



Research Article/ Development

## Participatory Development Approach for the Rural Road Networks: A Case of Infrastructure Development Office, Kaski

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess people's participation in the rural road projects in Kaski District of Gandaki Province. The data were collected from 50 conveniently selected residents along the road project alignment Dopahare-Kristi-Bakrek-Pawaigaude area, using the convenient sampling procedure. This study is descriptive, and the questionnaires were used to collect data concerning the people's participation and road infrastructure development in the villages. The findings of the study reveal that the presence of poor rural road infrastructure, both in quality and access, the road sector was found external resource-dependent, deficient in resource mobilization and topography of the rural area by itself escalates the problem. The community participation is not well-institutionalized in this project. The study concludes that public participation is crucial in developing a country like Nepal. People's participation in Nepal is limited only for elite people, but not for people from disadvantaged groups. Though people's participation has increased in Nepal over the last few decades but people from the underprivileged groups do not participate to the same extent of the elite group, which creates disputes in the society. This study recommends all concerned bodies such as the

local communities, the municipality, and other stakeholders to take their responsibility to solve this critical issue.

**KEYWORDS:** Participatory approach, rural road network, decision making, sustainable development

## INTRODUCTION

People's participation refers to the community's involvement in both project implementation and decision-making processes. According to Oakley (1991), the term 'participation' is the process of harnessing the existing physical, economic, and social resources of community people to attain the objectives of sustainability in development projects. Thus, participatory development is the active participation of individuals in the decision-making process about the execution of projects, programs, and procedures that impact them. By empowering local stakeholders to actively participate in the planning and implementation of development projects, their needs and priorities are considered, leading to more equitable and sustainable outcomes. Additionally, participatory approaches have the potential to build stronger relationships between communities and external organizations, fostering collaboration and trust that are essential for achieving meaningful and lasting change. Thus, this study is to explore how these approaches can be effectively implemented in various contexts to promote sustainable development and improve the well-being of communities around the world.

The epistemology of a participatory approach is rooted in the belief that knowledge that is constructed through the active involvement of all stakeholders. The position of participatory communication is not a new idea and dates to the 1970s, which is the result of a gradual shift from the top-down approach to development. Unlike the earlier development projects, there was no place for any decision-making process for the public. Participatory communication values the useful experiences and expertise of individuals and communities, which can contribute to the knowledge and decision-making processes. Participatory communication challenges traditional expertise and authority and promotes the importance of local knowledge and experience. In this context, knowledge is situated in social, cultural, and historical contexts. Here, participatory communication gives importance to collaborative and inclusive processes that can support all stakeholders in knowledge production and dissemination. ~~He~~ Chambers (1992) introduced the terminology PRA meaning Participatory Rural Appraisal. He introduced the concept of PRA, which is related to the concept of participatory approach. Now, this idea is the most popular and practical concept in this area. According to the concept of PRA, the local people and other stakeholders have the authority to express, enhance, share, and analyze their needs. PRA considers the more participation of local people, empowering them for sustainable development of projects.

This perspective enhances the importance of relationships, trust, and mutual respect among all stakeholders and can support the development of plans and support for knowledge. Publicly, participatory communication's epistemology believes that knowledge is not stable or fixed, but strong and complete, and it has been enriched by active engagement of various perspectives and voices. Understanding participation as the exercise of people's capacity to think, act, and control their actions within a collaborative framework is the fundamental component of participatory development. As a result, the key concept of participatory development involves people working together and independently initiating their own thoughts and discussions. Participants will provide more ideas, labor, personnel, and/or other resources (cost-sharing) to the project's preparation and execution. As a result, project resources are used more effectively; additionally, they have more chances to offer their native understanding of the local conditions to the project, which helps identify institutional, social, and environmental barriers and find workable solutions.

