

Mandates and Implementation of Child Rights by Local Governments in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the status and practices of child-friendly local governance in Nepal, with a focus on selected wards of Kathmandu Metropolitan City. A descriptive research design was adopted. Primary data were collected through structured interviews and focus group discussions with 25 respondents from five wards, using non-probability quota sampling, and were supplemented by secondary data from legal and policy documents. The findings reveal low public awareness of constitutional and legal mandates on child rights at the local level. While basic services such as birth registration and vaccination are generally accessible, broader child rights initiatives are inconsistently implemented and often perceived as symbolic. Political prioritization of revenue-generating sectors, weak institutional commitment, and limited cultural relevance constrain the effective realization of child-friendly local governance.

Keywords: child rights, local government, metropolitan city, Nepal

INTRODUCTION

Nepal ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) over two and a half decades ago, thereby formally committing the state to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of children in accordance with international human rights standards. Since ratification, the Government of Nepal has undertaken a range of legal, policy, and programmatic initiatives aimed at ensuring children's rights to survival, development, protection, and participation. Within this broader framework, development partners—particularly UNICEF Nepal—have played a pivotal role in supporting the localization of child rights principles through governance reforms and community-based interventions.

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One of the most significant initiatives in this regard has been UNICEF Nepal's Decentralized Action for Children and Women (DACAW) programme, implemented under the strategic guidance and in close coordination with the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD). The DACAW programme was designed to strengthen decentralized governance by integrating the concerns of children and women into local planning and service delivery processes. It worked most closely with families and communities from the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups in rural Nepal, emphasizing social mobilization, participatory decision-making, and local institutional capacity-building.

The conceptual foundation of DACAW aligns closely with established understandings of local government. The United Nations (1962) defines local government as a political subdivision of a nation or state, constituted by law and endowed with substantial control over local affairs, including the authority to impose taxes or exact labor for prescribed purposes. Similarly, Sharpe (1970) characterizes local government as the lowest tier of administration within a state, exercising delegated powers to provide public services and represent local interests. In the Nepali context, local government refers to Rural Municipalities, Municipalities, and District Assemblies that are constitutionally mandated to formulate laws, policies, and development plans and to exercise executive authority within their respective jurisdictions (Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Part 17, Articles 215–232).

The incorporation of DACAW experiences and approaches into the government's Local Governance and Community Development Programme (LGCDP) demonstrates the tangible impact of UNICEF's policy advocacy and the institutional ownership exercised by MoFALD (formerly the Ministry of Local Development) in advancing women's and children's issues. A notable outcome of this process has been the systematic mainstreaming of child rights within LGCDP frameworks, including gender and social inclusion policies, operational guidelines, public communication materials, social mobilization curricula, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. This integration represents a shift from isolated, project-based interventions toward a more institutionalized and sustainable model of child-friendly local governance.

Nepal has achieved measurable progress in several dimensions of children's rights over recent decades. Significant reductions in infant and maternal mortality, improvements in child nutrition, expanded opportunities for children's participation and association, reductions in child labor, and the gradual strengthening of child protection systems and institutional structures indicate positive national trends. These gains have been supported by the combined efforts of development partners, civil society organizations, and child- and youth-led organizations operating at the local level. Through awareness-raising, community mobilization, partnerships with government institutions, and the empowerment of children and families, these actors have contributed meaningfully to improving outcomes for children.

The promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 further strengthened the normative and legal foundations for child rights. The Constitution explicitly recognizes children's rights as fundamental rights and incorporates the principle of the best interests of the child within state policies (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). Moreover, Nepal's transition

to a federal system of governance has expanded the authority and responsibilities of local governments, creating both opportunities and challenges for advancing child-friendly governance practices at the grassroots level.

Within this evolving governance landscape, the notion of Child-friendly Local Governance has gained increasing prominence. It emphasizes governance systems and practices that are inclusive, participatory, responsive, and accountable to children's needs and perspectives. Understanding how local governments interpret and operationalize constitutional mandates, legal frameworks, and policy commitments related to children is therefore essential. Against this backdrop, the present study examines the status and practices of child-friendly local governance in Nepal, with particular attention to service delivery, governance processes, and the efficiency and relevance of political and legal structures at the local level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the relevant theoretical and empirical literature related to child rights, with a particular focus on the legal-policy framework and the practice of Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) in Nepal.

