

Public Expectation on Strengthening Municipal Governance through Government Preparedness in the Public Service Delivery

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ABSTRACT

With the introduction of the federal government system in Nepal, two local level elections were held which increased the public expectations of citizens although the power sharing and decentralization system at federal state and local level and local level is relatively difficult. The Ministry of Federal Affair and General Administration (MOFAGA) under the Local Government Operation Act has developed a Local Government Institutional Self-Assessment (LISA) model to assess municipal governance. This study examined the preparedness of Pokhara Metropolitan City for addressing the expectations of the people in public service delivery especially with the application of the LISA model and identified the measures of preparedness for the responsive and accountable municipal government. The sample size was 149 individuals selected from three wards (ward 8 in urban, ward 27 is in semi-urban and ward 24 in the rural/periphery area) of PMC where the sample was collected at the 5% level of significance and 8% margin of error. The findings of the study suggested that the assessment of the expectation is the first step and government preparedness should be according to the public service delivery mechanisms so as to strengthen municipal governance in the municipality. The LISA model in municipalities is the baseline for strengthening the municipal governance. The study has been a useful assessment for the capacity development and technical backstopping at the one hand the public expectations at the other.

Keywords: *government preparedness, LISA model, Local Government Operation Act, municipal governance, public expectations.*

INTRODUCTION

There are 761 governments in Nepal (one federal, seven provincials, and 753 local governments). There are six metropolitan cities, 11 sub-metropolitan cities, 260 municipalities, and 420 rural municipalities that constitute the federal government system in Nepal. Nepal has

made the paradigm shift and transformed from a unitary to a federal governance system from the Constitution of Nepal 2015. Local government is a public institution in a small geographic area, such as a city, town, or county, which are the closest and trustworthy organizations of the local citizen (Acharya, 2018).

By the constitutional assembly, people made the popular slogan *gaun gaun ma Singhadurbar* (Singhadurbar in every village), and the constitution has given considerable power and autonomy to the local governments, from the formulation of their policies and laws, programs and plans, judicial, and authority to generate local revenue and execution and monitoring and evaluation of programs and projects as followed the coordination, collaboration, and co-existence principles constituted by the Constitution (Acharya, 2018). In comparison to the 1990 constitution, the new constitution also introduces measures for greater inclusion of women and Dalits among the marginalized communities within Local governments (TAF, 2017). However, the local bodies are highly politicized, too, and a constant tussle between the chiefs and their deputies, partly because male leaders often question the competence of their female deputies, have hampered service delivery. Pervasive corruption is another drag on their smooth functioning (Baral, 2022). It seems that corruption, dishonesty, and a non-accountable political and bureaucratic system is hindering the newly restructured municipalities. The capacity is a major constraint for local governments, which should be addressed to achieve successful local governance, inclusive citizen engagement, and strong technical, administrative and fiscal capabilities. Lack of local autonomy, political conflict and social class differences, external engagement, conservative hierarchic government bureaucracy are major hurdles to growing capacity (Acharya & Scott, 2022).

As (Gautam, 2016) said, “sadly prolonged political transitions from one system to another, inadequate emphasis on good governance, and neglect of economic issues have been real curse for Nepal’s development” (p.350), there is immense possibility of development, Nepal has not been able to harness the economic development and societal transformation. It is said that the lack of good governance in the service delivery and the lack of practice in accountability and the responsibility as a good citizen could be reasons.

The local governments have been run by elected representatives since the first local government election in 2017. The local government people’s representatives completed the first five years and the second election was held in 2022. The MOFAGA under Local Government Operation Act has developed a Local Government Institutional Self-Assessment (LISA) model to assess municipal governance. New public management and participatory

governance theory are two important approaches to public administration and governance that have gained a widespread attention in the last few decades. By evaluating the assumptions and practices of the traditional view that generally delays the development of truly participatory democracy, participatory governance seeks to deepen citizen participation in the governing procedure (Fischer, 2015). The Constitution of Nepal, 2015 was enacted with the goal of strengthening and empowering local governments. It is for establishing good governance and developing local democracy in order to alter people's rural livelihoods and ensure long-term economic development (Dhital, 2018). The local government under the federal system has not a long history in Nepal, but within a short period, local governments are in the progress to establish their systems, structures, process, and standards and service delivery mechanism at local level.