The above-mentioned constraints, however, may vary in different forms and degrees from a decentralized, laissez-faire, and/or free enterprise system to a fully

centralized, strongly planned, and/or controlled one. They could also differ in terms of how stable they are. As a result, a wide range of circumstances exist, from the complete backing of the federal, provincial, and/or local government to the involvement of the impoverished to indifference and hostility against this strategy. In fact, in a few countries, the urban and rural elites, particularly the latifundios and landholders influence the political and administrative structures to such an extent that any policy to encourage genuine participation of rural people is either inexistent, or strongly opposed, and/or by various means deactivated. For example, by prohibitive legislation, exasperating government control, absence of funds and/or personnel and so on. Centralized public administrative systems that control decision-making, resource allocation and information, may ignore participation.

All studies and reports mention that labor-based, environment-friendly, and community-based road construction has been proven to be effective for investment in road construction and management. In Nepal, community-based research for participatory approach-based road construction in hilly areas has been the most effective solution. This approach has been recognized by different governments, different departments and is reflected in their policies and plans, such as the 9th and 10th plans, Local Self-Governance Act, and District Development Committee/Rural Municipality Development Committee directives, which are also reflected in government documents. At present, Nepal has three level governments, which have the right to develop the road respectively.

The equal partnership of community people recognizes that every person has skill, ability, and initiative and has an equal right to participate in the process of development project formulation, implementation, operation as well as maintenance. Local people's participation ensures transparency, sharing power, and responsibility of the respective community beneficiaries' peoples from formulation to operation of the development project. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) ensures the participation of local people in development projects under the Development Policy "Constitution Article 52". The federal, provincial as well as local government policies and guidelines strongly provide the peoples participation during the planning, implementation as well as the construction of development projects.

The top-down approach of persuasive models implicitly believed that indigenous populations were either unaware or held incorrect opinions and that the expertise of governments and institutions was accurate (Weyman & Fussell, 1996). Dissatisfaction with the above traditional development theories leads to a re-examination of the purpose of development towards a search for alternative conceptual explanations. To address this difficulty, several development experts (Chambers, 1992) have developed the idea of participatory, or "people-centered development." "Bottom-up" planning," "people-centered development," and the idea that regular people may oversee their development are the main topics of discussion and development initiatives nowadays. This approach, which has been applied to development projects in the third-world countries, promotes the participation of all stakeholders in the process of development. The idea underlying the advent of the participatory development method is that beneficiary groups' capacities are strengthened and developed through their involvement and participation in development projects. This empowers and promotes self-improvement and independence, which guarantees the project's sustainable growth.

In Nepal, the lack of roads, communication, and electricity separate the people of different villages. The development of Nepal's main roads largely depends on foreign aid, support from international and non-governmental organizations, funds provided by

municipalities for the construction of rural roads, and significant labor contributed by local communities.

## RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, the data were primary or secondary depending upon the place from where it is collected. The collection of primary and secondary data is essential to visualize the scope of the problem and possible results to be obtained based on the study (Marashaini, 2012). This study was carried out based on both primary data and secondary data. Statistical methods, and chi-square tests are effectively tools for interpreting factors associates between independent and dependent variables.

The primary data required were gathered through structured questionnaire survey and secondary information was collected from a wide range of literatures. They included published and unpublished journal articles, reports of department of road (DoR), project documents of department of local infrastructure (DoLI), books, and reports on the rural road development issues, research reports of national and international universities, and newspapers articles. This study utilized a descriptive research design to investigate the people's participation in the decision-making process in the specified road. The research design was chosen to provide a comprehensive description of the theory and practice to analyze its key attributes and features. A conventional sampling technique was employed to select a representative sample from the target population. The sample were collected from the study area along the Dopahare-Kristi-Bakrek-Pawaidegaude rural road alignment in the Kaski and Syangja districts. The sample size was determined to ensure the adequate representation of the population while maintaining feasibility within the scope of the study. In the Kaski infrastructure development office, there are numerous road projects, but the study only focuses on one road that connects more villages and serves as a larger population than other projects. The selected project was constructed by a contractor, but there are also several projects constructed by the user committees in the relevant office. Therefore, the study may not reflect all the rural road projects implemented by the infrastructure development office Kaski.