Child Rights in Nepal

Nepal has made notable progress in the protection and promotion of child rights through a combination of constitutional guarantees, national legislation, and international commitments. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) explicitly recognizes children's rights as fundamental rights under Article 39, ensuring the right to identity and birth registration, protection from exploitation, violence, neglect, child labor, access to child-friendly justice, and rights to education, health, and participation. These constitutional provisions are operationalized through key national laws, particularly the Children's Act, 2075 (2018), which safeguards children's rights to survival and development, prohibits child labor, trafficking, and sexual exploitation, and establishes juvenile justice mechanisms. Complementary legal frameworks, including the Criminal Code Act, 2074 (2017), the Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2075 (2018), and the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 2056 (2000), further strengthen legal protection against child marriage, abuse, exploitation, and denial of education. At the international level, Nepal's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), along with ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182 and the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography, reinforces the state's commitment to align domestic laws and policies with global child rights standards.

Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) in Nepal

Nepal has undertaken sustained efforts from both government and non-government sectors to promote the protection and development of child rights. Child-focused interventions in education and health date back to the First Five-Year Plan of 2013 BS (1956). A major milestone was achieved in 2068 BS (2011/12) with the formulation and implementation of

the Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) Strategy, which brought child rights into the mainstream of the local governance system. The CFLG concept has expanded nationwide, reaching all districts and a large number of municipalities and former VDCs, with several local bodies formally adopting CFLG through council decisions, periodic plans, investment plans, and codes of conduct. Sunawal Municipality and Pragatinagar VDC (now Devchuli Municipality) in Nawalparasi were the first local bodies to meet CFLG indicators, while Biratnagar became the first sub-metropolitan city to be declared child-friendly. Approved by the Government of Nepal in July 2011, the CFLG framework aims to mainstream child rights—survival, development, protection, and participation—within local governance structures at district, municipal, and community levels. Developed with technical support from UNICEF and drawing on experiences from DACAW and other child rights programmes supported by organizations such as World Vision, Plan International, and Save the Children, CFLG represents a significant best practice in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. At present, among Nepal's 753 local governments, a limited number of municipalities have been formally declared child-friendly, while many others remain in various stages of implementation.

Historical Evolution of Child-Friendly Local Government (CFLG) in Nepal

CFLG in Nepal is not a completely new model. There were programs on child-friendly concepts and approaches previously, too. Central Child Welfare Board (CCWB) initiated the movement of Child-Friendly Village Development Committee (CF-VDC) with piloting at 8 districts (Illam, Morang, Rautahat, Bara, Makawanpur, Kanchanpur, and Sunsari), including 7 VDCs and 1 Municipality since 2005 which was later extended to 16 districts with an additional 8 districts (Dhankuta, Sindhuli, Parsa, Chitwan, Kaski, Rupandehi, Arghakhanchi, and Humla). This program has 100 indicators and was in operation till 2009. A non-government organization, Children & Women in Social Service (CWISH), and the ILO office in Nepal, within the Time Bound Project in 2004-2005, operated Municipal Mobilization for Ending Child Labor in 11 municipalities of Nepal. The Government of Nepal, with support from UNICEF, was running the Decentralization Action for Children and Women (DACAW) Program. The Ministry of Local Development was running a program named Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCDP) with support from the UNDP Office in Nepal.

The Child-Friendly Local Governance emerged to address the demand and relevance of integrated decentralized child rights intervention at the local level, led by the local government. The collective realization of the need for local government led to integrated child rights interventions ultimately moved towards the adoption of Child Friendly Local Governance. As a result of its positive experiences with DACAW, the MLD started to formalize its initiatives for CFLG in 2007 (South-South Cooperation on Child Friendly Local Governance, 2010). Local Government Community Development Program (LGCDP) included CFLG as the decentralization indicator (MoFALD, 2013). The National CFLG Strategy was formulated in 2011, which was endorsed by the Council of Ministers. It provides overall guidelines for the implementation of CFLG. With the adoption of CFLG, the local

government increased an increased investment in children up to 15 percent of their capital budget.

Practices of Child Welfare Rights at Local Government

Following Nepal's transition to a federal governance system in 2017, local governments—municipalities and rural municipalities—have assumed a central role in the implementation of child welfare rights (Bal Kalyan Adhikar). The Constitution of Nepal (2015), the Local Government Operation Act (2017), and the Children's Act (2018) constitutionally mandate local governments to ensure birth registration, access to free basic education up to Grade 8, basic health and nutrition services, and protection of children from abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and child labor. In line with these provisions, local governments have expanded school infrastructure, facilitated immunization and nutrition programs, monitored child protection issues, and initiated rehabilitation services for street children and victims of violence, thereby institutionalizing child welfare at the grassroots level (Constitution of Nepal, 2015; LGOA, 2017; Children's Act, 2018).