According to the World Development Report, 2004, public service delivery is defined as "a set of institutional arrangements adopted by the government to provide public goods and services to its citizens". The scope of this study is to examine the preparedness of Pokhara Metropolitan city (PMC) for addressing the expectations of the people in public service delivery especially with the application of the LISA model and identify measures for the responsive, strengthened and accountable municipal government. The study is also targeted to assess whether the local government's performance is on the right track as pursuant by the constitution and prevailing laws. To study the public expectation and satisfaction through an empirical study, a survey of the citizens who are seeking or receiving services from Pokhara Metropolitan City is carried out. Factors affecting the public expectations in service delivery have been explored and analyzed. Pokhara Metropolitan City was selected purposively due to the researcher's convenience and familiarity.

However, the study is limited to a single metropolitan city – Pokhara Metropolitan city. The characteristics may not be similar to other metro cities. Hence, the findings cannot be generalized due to time and resource constraints. The research is limited to the survey of limited respondents selected randomly and purposively among the visitors in metropolitan and ward offices. The LISA score is taken and analyzed for the fiscal year 2021/022 and 2022/023. LISA is a web-based performance assessment system which is supposed to help the local governments to be more efficient, transparent, and accountable (Kandel, 2021). The LISA guideline 2020 envisages a continuous assessment mechanism to improve the overall performance of local governments. Here, LISA score has been calculated so as to assess the principles and strategies of effective governance for sustainable development. It is believed

that the LISA tool helps to set baselines, identify gaps, plan actions and have comparable data across local governments in the field of public service delivery. It could be the assessment whether the LG is operating in the public expectation line or not.

Following 10 indicators set by the LISA model are analyzed from the point of view of government preparedness and public expectation in public service delivery of Pokhara Metropolitan City.

1. Governance System
2. Organization and Administration
3. Annual Budget and Planning Management
4. Fiscal and Financial Management
5. Service Delivery
6. Judicial Performance
7. Physical Infrastructure Development
8. Social Inclusion
9. Environment Conservation and Disaster Risk Management
10. Coordination and Cooperation

DATA AND METHOD

This research has been designed in an exploratory method. Therefore, it tries to explore the public expectations and government preparedness of Pokhara. Besides, the study is based on a grounded theory model to analyze qualitative data from field-study which covers only the Pokhara Metropolitan City of Kaski District. In the study, the in-depth literature review and in-field research augmented with in-field experience. The research combined a top-down and bottom-up approach, meaning that all stakeholders and interested and affected parties have been represented and further consulted.

Pokhara Metropolitan City is divided into thirty-three wards. The wards are categorized by urban, semi-urban and periphery characteristics. The sample size was 149 individuals selected from three wards (ward no. 8 in urban ward no. 27 is in semi-urban and ward no. 24 in the rural/periphery area) where the sample was collected at 5% level of significance and 8% margin of error using *Raosoft* sample size calculator, considering 95% confidence interval with eight percent margin of error. The LISA score is taken and analyzed for the fiscal year 2021/022 and 2022/023.

The primary data is collected through a questionnaire schedule and field observation.

The questionnaire has been collected by using the qualitative method. The first part of the questionnaire included socio-economic and demographic features of the respondents (service seeker/recipients) like age, gender, indigenous identity, educational attainment of family. The second part of the questionnaire is focused on the quality of service provided from the metropolitan office and ward office to the public. Mainly, the questionnaire, key informant interviews (KII), focused group discussion (FGD), and field observation methods are used for primary data collection. The secondary data is the result and data, which was collected by previous investigators. LISA score of Pokhara Metropolitan City, related books, magazines, articles, reports, bulletins, and newspaper, published, unpublished and official documents of Pokhara Metropolitan city are used for secondary data. The secondary data is collected as per its necessity during the survey period. The SPSS tool has been utilized for the frequency and tabulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study finds higher public expectations towards IT friendly service, paperless service, service according to citizen charter, easiest and minimum service charge, effective queue management system during the service delivery. Although, the metropolitan city is found to be slowly addressing citizen issues regarding service delivery with the limited budget frames. This study confirms that the status of public satisfaction for the services delivered by the metropolitan city is of fair level. There is much room to be addressed by the metropolitan city for enriching the service effectiveness hence to address the expectation level. It is equally necessary for addressing the LISA indicators and uplifting the status by securing a fair score is the need.