The collected data were entered into SPSS 25 software. Univariate analysis was done to describe the independent variables. Mainly the maximum, minimum, mean, and standard deviation can be used to find the results. For the bivariate analysis, cross tab Chi-square test with P-value <0.05 was used to see the relation between dependent and independent variables. The crosstab Chi-square was used between demographic-social, economic (independent variables) as well as dependent variables.

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research process to ensure the confidentiality, privacy, and voluntary participation of the participants. Informed permission was obtained from all participants, and their secrecy was protected in the reporting of the findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study in relation to the issues of status, operation, and maintenance of rural roads. The study aims to find out the participatory approach behind the rural road projects in relation to planning, construction operation, maintenance, and management of them and to suggest improvements to the user's committee as well as related government agencies to increased participatory approach in the future.

## Results

The data collected through the questionnaire surveys were presented in the tables and figures. They include information supported by available literatures.

**Table 1**  
*Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Sex		
Male	34	68.0
Female	16	32.0
Age		
18-25 years	9	18.0
26-45years	17	34.0
over 45 years	24	48.0
Education		
No formal Education	3	6.0
Primary Education (1-8)	13	26.0
Secondary Education (9-12)	16	32.0
Bachelor	11	22.0
Master and above	7	14.0
Marital status		
Married	33	66.0
Unmarried	10	20.0
Single	6	12.0
Divorced	1	2.0

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic status of the respondents. According to the table, among 50 respondents, 34 respondents are male and the remaining 16 respondents are female. As can be seen, male respondents are likely to participate more than female participants. Similarly, the participants of more than 45 years of age are more in the study area than the range of respondents from the age of 18-25 years. From the data, it can be concluded that the young generation is more likely to move towards the city area or abroad. The educational qualification of the respondents where the respondents of secondary educational level are more than only three percent of the respondents that has no formal education. It is worthwhile to note that 94% of respondents are educated. As for the marital status of the respondents, out of 50 respondents, 33 were married, 10 respondents were unmarried, 6 were single, and one respondent was divorced.

**Table 2**  
*Length of Living Period of Respondents in the Study Area*

Length of living period by respondents	Frequency	Percent
Up to 10 years	2	4.0
Above 10 years	48	96.0
Total	50	100.0

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Table 2 summarizes the length of living periods of the respondents in that location where 48 respondents are living in this area for more than 10 years and the rest of respondents live less than 10 years. This suggests that the minimum number of populations have migrated from other locations.

