two forms: state-owned and state-controlled corporate governance. It's essential to recognize that a lack of ethical behaviour and oversight of corporate actions can lead to corporate greed and fraudulent activities, posing significant challenges to corporate governance (Rana, 2019).

In Nepal, corporate governance faces unique challenges, particularly in the rural areas of the WASH sector. These challenges include limited income sources and affordability for various services, including WASH services. Private companies often prioritize profit over providing effective services, which can be particularly unattainable in rural areas. Similarly, rural WASH services tend to be more expensive due to scattered settlements, limited and challenging road connectivity, and insufficient infrastructure development. It is often challenging to collect water tariffs for even operation and minor repairs of water supply systems.

Indeed, in the context of rural Nepal, it's crucial to explore a variety of operationalization and management options tailored to the specific needs and challenges of the region in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector Development. Emphasizing a welfare approach to development is especially appropriate in these areas. Rural areas in Nepal often have unique challenges such as limited resources, difficult terrain, and scattered settlements. Therefore, development initiatives should be context-specific, considering the distinct characteristics and needs of each community. In rural areas involving local communities in the decision-making process is essential. A bottom-up approach that engages community members in defining their development priorities and crafting solutions can lead to more sustainable outcomes. Prioritize the well-being of the population by focusing on essential services like, income, water supply, sanitation, healthcare, and education, those services directly impact the overall welfare of rural communities and the government should have incentive provisions for the worst situation of the community. Create opportunities for income generation and livelihood improvement. This can include agricultural support, vocational training, and small-scale entrepreneurship initiatives, all of which contribute to overall well-being and contribute to sustain the WASH services. Improve infrastructure in rural areas, including road connectivity, electricity, and communication networks to promote appropriate technology of WASH services also be contributed to improve the WASH governance. Establish partnerships with non-governmental organizations, international agencies, and civil society to leverage resources and expertise in rural WASH development and advocate for government commitment to rural welfare by formulating and implementing policies that prioritize the well-being of rural populations. By exploring a welfare-

oriented approach and tailoring development strategies to the unique circumstances of rural Nepal, it's possible to create positive and lasting changes in governance practices that improve the quality of life for the people in these areas.

Dimensions of WASH governance: Governance surpasses the mere structural setup and policy modifications; it encompasses the actions of both state and non-state actors in addressing the concerns of the people (Bhandari, 2016). Moreover, it involves the responsibilities of citizens towards the government, such as active participation in the electoral process, the payment of taxes, and the provision of feedback to the government during the governance process. Within diverse nations like Nepal, marked by a variety of ethnicities, languages, and geographical regions, it is imperative to ensure that marginalized and deprived populations are integrated into the governance system. This imperative is known as inclusive governance. Inclusive governance extends beyond mere opportunities for leadership roles or decision-making; it underscores the necessity to safeguard the rights of all citizens through government services. This approach anticipates the active involvement of every citizen in the governance mechanism, which, in turn, fosters national development. Inclusive governance not only prioritizes efficient service delivery but also empowers marginalized communities to demand the services they rightfully deserve. Recognizing the multi-dimensional exclusions prevailing in society is vital, as these exclusions ultimately hinder the development of a nation. In this context, inclusiveness in governance serves as the cornerstone of development, enhancing both the sense of ownership among the people and the government's commitment. Such inclusive practices significantly contribute to the sustainability of development efforts including water sanitation and hygiene. Certainly, the minimum dimensions of WASH governance for its sustainability encompass:

Effective WASH governance requires strong leadership at both local and national levels. Leaders must be accountable for the planning, implementation, and maintenance of WASH services to ensure their sustainability.

Ensuring participation and community engagement is an important parameter of inclusive governance. Participations have a positive contribution to local-level planning and accountability if that is effective. Effective participation often builds an environment to attain decision-making for all including marginalized communities and genders. However, participation depends on the building agency of marginalized groups, the mobilization of citizens and on the establishment of vibrant social networks (Pandeya, 2015). Communities that use water supply services are not limited to involving people in the system's construction; they also encompass inclusive leadership, operation, and management, decision-making, as well as the ability to coordinate and collaborate with other development agencies and municipalities. Effective involvement of the community people was also hindered by organizational characteristics, such as local government capacity, structure, and policies.

Promoting transparency is an important dimension of governance in governments and communities. Transparency not only introduces financial clarity of the expenditure, but it also consists of the rights of people to attain and select an appropriate model of development. Particularly, in the WASH system people should have the right to select water and sanitation scheme selection and operationalize model selection. Additionally, transparent practices in budgeting, decision-making, and the allocation of resources help build trust among stakeholders and ensure effective management. Numerous tools and techniques are available to promote transparency in governance. In contemporary times, internet governance has evolved to include enhanced coordination and collaboration among various institutions and actors. This evolution emphasizes open information sharing, evidence-based decision-making, and the formation of expertise or issue-based organizations. It enables solutions that can be tailored to specific local contexts while also being scalable to address larger challenges (Verhulst et al., 2017). Effective communication methods play a crucial role in governance and contribute to enhancing trustworthiness, a key dimension of inclusive governance. In the context of community-managed water supply systems, transparency is not confined solely to the construction phase. It extends to the sharing of discussions, decisions, financial matters, and expenditures. This approach is instrumental in building trust within the community, introducing a sense of responsibility among community members to pay water tariffs, and encouraging their active participation in the maintenance and repair of the water supply system.