Development Expectations

Dhungana (2019) stated that accountability in local governments requires an attention not only to the laws, but also to the practices of civic interaction and the willingness of elected officials and the citizens in this engagement Respondents were asked to identify their development expectations with pre-defined list which includes service delivery according to citizen charter, minimum and affordable service charge, working hour, effective queue management, proper reception and public relation, gradual improvement of office and logistics and not influenced by middleman.

Table 1*Development Expectations on the PSD*

Development Expectations	No of Responses	Percentage
Service delivery according to citizen charter	103	69.1
Minimum and affordable service charge	78	52.3
Timely service delivery	73	49.0
Effective queue management	61	40.9
Proper reception and public relation	51	34.2
Gradual improvement of office and logistics	43	28.9
Not influenced by middleman	42	28.2

Note. n=149, Based on multiple responses, Field survey, 2020

As shown in table 1, the majority of the responses (69.1%) have development expectations regarding service delivery according to the citizen charter. The study found that minimum and affordable service charge is for another development expectation towards the effective service delivery, the responses (52.3%) have the expectations from their side that the service should be minimum and affordable. Half of the respondents (49%) replied that timely service delivery is another development expectation of citizens. Development projects along with social projects should be completed within a time frame. More than one third (40.9%) respondents replied that effective queue management is a tool of development expectation for public service delivery. Proper reception, gradual improvement of office and logistics and not influenced by middlemen are also the segments of development expectations towards service delivery. From the point of view of the service recipient, the level of expectation met is reported only as 'fair'. (See Table 1). The planning and the budget allocation process has been started but still there is enough room to be reformed systematically. In this regard, the Mayor of Pokhara Metropolitan City stated,

There's a total change in the budget allocation system. Previously, planning used to be according to the budget; nowadays it is quite reversed when there's proper planning then the budget allocation process begins. This new trend has been started in PMC. The most important thing is that we became a citizen of the biggest metropolitan city of Nepal but we lack the 'urban culture'. We have diverse topography having urban, semi-urban and periphery. We are making it remote to near (*Bikat lai Nikat*) by our public services; road connectivity; the 129 KM road connection is joining each and every ward soon.

The effective public services provided by the public institution can turn the remote as near. Slowly, the citizens of the metropolitan city are realizing but it is at a slow pace. Pokhara

Metropolitan City is the largest Metro City of Nepal in terms of area and geographical coverage. There are still some settlements which don't have access to the office of the metropolitan city in a single day's travel. Similar is the statement of the ward secretary of Pokhara Metropolitan City- 24, as he said,

Our ward is still working in a rural setting, even the Tole Development Organizations (TDO) are under formation. Another problem is the administrative problem. We have one settlement called 'Ban pale' which is the remote part of our ward and metropolitan area too. To settle the project of ten lakh above, people have to go to the metropolitan office which is not an easy move for them. Ward is not fully authorized, it is controlled. And obviously, service to the people is not becoming fast and reliable. This situation will be changed gradually. Otherwise, how can citizens realize the local government?