**Figure 1**  
*Occupational Status of the Respondents*

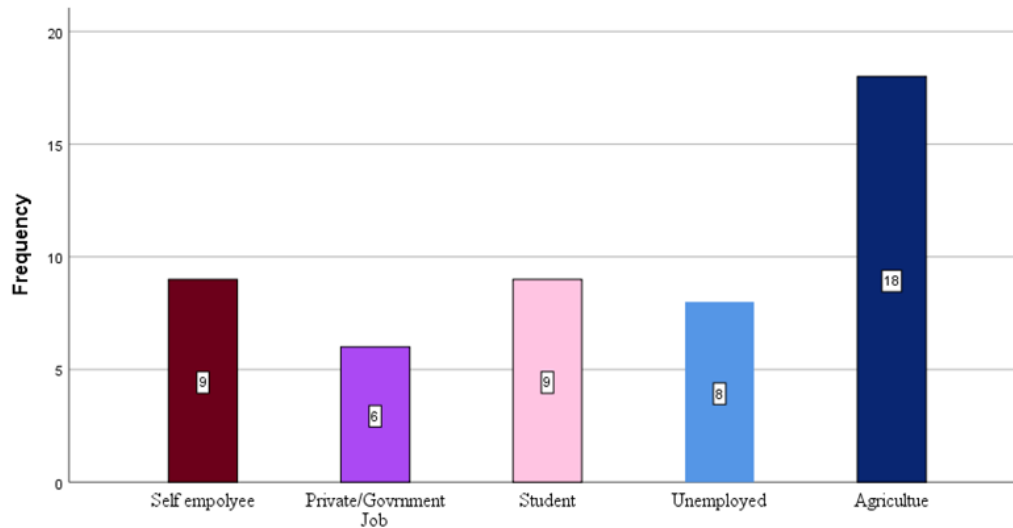


Figure 1 describes the occupational status of the respondents. As can be seen, among the 50 respondents, more respondents are engaged in the agriculture sector. As the data suggest, 18 respondents are involved in the agricultural sector and a minimum number of respondents (6) are engaged in private/government jobs.

**Table 3**  
*Knowledge and Willingness of Participation by the Respondents*

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Concept of people's participation in road infrastructure development (n=50)		
Yes	35	70.0
No	14	28.0
No answer	1	2.0
Understanding of the respondents in people's participation (n=35)		
Take part in decision making process	19	54.3
Involvement in implementation road	9	25.7
Contributing of resources	4	11.4
No Answer	7	8.6
Willing of the respondent to participate in the road development (n=50)		
Yes	33	66.0
No	13	26.0
No Answer	4	8.0
Willing of the participate in different sectors (n=33)		
To improve the quality of infrastructure service	14	42.4
For efficient and effective utilization of resources	2	6.1
To get attention to satisfy pressing needs and priorities	6	18.2
To take part in the decision-making process	11	33.3

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Table 3 presents the number of respondents who know the concept of people's participation in development activities. Among 50 respondents, 70 % of respondents are known of the concept of people's participation, 28 % respondents do not know the concept of people's participation, and 2 % of respondents do not have any idea about the concept. Similarly, out of 35 respondents, 54.3 % of respondents understand the concept of people's participation, which means the involvement of people in the decision-making process, and 25.7 % of the respondents replied that people's participation means the involvement of the local people in the implementation phase of the project. Likewise, 11.4 % of respondents understand people's participation in development projects as the utilization of local resources and 8.6 % of the respondents did not answer. It is worthwhile to note that the concept of understanding the people's participation was different for different respondents. Out of 50 respondents, two-thirds of the respondents were willing to participate in the road development, whereas 26% did not and 8% of them did not give any response to the question. Among 33 respondents, 42.4% were willing to improve the quality of infrastructure service, 33.33% were willing to take part in the decision making process and the least percentage 6.1% of the respondents for efficient and effective utilization of resources.

**Table 4**

*Participation of the Respondent in Project Selection Process*

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Involvement of local people in the decision-making process of any project selection		
Yes	16	32.0
No	9	18.0
No Idea	25	50.0
Selection process of road project		
Demand of local people	17	34.7
Influence of Politics and Others	17	34.7
No Idea	15	30.6
Meeting attendance by respondent to make decision in road selection process		
Yes	17	34.0
No	24	48.0
No Answer	9	18.0
Respondent reasons for not attending meeting (n=24)		
Do not know when the meeting is held	11	45.8
Not interested in attending meetings	5	20.8
Views were not taken into consideration	4	16.7
The dominance of the top approach (anti-participatory) approach	4	16.7
Who are the key decision makers in the road infrastructure selection process? (n=50)		
City administration officers	10	20.0
Local people are equally involved	16	32.0
Political leaders	24	48.0

Table 4 illustrates the role of the users in selecting the development project. As shown in the table, out of 50 respondents, 32 % respondents responded that any road project is selected by the local demand. However, 50 % of the respondents replied that they have no idea and the remaining 18 % of respondents replied that the road projects are not selected according to the local demand. The data above suggest that the participation approach is not appropriately followed properly. The project selection

criteria were subjective; hence, both organisers and elite participants were manipulating the criteria. This was important because developmental needs and social problems to be addressed through that budget were overwhelmingly greater. The data also demonstrate the involvement of the local people in the selection process of this road project. Only 34.69 % of respondents said that this project was chosen by the demand of local people. The remaining 34.89% of respondents said that this project was chosen because the political and other influences, and 30.61 % of the respondents have no idea about the selection process of this road project. Figure 10 shows that the number of the respondents who have attended the meeting intends to participate in the decision making process of the project. A minimum number of the respondents have attained the meeting and a maximum number of remaining respondents do not attain the meeting.