Responsibility and accountability represent pivotal dimensions within the framework of inclusive governance. In the context of community-managed water supply systems, the primary objective is to empower the community to adopt the central role in the operation, maintenance, and repair of the system. Once the construction phase is completed and the system is handed over to the community, they bear full responsibility for its management. However, it is often the case that communities lack the requisite technical, managerial, and financial capacity to effectively undertake this responsibility. Despite the inclusiveness of User's Committees and community ownership, the functionality and sustainability of water supply systems can be endangered. Moreover, local governments are accountable to ensure

effective and sustainable services to the community people. Where the community-based management approach encounters challenges due to capacity gaps, economic constraints, and a lack of management expertise, according to the constitution, the ultimate accountability for providing water to every citizen in the country lies with the government. Shifting power to local and provincial governments has positive effects on a local resource's utilization and bottom-up planning approach. It increases accountability and reduces bureaucracy influences in decision-making which should determine the appropriate approach for service delivery and system management within the community (Thapa et. al, 2019).

Inclusive governance and sustainability is the persistency of services as required and defined standards. Water point functionality has become a core concern of water supply scheme functionality, and major challenges are faced in various water supply schemes and sanitation services (Whaley & Cleaver, 2017). This dysfunctionality is due to various causes inclined toward governance parameters. A number of discussions have been made about the mode and types of governance to sustain the system. New information and communication technologies can make a significant contribution to the achievement of good governance in WASH sectors. Local governments are constituted based on the main factors of technical capacity, policy, and financial capacity to achieve good governance (Acharya, 2018).

Moreover, other internal and external factors are hindering municipal governance and lack of clarity in the powers, roles, and responsibilities among federal, provincial, and local governments also have a visible impact on WASH governance and finally sustainability of WASH services. Similarly, community-based violence and gender-based inequality in water resources also alter including governance both in rural and urban areas. Urbanization is one of the structural drivers of changing gender-related social norms, and gender dynamics in urban water governance which critically analyzed the assumption that urban development can bring about significant changes in gender-based inequality (Moser, 2017). However, rural areas are still profoundly influenced by the cultural values and societal norms, have directly hindered the inclusiveness in the WASH governance, which states the gender equality in the governance process. It increases ownership of men and women of different ages to the sustainability of the development work and in community WASH services.

Actors of inclusive governance often revolve around identifying the key actors responsible for development activities and their roles within the governance process. It prompts an examination of whether all development organizations can be classified as governance actors. The state, given its pivotal role and responsibility in the established system, is recognized as a central figure in the governance process. However, it is equally essential to recognize and acknowledge the comparative advantages of various non-state actors in governance activities (Nasiritousi et al., 2016), emphasizing that non-state actors bear significant responsibility for governance processes. They assume diverse roles that span the entire policy spectrum, including influencing policymakers and acting independently of states.

In the context of WASH sector development, key governance actors include water user committees, service providers, users, and local governments. The community-managed water supply approach is designed to be overseen by user committees and owned by local communities. Simultaneously, local governments are held accountable for ensuring that people receive the expected standard of water services. It's worth noting that the processes and values of governance have remained relatively unchanged for an extended period, which can hinder the effectiveness of municipalities and public bodies. While governments are central players in WASH governance, local government bodies often adhere to conventional and formal procedures, which may not fully align with the needs of the public and the goals of local governance. The improvement of capacity and the alignment of intentions are essential to bridge these gaps and enhance the effectiveness of governance within the WASH sector.

5. Conclusion

Governance encompasses the complicated process of governing people's needs and facilitating development through the comprehensive efforts of state and non-state actors, with individuals playing a vital role in the process of rule and development. Most rural WASH services including water supply schemes in Nepal are founded on the principles of community-based management. This management approach is deeply rooted in the democratic system and places a significant emphasis on empowering local communities to manage the services. The essence of this management system lies in the notion that WASH services like water supply schemes and sanitation facilities should be owned and governed by the local community. Consequently, the local community is entrusted with the responsibility of managing, operating, and maintaining the services.

The significance of inclusive governance in ensuring the sustainability of WASH services can be viewed from two distinct yet interconnected perspectives. Firstly, inclusiveness within the management systems, such as active participation and leadership roles filled by individuals from diverse genders, castes, ethnicities, and age groups in water user committees and other monitoring committees, contributes significantly to the sustainable functionality of water supply systems. Inclusive governance enhances people's ownership and accountability in the proper management of water supply systems. Secondly, governance in the realm of water is not solely about the people's responsibility to manage the system; it also involves the government's responsibility to support the management, operation, and maintenance of water supply systems. The constitution of Nepal upholds every individual's right to clean drinking water, a fundamental dimension of governance within community water supply and sanitation services.

In conclusion, governance in Nepal, particularly in the context of community-based water supply systems, plays a critical role in ensuring the equitable and sustainable provision of clean drinking water and safe sanitation. Inclusive governance is the key for this process, empowering local communities and emphasizing their active participation and ownership in the management of these vital resources. The interplay between community responsibility and government support is vital for the functionality and durability of WASH services, all while upholding the fundamental right to clean drinking water for all.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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