One executive staff of ward 8 highlighted the public expectation which is rising. This type of expectation is because of the political changes, it is fair. But even the staff are facing obstacles while delivering services, as she said,

Yes, we found difficulty in public service delivery. People come to the ward office and they say- "*Aba Ta Gaun Gaun Ma Singh Durbar Ayeko Cha*" (the central administrative unit has come to the village level). "It is justifiable when the public demand services from the nearest door. But there are complexities; we are facing these sorts of problems. Sometimes, they come to us showing the chairman's signature and tell us about the work which they are not liable to do. This happens in the case of a vital registration system. If the service seeker conducts any mistake while typing the name or address and other details in the online system, we can't correct it immediately. We need to ask the Metropolitan office and proceed with the changes. We do not have access to and control over the software system. Sometimes, the technical task like land measuring occurs for actual valuation and other recommendations, we are lacking the technical staff. In the absence of technical staff, we are giving approval which is not authentic.

Effective Service Delivery

According to Schedule 8 of the current constitution, the local governments are responsible to provide basic public services such as local service delivery system, local-level development programs and projects, basic and secondary education, basic health and sanitation, regulation of local level markets, environment protection, and biodiversity, agriculture, and livestock and cooperatives, local level physical infrastructure development-road, irrigation; social security of the senior citizen, a person with a disability (PWD), disaster management, watershed,

wildlife, mines conservation and utilization and language, culture, vital registration, CSOs mobilization and dispute management and others.

Table 2

Factors of Effective Service Delivery in PMC

Service Variables	Responses	Percent of Cases
Timely delivery	91	61.1
Digitized service	67	45.0
Transparent revenue collection	58	38.9
Less paperwork	58	38.9
Mobile/Apps Service	57	38.3
Customer friendly behavior of the staff	56	37.6
Quick Service	49	32.9
Use of ICT to get information and service	42	28.2

Note: This table is based on the multiple responses

Source: Field survey, 2020

About 62.1% respondents opine that ‘timely delivery’ is their first priority so as to make effective service delivery in the Pokhara Metropolitan City which followed by ‘digitized services (45%) while ‘transparent revenue collection’ and ‘less paper work’ were the same on two fifths (38.9%). Not only this, the mobile/apps services were on two fifth (38.3%) followed by customer friendly behavior of the staff were less than two fifths (37.6%) and then about one third were quick service (32.9%) followed by use of ICT to get information and services were on 28.2 percent (see table 2).

It is found that effective service delivery is an important instrument for public services especially in local government. Here, timely service delivery is considered as the key determinant of effective service delivery and it is applicable in the case of Pokhara Metropolitan city, too. Moreover, transparent revenue collection, customer friendly behavior of the staff, Mobile/App services are also listed as the supportive determinants. Public wants quick services. ICTs friendly service is also in the list. But to cope up with the changing working environment, there is the lack of sufficient/competent human resources.

The study highlighted major factors associated with the effective public service delivery in Pokhara Metropolitan City, among them ‘Timely delivery’ is ranked at the top level. There is no variation on any service items except use of ICTs. Regarding digitized service, it is ranked as the second determinant of effective service delivery. The digitized service, less paperwork, mobile apps, customer friendly behavior of staff, quick service and use of ICTs, there were no variations by age group except timely delivery and transparent revenue collection. With

the digitized service, timely delivery, mobile apps, customer friendly behavior of staff, quick service and use of ICTs there was no variation. Only variation occurs on transparent revenue collection and less paper work by location as well as variation occurs on less paper work and customer friendly staff by education (see Table 2).

People from all age groups, gender have a common opinion regarding transparent revenue collection. This is the key to effective service delivery. Less paper work makes service delivery more effective on time. The respondents having university degrees said that use of ICT for the information dissemination could be the main factor in the public services delivery.

The most important aspect of their expectations is the proper and transparent revenue collection system. The local government should implement the service according to the changing scenario. Because, the nature of government under NPM, Osborne and Gaebler remark “Governance is an act of collectivity solving the citizens’ problems. Government is the instrument that the public uses. The instrument is outdated and it is time to remake it.”