The data presented above indicate that people’s participation is not encouraged in any process of the project. The data also show that the respondents do not attend the meeting. Among 50 respondents, only 26 respondents attended the meetings that was conducted for the decision-making process. In addition, among the rest of 50 respondents, 24 respondents did not attend the meeting. For example, out of 24 respondents, 11 respondents said that they do not know when the meeting was held, and 5 respondents are not interested in attending the meeting. According to Table 4, many respondents said that their views are not considered by the political and other community leaders. Thus, the data indicate that the elite dominant practice exists in the process as the maximum number of respondents do not know the date and time of the meeting.

Overall, Table 4 shows that the elite groups are involved in the decision-making process. The data in the table demonstrate that 68 % of projects are selected from the absence of the local people's decision. Thus, from the perspective of the respondents, only 32 % respondents of road projects are selected from the local people's demand. More than two-third projects are selected from the elite capture such as political as well as high-level administrators and others. There is no full participation of users in the decision-making process.

**Table 5**  
*Way of Community Participation*

Way of Community Participation	Frequency	Percent
Planning Process	24	48.0
Operation and Maintenance	9	18.0
Implementation process	17	34.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 5 indicates the method of community participation. Here most of the respondents participate in the planning process. Some of the respondents participated in the implementation process and 18% of them are engaged in operation and maintenance. It indicates that, in practice, the public participation is only in the paperwork rather than in the planning and implementation phase.

**Table 6**  
*Participation of the Respondents in the Project Implementation Phase*

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Participation of the respondents during project implementation phase		
Yes	33	66.0
No	17	34.0



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Types of respondent's participation during implementation		
Kind Contribution	6	18.2
Financial Contribution	3	9.1
Monitoring during implementation	24	72.7

Table 6 provides the information about the participation of the respondents in the implementation phase. As shown in the table, among 50 respondents, 33 respondents participate in the implementation phase and the rest of them do not participate during the implementation phase. Among the total respondents, 72.73 % of local people are involved in the monitoring during the project implementation. As can be seen, 18.18% of respondents are involved in sharing their information with each other, and the minimum percentage of local people have their financial contributions. It is worthwhile that people are concerned with the quality of the road during the implementation phase of the project for sustainability.

**Figure 2**

*Use of Local Resource during the Project Implementation*

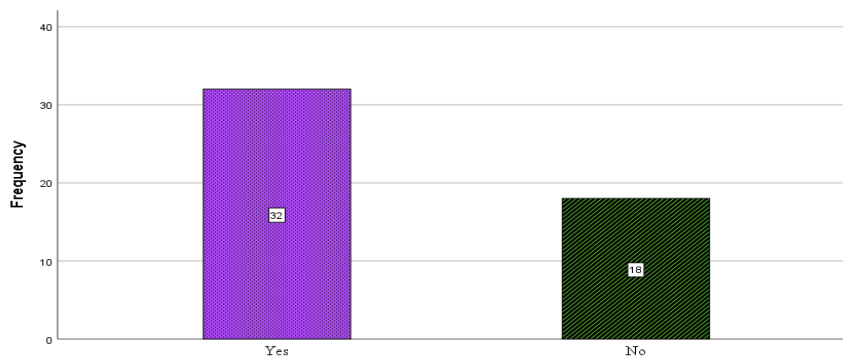
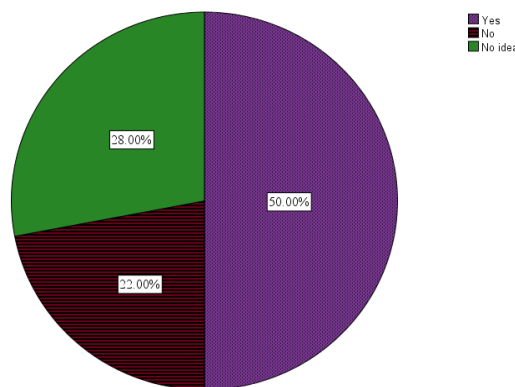