In practice, local governments implement child welfare rights through sector-specific interventions. In education, they provide free textbooks, uniforms, and scholarships for marginalized children, operate Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers, and monitor school attendance through school management and monitoring committees to reduce dropout rates. Health and nutrition initiatives include immunization campaigns, mid-day meal programs in selected municipalities, and targeted nutrition support for malnourished children. Child protection mechanisms such as Child Welfare Committees (Bal Kalyan Samiti), anti-child labor inspections, awareness campaigns against child marriage, and enforcement of the legal marriage age are increasingly visible. Additionally, local governments support vulnerable children through social security allowances, orphan assistance, daycare services for working parents, and rehabilitation programs, while strengthening birth registration systems—often linking them with citizenship processes—to ensure children's legal identity and prevent statelessness (NCRC, 2024).

Empirical Reviews

Riggio (2002) laid the foundational framework for child-friendly cities by identifying essential legal, budgetary, planning, and institutional measures required to operationalize the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) at the city level, supported by practical examples from both developed and developing countries. Subsequent studies have critically examined the governance mechanisms through which children's rights are implemented.

Tisdall (2015) demonstrated tensions between children's rights and wellbeing approaches in Scotland, noting that while wellbeing-based arguments gain stronger policy traction, they risk depoliticizing children's rights and limiting avenues for accountability and redress.

Empirical evidence from decentralized governance systems further illustrates the importance of local-level institutions. Raj et al. (2016) identified Kerala, India, as a strong example of effective decentralization enabling the practical implementation of Child-

Friendly Local Governance (CFLG), while emphasizing that each context must develop its own institutional processes to realize children's rights.

Schapper (2017) expanded this understanding by conceptualizing children's rights implementation as a multi-level governance process requiring coordination among local, national, and international actors, including children themselves. Similarly, Holzscheiter et al. (2019) advanced theoretical perspectives on child rights governance by framing it through dimensions of temporality, spatiality, subjectivity, and normativity. The literature also underscores sector-specific and contextual challenges.

Nakar (2019) highlighted schools as critical entry points for preventing violence against children in resource-poor settings, advocating for contextually adapted whole-school approaches. Studies from Tanzania and Malaysia (Josephat & Mbuti, 2021; Alias et al., 2023) revealed that while local governments and participatory mechanisms can be effective, weak political commitment, limited adult understanding of child participation, and structural power imbalances constrain outcomes.

Pathak Sangroula (2022) examined the historical development of international child rights standards leading to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), analyzing its implementation in South Asia. It explores the incorporation of these standards into domestic laws and conducts a comparative analysis of the region's legal, socio-economic, and political mechanisms. The research highlights a critical gap between universal state ratification and the practical setbacks in protecting child rights, primarily caused by persistent socio-legal constraints and deficits in implementation measures.

Powell (2024) and Mohamed (2024) further emphasized that child-friendly governance initiatives face persistent challenges such as weak political will, fragmented governance, neoliberal policy orientations, and inadequate justice systems, underscoring the need for coordinated, rights-based, and participatory approaches to ensure meaningful realization of children's rights at the local level.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research design serves as the foundational framework of a study, outlining its purpose, scope, and methodological direction before data collection (Kharel, 2020). Since this study focuses on examining child rights practices within local-level governments in Nepal, a descriptive research design was adopted to systematically capture existing conditions and governance practices.

The paper population comprises elected representatives and employees of local-level governments across Nepal. For practical and contextual relevance, five wards of Kathmandu Metropolitan City – Koteshwor (Ward 32), Boudha (Ward 6), Paknajol (Ward 16), Kalanki (Ward 14), and Naxal (Ward 1) – were selected as the sample based on their geographical distribution within the Kathmandu Valley. A non-probability quota sampling technique was employed, with interviewees predetermined from the targeted groups within the selected wards.

Primary data constituted the main source of information and were collected through structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), while relevant secondary data were obtained from official government and institutional sources. The paper utilized both open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires aligned with the research objectives. Collected data were compiled and organized using Excel, supported by memoing of interview responses to aid interpretation and qualitative analysis, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents and analyzes the empirical findings generated from semi-structured interviews with sampled respondents across five wards of Kathmandu Metropolitan City. The results are organized thematically, focusing on respondents' socio-demographic profiles, their awareness of legal mandates on child rights, perceptions of institutional mechanisms, service delivery practices, and views on child-friendly governance at the local level. The discussion integrates these findings with relevant theoretical and empirical literature to examine the extent to which child-friendly local governance is realized in practice.