Considering this context, in the last three years, MOFAGA developed the LISA model and facilitated it through the ‘Provincial Centre for Good Governance-PCGG’ in practice to improve the performance of the local governments as envisioned by the constitution and Local Governance Operation Act (LGOA). The “LISA guideline 2020” is prepared based on LGOA that made the provision of an annual performance assessment process to improve the overall performance of municipal governance which makes the local government to be more efficient, transparent, responsive, and accountable. It is necessary to understand that public service delivery reveals the relationship between the two sides, one side being of the provider and the second of the receiver. So public service is a mechanism of government to provide its services to the people. The overall LISA score suggests the ‘preparedness’ of local government for addressing the public expectations as such. The 10 indicators ranging from governance system to coordination and cooperation and their scoring suggest how Pokhara Metropolitan city is preparing its service delivery so as to address the public expectations. The public expectation such as service delivery according to the citizen charter is found high. To address this issue of governance, ‘timely delivery’ is considered as the topmost factors of effective service delivery in PMC. But when we look at the LISA Scoring of PMC for three fiscal years, the governance mechanism is relatively found low in performance.

Table 3*Overall LISA Score of PMC*

Categories	LISA Score of PMC				Average
	Total	2020/ 021	2021/022	2022/023	
Governance System	9	7.75	8	7	7.6
Organization & Admin	8	3.5	3	2	2.8
Annual Budget & Plan	11	5.5	6.5	8.5	6.8
Fiscal & Financial Management	11	3	4.5	5.5	4.3
Service Delivery	16	10	10	12.25	10.8
Judicial work Performance	7	6.5	5.5	7	6.3
Physical Infrastructure Development	13	5.5	4.5	7.5	5.8
Social Inclusion	10	0	3.75	10	4.6
Environment and Disaster Management	9	2.5	3.5	6	4.0
Coordination and Cooperation	6	0	2	4	2.0
Total	100	44.25	51.25	69.75	55.1

Note: This score is based on the digital datasheet MOFAGA, Nepal, accessed on March, 10, 2023

Table 3 shows that the service delivery is increasing by 62.5% to 78.12% which seems satisfactory. Another category is social inclusion in the service delivery, the table shows 100% increment of social inclusion in the PMC. According to the LISA Score, there are other satisfactory performances for example the judicial work performance, coordination and cooperation of the municipal office, fiscal and financial management, physical infrastructure development. On the contrary, the data shows that the governance system decreased in comparison to the previous fiscal year. The administrative and organizational management is not properly handled, it is decreasing and the same is the case in the FGDs conducted in the ward offices. The ward office can't correct the minor mistakes that make vital registration lethargic. Staffs were not seen perfect in computer applications, still the system is digitized which is adding confusion to the general public. It is hampering the services to make it 'paperless'.

Strengthening Municipal Governance

The performance of local governments is a major concern from the federal to the local level as how the municipal government makes them effective, accountable, and responsive governance at the local level. The success or failure of municipal governance is the concern of the taxpayers at the local level, and the provincial, and national stakeholders and development partners.

There are some contradicting policies and guidelines in relation to the natural resources sharing and management through the Pokhara Metropolitan City office. There is still a dilemma on policy implementation, there's confusion whether this is a working area of local level or central government. The physical infrastructure development is the key indicator for the performance evaluation of the local institution. While looking at the score of LISA the infrastructure development is found in slow pace. This particular condition is hampering to achieve the public expectation. The preparedness of Pokhara Metropolitan city is not found as satisfactory regarding the infrastructure development. The major reason behind this is found as the incongruent planning and budgeting. The Public Private Partnership (PPP) Model is designed for major tourism infrastructure development projects, garbage collection and management projects but it is still in the state of limbo. To improve the quality of public service delivery, sustainable service delivery is necessary leading to municipal governance.

According to the Local government act 2074, the local levels are categorically authorized to deliver 61 different services but the metropolitan city provides 64 kinds of public services through ward offices including vital registration (birth, marriage, migration, death), relationship verification, recommendation, authorization, tax clearance and collection, garbage collection, water supply, awareness creation program, infrastructure development etc. Services have been categorized into three characteristics i.e. administrative services, community development and environment and infrastructure development services.

Some of the services i.e., vital registration system, recommendation, registration and land sale/purchase system were digitized. In course of study, the study has gone through some of the focus group discussions (FGDs), and via the discussion with the office staffs of ward offices, study finds that the staffs were not updated much with the digitalized services. In some of the cases of vital registration, minor mistakes in the documents carry much more trouble, the service seekers have to wait long for the corrigendum.