Figure 2 provides the use of local resources during the construction of the road project. Among 50 total respondents, 32 of the respondents said that the project used local resources and 18 said that there was no use of the local resources during the construction of the road project. The study indicates that there may be the use of local resources while constructing the project.

**Figure 3**

*Disputes during the Project Implementation Phase*



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Figure 3 above illustrates the dispute that occurs during the implementation phase. As can be seen in the table, 50 % of the respondents said ‘yes’ whereas 22 % of the respondents said ‘no,’ and 28% of respondents said they had no idea. The data represent the perception of the most respondents who are familiar with the dispute that occurs mostly during the implementation phase.

**Figure 4**  
*Types (Nature)of Disputes during Road Construction*

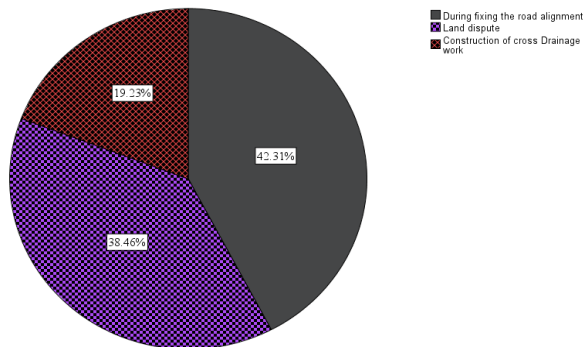


Figure 4 reveals the types of the dispute during the implementation of the road project. As the figure shows, among the 50 % of respondents who agreed with the question, there occurs a dispute in during the implementation phase. Where 42.31 % of respondents said that the dispute occurred during the maintenance of the road alignment, 38.46 % of respondents said that the dispute occurred due to land acquisition, and 19.23 % respondents said that the dispute arose during the construction of cross drainage work. It is worthwhile to note that one of the main disputes arose during the road alignment fixing time.

Inferential statistical analysis is the method that is used to draw a conclusion. It allows the users to infer the trends about a larger population based on the samples that are analyzed. The chi-square Test is used to determine whether the collected data are significantly different from that are expected by the study. Therefore, a chi-square test is an excellent choice to help us better understand and interpret the relationship between two categorical variables. In this study, the chi-square test is used to find out the association between sex and the respondents’ participation during the implementation phase.

**Table 7**  
*Factor Associated with Participation and Participation of the Respondents during the Project Implementation Phase.*

Characteristics	Male		Female		Chi-Square	P-value
	Yes	No	Yes	No		
Participation of the respondent during the implementation phase	25(50.0%)	9(18.0%)	8(16.0%)	8(16.0%)	2.684	0.095
Use of local resources during project implementation	25(50.0%)	9(18.0%)	7(14.0%)	9(18.0%)	4.188	0.043*

\*Significant, \*\*Highly Significant

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From the chi-square test, there is no factorial association between the two variables because the value of the  $p$  is greater than 0.05. According to Table 7, the value is 2.684. As can be seen, 50.0% of the male and 16.0 % females said that they are participating during the project implementation (Construction) phase and 18.0 % males and 16.0% of females said that they do not involve during the construction phase. From the analysis, the value of  $p$  is greater than 0.05; hence, it is worthwhile to note that there is no significant relationship between gender and participation during the project implementation phase.

Table 7 shows the factorial association between sex and the use of local resources in the implementation phase. As can be seen, among the 50 respondents, 25 male and 7 female respondents said that there was the use of the local resources during the project implementation, and 9 males and 9 females said that there is no use of the local resources during the project implementation phase. From the calculation sheet, the value of  $p$  is less than 0.05, which indicates that two variables are significant. Gender and the use of the local resources are significantly associated.