Interviewees' Profile

Table 1 illustrates the profile of the sampled interviewees:

Table 1

Interviewee's Profile

Ward No.32	Koteshwor		
Respondent's Code	Sex	Age	Occupation
RD-1	M	46	Teacher
SS-2	F	45	NAC Employee
RD-3	M	25	IT Entrepreneur
AP-4	M	43	Section Officer
SK-5	M	35	Land Broker
Ward No. 6	Boudha		
HS-1	M	62	Curio Shop
RPG-2	M	37	Small Vendor
TS-3	M	40	Curio Shop
DTS-4	F	42	Curio Shop
TNS-5	M	45	Curio Shop
Ward No.16	Paknajol		
SB-1	M	40	Shopkeeper

MKS-2	F	35	Accountant
SM-3	M	42	Shopkeeper
SM-4	F	30	Shopkeeper
KC-5	F	19	Student
Ward No.14	Kalanki		
DC-1	M	43	Shopkeeper
TT-2	F	32	Housewife
Respondent's Code	Sex	Age	Occupation
PS-3	M	33	Shopkeeper
TP-4	M	43	Hardware Shop
AA-5	M	46	Teacher
Ward No.1	Naxal		
KS-1	M	48	Grocery
BKS-2	M	50	Paint Shop
RG-3	M	33	Sweet Shop
SA-4	M	48	Naxal Bhagwati Bahal Employee
NKC-5	M	34	Student

Note. Interview with Sampled Interviewees

Table 1 illustrates the respondent sample across five wards of Kathmandu (Koteshwor, Boudha, Paknajol, Kalanki, and Naxal), showing a predominantly male cohort, with only 6 female respondents out of 25. Occupations are largely concentrated in shop keeping, small trade, and local government or service roles, with notable clustering, such as all respondents in Boudha being connected to the curio shop trade. The age range is broad, from 19 to 62, indicating a mix of working-age adults, though with minimal representation from younger generations outside of two students. This profile suggests a sample drawn primarily from established, locally-engaged residents and business operators within their respective communities.

Opinions forwarded by the Interviewees

This part of the report covers the opinions forwarded by the sampled interviewees and quoted as stated. The researcher conducted the interview with sampled interviewees and got the following opinions based on the forwarded structured questions.

Opinion on the Major Legal Frameworks (or the Mandates) of the Local Government regarding the Rights of the Child

Of the total 25 interviewees, only three interviewees state that they are aware of the major legal frameworks or mandates given by the Constitution of Nepal to the local government to work on the rights and welfare of the children. The opinions forwarded by

them are:

Education and health facilities as per law (....), who are economically backward, recommendation is provided for affordable or free education. [Interviewee-RD-1]

Some women health-related activities and education facilities are handled as per prevailing Local Government Operation Act are being done. [Interviewee-SS-2]

Seen some work done on right to education and to protect the child from sexual harassment and in-house harassment. [Interviewee-SM-1]

Opinions on Functionalizing Mechanisms and Structures for the Realization of the Rights of the Child

The interviewees present mixed views on child rights-related projects in their wards. Some note the establishment of child clubs, Green Clubs, and periodic activities like workshops on child labor, menstrual health, cyber-bullying, and school-coordinated programs, sometimes with UNICEF involvement. However, others criticize the lack of substantial or sustained efforts, mentioning that initiatives are short-term, poorly maintained, or overshadowed by “power-players.” A few interviewees compare their wards unfavorably to neighboring wards, which they perceive as more active, while others highlight that while provisions exist, they often remain non-functional. Overall, engagement appears inconsistent, with some collaboration with schools but limited ward-led initiatives. The opinions forwarded by them are:

The projects related to child rights come to our ward but are taken away by the power-player. [Interviewee-SA-4]

I have no complete idea, but I came to know that a child club is being established, and weekly activities are done. [Interviewee-RG-3]

Some activities are seen done with coordination with the government schools operating within the ward. [Interviewee-KS-1]

Short-term works, like workshop on child labor eradication, child-based training, etc...but not any substantial. [Interviewee-NKC-5]

I see as a neighbor Ward No.17 has been doing much better than my ward (Ward No. 16). [Interviewee-MKS-2]

Yes, there are provisions, but they are not functioning. [Interviewee-SM-3]