Good governance always prioritized citizen satisfaction. The swift legal procedures, service according to citizen charter, 'paperless' services, timely grievances redressal system,

effective utilization of ICTs in service delivery and proper and transparent revenue collection systems were found to be the factors affecting the citizens satisfaction in PMC. Citizens were averagely satisfied with the existing services of PMC. The average satisfaction level resembles the things to be improved.

CONCLUSIONS

In the respect of Constitution of Nepal, 2015 and Local Government Act, 2017, PMC has made 58 sets of rules, directives, acts, regulations and working procedures so as to bind the public service delivery. More importantly, the metropolitan is working through the E-Governance system which will reduce the rate of corruption. PMC is going to make its own server to operationalize the different official works, too. It is concluded that PMC is directed towards the right track of public service delivery yet there are lots of things to do. For example, the timely updating of human resources with the line of ICTs is the first step. Even the service recipient also has to be aware about the public services. There's the need for systematic supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the public service projects.

The major preparedness of the metropolitan city is focused on public service delivery albeit it is not sufficient. The metropolitan city is providing the vital registration, building map approval and taxation system in the digital way. The recruitment of engineers in each ward for project planning, estimation and supervision is compulsory. However, the technical staffs like junior engineers, overseer are not sufficient in the ward offices. The expected results on the related public service deliveries are yet to be achieved because of the proper monitoring and evaluation system.

To address the ethos of federalism, the effective public service delivery by the immediate municipalities i.e., ward offices is a must. Because these offices are the point of contact for the people having different services ranging from recommendation letters, vital registration and the tax paying. Thus, the two-way capacity development, human resources and the public awareness to the general public are other requirements for effective public service delivery that enhance the charm of federalism and strengthen municipal governance as well. To make the service effective, grievance handling is found to be the most significant factor. Thus, the metropolitan should be serious on the grievance redress process.

The study examined the preparedness of Pokhara Metropolitan City for addressing the expectations of the people and the findings reveals that the essence of federalism is not being realized in the service delivery because at the local level there are the total grievances that

the central government is not decentralizing the power and resources to local level. There is a lethargic process to mobilize the local resources, with the limited budgets and resources as the local government is providing the services to the public. The LISA Score and the observations made in course of the study implies that the programs/ projects implementation is not congruent with the budget and planning. This is the issue related with the internal control or governance mechanism of Pokhara Metropolitan City.

The public expectations towards the local level service delivery are found increasing and government preparedness is relatively found sluggish in manner. Besides, citizen awareness is vital towards the public service delivery and strengthening the municipal governance. While demanding the rights, the citizens also have responsibility to strengthen municipal governance, too.

With the limited resources, the local government is preparing to provide swift and efficient public service delivery to the citizens. To achieve effective public service delivery, the daily check and balance, monitoring system and feedback system through public hearing and other measures should be periodically provided by the citizens, civil societies and the metropolitan city should prioritize its planning, budgeting and actions accordingly. To improve the quality of service, sustainability is necessary. There are some of the implications that the study forwards. First of all, LISA scoring is not a formality, rather it should be followed properly in the planning, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of the public service delivered by PMC. The ward offices should be capacitated to allocate budget and finalize the procurement procedures of the infrastructure and social development projects. For digitization of services, sufficient technical staffs should be hired in all ward offices. Secondly, the public services especially the garbage collection, electricity supply, drinking water supply, education should equally be distributed to all wards. There must be a proper mechanism of supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the development infrastructure as well as of general public services. The metropolitan city should run the general awareness program about the public services, grievances, taxation, revenue collection, budget allocation, etc. Thirdly, making 'urban culture' is the need of a metropolitan city so as to strengthen the municipal governance. For this, the stakeholders such as elected representatives, municipal administration along with bureaucracy and even the consumers or citizens are equally responsible to strengthen municipal governance, they must not forget their roles and responsibilities.

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