### Discussion

This study primarily focuses on the involvement of local peoples in the decision making process of different phases of rural road projects. Participation takes place at various levels such as global, national, subnational, community, and household. Any development program that requires an active participation of the local people for its success. Without the involvement of the local people in the decision making process, an implementation of rural development programs can face serious challenges. It reduces the transparency, accountability as well as ownership of local peoples towards the project. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) Article 51 also has ensured the involvement of the local people in the decision making process while selecting the development project for sustainable development. Hence, this study found that only 34.0 % respondents are involved in the decision making process while selecting the road projects. In consistent with this study, the PRA suggested that the community participation increased the transparency and accountability of the local peoples. In this study, it is found that 45.83 % respondents do not know when the meeting is held for the project selection process. Among 50 respondents, only 34.0 % respondents attended the decision making meeting and 40.0% of the respondents said that they did not attend the decision making meeting. The study suggests the use of local resources during the construction of the road project. Among 50 respondents, 64.0 % of the respondents said that the project used the local resources and 36.0 % said that the project did not the local resources during the construction of the road project. Thus, the findings of the study suggest that the use of local resources while constructing the project is rare. The study reveals the types of the dispute while implementing the road project. The collected data show that 50 % of respondents agreed that there occur disputes in the implementation phase. Similarly, 42.31 % of respondents said that a dispute occurred during the maintenance of the road alignment, 38.46 % of respondents said that a dispute occurred due to land acquisition, and 19.23 respondents said that a dispute arose during the construction of cross drainage work. It is worthwhile to note that one of the main disputes occurs during the road alignment fixing time. During the field visit, a number of local people said that some development projects are selected, but the local citizens are not informed about the project. Instead the project is influenced by high political and administrative leadership. This goes against the concept of people's participation in the development projects. People's active participation in rural development activities has gained much popularity

and has drawn attention of the interest of the social sciences researchers. The findings of the study also recommended that local people should take active part in the rural road development activities. The study concluded that people's participation approach is effective when people start to participate in all aspects of the development process, such as decision making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and benefit sharing. When local people fully participate in the rural road projects, they will be in a better position to assess their own rights and responsibilities. The study recommends that all concerned bodies such as local communities, municipality, and other stakeholders, including political and administrative leaders should take their responsibility to increase the effective and active participation in the rural road projects.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest that the maximum number of local people understand the concept of the people's participation, which means that they are willing to participate in decision making process. For instance, the local people wish to attend the meeting held for decision making as well as monitoring of the project during the rural road projects. However, in practice, the participatory approach is not properly implemented for the rural road projects. Thus, the study concludes that the public participation should not be only in the paperwork but it should be in the planning and implementation phase.

In developing countries, the involvement of people's participation is very important. In Nepal's case, people's participation is limited only for the elite group, but not for the marginalized groups. Though people's participation has occurred in Nepal, people from the backward communities are not fully participating in the infrastructure development projects, which has created conflicts in the society. Therefore, it is recommended that the government, political leaders, civil societies, and development workers should look towards backward people so that they can be brought into the mainstream society for the betterment of the nation and sustainable development of projects.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

*I hereby wish to declare that I do not have any conflict of interests to disclose. However, I declare that the manuscript has not been published before and is not being considered for publication elsewhere.*

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

*I declare that this manuscript is originally produced by me.*

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**Mr. Rabindra Tiwari** did his Master's degree in Construction Management from Pokhara University in 2017. Now, he is pursuing his PhD in Development Studies from the same university. He entered the public service as a civil engineer in 2010. With a commendable track record spanning over 13 years, the author has honed his expertise in infrastructure development, specializing in projects encompassing roads, bridges, water supply systems, and building construction. His professional footprint extends across diverse districts such as Kaski, Nawalpur, Lamjung, Mustang, and Parbat, where he has contributed to a myriad of infrastructure development initiatives.

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