Ward itself is not maintaining or seen actively coming ahead but with the coordination with some government schools, it comes with few programs time-to-time. [Interviewee-RD-1]

The ward comes with menstrual knowledge programs, traffic police classes, cyber-bullying classes, etc as well as some program with coordination with UNICEF are also conducted at local schools. [Interviewee-SS-2]

I came to know that a Green Club was established. [Interviewee-SK-5]

Opinions on the Service provided and/or delivered by the Local Government, as defined by the Constitution of Nepal, as the Fundamental Rights of the Child

Interviewees generally acknowledge accessible basic services like child vaccinations and birth certificate issuance, with many expressing satisfaction in obtaining these necessities. Some highlight positive experiences during COVID-19, while others feel services are minimal or favor those with political connections. A few mentions additional support, such as school admission recommendations, but overall, perceptions vary – some find services adequate, while others criticize inequitable access or limited offerings beyond essential provisions.

Only thing I got easily is the birth certificate of my child and participation in the vaccination campaign. [Interviewee-RPG-2]

Easy access to vaccination. [Interviewee-HS-1]

Not too much was seen during the COVID-19 time; they had provided support. [Interviewee-RD-1]

I know that we have been getting vaccinations from the ward, birth certificate, etc. [Interviewee-SB-1]

I have got whatever I was in need. [Interviewee-MKS-2]

Yes, but in very minimal that I was expecting. [Interviewee-SM-3]

Different vaccinations are being provided for the children. [Interviewee-KC-5]

The people who can speak are getting all the benefits, if not nothing. Only the people with official or political connections are getting better facilities. [Interviewee-KS-1]

I took a birth certificate for my child. [Interviewee-BKS-2]

As usual, birth certification, vaccination facilities, etc. [Interviewee-RG-3]

The best part was vaccinations for my children. [Interviewee-TT-2]

Some recommendations for my child to be admitted in school and vaccination. [Interviewee-AA-5]

Opinions on Child-friendly Governance at the Local Government

The interviewees note that while some wards have introduced child-friendly infrastructures in their offices, these efforts are seen as limited and in need of improvement. However, many highlight that children rarely visit ward offices for services, making such initiatives less impactful. Some criticize the disconnect between awareness campaigns and actual implementation, while others argue that wards should prioritize broader community needs rather than child-specific facilities, as it is not common practice for Nepalese children to seek services directly from ward offices. Overall, these measures are viewed as symbolic rather

than practical, with minimal real-world relevance for most families.

Yes, they have made a few child-friendly infrastructures within the ward office.
[Interviewee-KS-1]

I have seen it quite well, but not to be further improved. [Interviewee-RG-3]

Eventually, children do not primarily go to the ward office, so, have no major concern. [Interviewee-BKS-2]

Not seeing working for adults what we expect in the context of adults working. If it is better, the major concern is to work well as per the expectations of the ward people. [Interviewee-SA-4]

Different awareness messages are being sent, but when we reach the ward, it are not seen as stated. [Interviewee-KC-5]

No, they have not provided, and I don't think children need to reach out to the ward office for local government services. [Interviewee-SB-1]

Opinions on the Efficiency and Relevance of the Political and Legal Structure of Local Government to take forward the Child-friendly Local Government System

The interviewees express mixed but largely critical views on child-friendly initiatives in their wards. While some acknowledge efforts have been made, others dismiss them as ineffective, poorly implemented, or existing only on paper. Several notes that wards have the capacity and budget but fail to prioritize child rights, focusing instead on revenue-generating sectors like tourism. Many emphasize that Nepalese children rarely interact directly with ward offices, as there is no cultural practice of children independently seeking government services. Overall, child-friendly policies remain theoretical, with little real-world impact or meaningful action in most wards.

They have tried as far as possible, as far as they can. [Interviewee-RG-3]

Not very effective, though they say they have been providing services.
[Interviewee-BKS-2]

Not working and no expectations. [Interviewee-SA-4]

Yes, why not? They can work effectively, but you see, even under their jurisdiction, they can manage different activities related to education, but not materialize. [Interviewee-SB-1]

It is just mentioned in the legal framework, but zero. The government must be serious about activities related to child rights. [Interviewee-SM-4]

Much work related to child-friendly is to be done. [Interviewee-KC-5]

Not adequately done, have a budget also. [Interviewee-NKC-5]

Not done at all, only focusing on the tourism sector, as revenue is generated for them. [Interviewee-RPG-2]

The words have not been separately dealing with children only. We also have no practice of sending children independently to take government service. [Interviewee-AA-5]

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study reveal significant gaps between the legal-institutional commitments of local governments in Nepal and the lived realities of child rights implementation, aligning closely with concerns raised in prior literature. The low awareness of constitutional and legal mandates among local stakeholders reflects what Riggio (2002) identified as a foundational weakness in child-friendly governance—where legal and institutional frameworks exist but are insufficiently internalized at the operational level. Similarly, the inconsistent and short-term nature of child rights initiatives across wards echoes Raj et al.'s (2016) argument that decentralization alone does not guarantee effective child-friendly local governance; rather, it requires sustained institutional processes adapted to local contexts. The symbolic nature of child-friendly infrastructures observed in this study also resonates with Tisdall's (2015) critique that policy frameworks emphasizing wellbeing without robust rights-based accountability risk becoming depoliticized and tokenistic.

Moreover, the perception of inequitable access to basic services and the prioritization of revenue-generating sectors over child rights reflect broader governance challenges highlighted in comparative studies. Schapper's (2017) and Holzscheiter et al.'s (2019) multi-level governance perspectives help explain how weak coordination, power asymmetries, and limited child participation undermine effective implementation at the local level. Sector-specific insights from Nakar (2019) and empirical evidence from Tanzania and Malaysia (Josephat & Mbuti, 2021; Alias et al., 2023) further corroborate this study's findings, particularly regarding weak political commitment and limited adult understanding of meaningful child participation. Recent analyses by Powell (2024) and Mohamed (2024) reinforce these conclusions by emphasizing that fragmented governance, neoliberal policy orientations, and inadequate accountability mechanisms continue to constrain child-friendly governance, underscoring the need for culturally grounded, participatory, and rights-based approaches to translate legal provisions into tangible outcomes for children at the local level.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined the status and practices of child-friendly local governance in selected wards of Kathmandu Metropolitan City within the broader constitutional, legal, and policy framework of child rights in Nepal. The findings reveal a significant gap between formal legal commitments and their practical realization at the ward level. Although Nepal has established strong constitutional and legislative foundations for child rights and has benefited from long-standing support from development partners such as UNICEF, awareness of local government mandates related to child rights among community members remains very low. Most interviewees associated child rights primarily with basic services such as birth registration and vaccination, while broader rights related to participation,

protection, and child-friendly governance were largely unfamiliar or perceived as abstract.

The study further demonstrates that child rights initiatives at the local level are uneven, short-term, and weakly institutionalized. While some wards have established child clubs, conducted awareness programs, and coordinated with schools or external agencies, these efforts are often inconsistent, influenced by local power dynamics, or poorly maintained. Service delivery is generally limited to essential provisions, with several respondents perceiving inequitable access favoring politically connected individuals. Moreover, child-friendly infrastructures within ward offices are largely symbolic, as children rarely interact directly with local government institutions in the Nepali socio-cultural context. This disconnect underscores a mismatch between imported child-friendly governance models and local realities.

Overall, the political and administrative structures of local governments possess both the authority and resources to advance child-friendly local governance but lack sustained political will, prioritization, and culturally grounded implementation strategies. Child rights policies largely remain on paper, overshadowed by revenue-oriented development agendas such as tourism and infrastructure. Without meaningful community engagement, stronger accountability mechanisms, and integration of child rights into routine governance practices, the promise of child-friendly local governance is unlikely to translate into tangible improvements in children's everyday lives.

Implications

- **Strengthening Awareness and Capacity**
Targeted awareness programs and capacity-building initiatives are needed for local officials, ward representatives, and community members to improve understanding of child rights mandates and local government responsibilities.
- **Institutionalizing Child Rights Initiatives**
Child-focused programs should move beyond short-term projects toward sustainable, ward-led institutional mechanisms with clear roles, continuity, and monitoring systems.
- **Ensuring Equity in Service Delivery**
Local governments must adopt transparent and inclusive service delivery mechanisms to reduce perceptions of favoritism and ensure equitable access to child-related services.
- **Contextualizing Child-Friendly Governance Models**
Child-friendly governance approaches should be adapted to Nepal's socio-cultural context, focusing on family-, school-, and community-based entry points rather than office-centered infrastructures.
- **Enhancing Political Commitment and Accountability**
Stronger political prioritization of child rights is essential, including dedicated budgeting, performance indicators, and accountability frameworks to ensure child rights are not sidelined by revenue-driven development agendas.

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