

ASSESSING ASSOCIATIONAL GROUPS' PARTICIPATION AT LOCAL LEVEL PLANNING: A STUDY OF DHULIKHEL MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the practice of associational groups' participation at the local level planning. The purpose of the study was to conceptualize the various means of participation and assess the level of participation in social development and tourism development plans under the Integrated Urban Development Planning (IUDP) of Dhulikhel Municipality. 60 participants were taken using convenience sampling, and the interview was carried out to collect data using semi-structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The study shows that various means of participation were used during IUDP formulation. The various means of participation were identified as workshops, surveys, ward meetings, focus group discussion, involving committee and other means respectively in the descending order in terms of involvement of participants. Similarly, the level of participation was found to be placation and partnership in access and control aspects respectively. There was not enough access for participants to participate in IUDP formulation. Therefore, the invitation methods and means of participation should be reviewed so that participation could be enhanced by number, variety, and quality. The study reveals that citizens are allowed to negotiate with those in authority, but final decisions are made with or without regarding citizens' voices. Those who get access, play decisive roles in controlling plan formulation to some extent. Finally, it can be concluded that increased access to associational groups contributes to controlling the planning by improving their ownership.

Keywords: *Citizen Control, Means of Participation, Partnership, Placation*

Introduction and Study Objectives

“Embedding democratic innovations that increase and deepen citizen participation in decision making is now a common policy of governments in many countries and of local governments. Theorists in democratic theory tend to emphasize the benefits of citizen participation for democracy.” (Pateman, 1970, p. 67). Nepal is also forging active participation and meaningful engagement of citizens in local development planning and as main agendas recently. However, some evidence can also be found from the past.

Historically, in Nepal, there were local and indigenous community institutions, for example, Guthi (patriarchal kinship-based social organizations), and Samaj (community groups), in which communities directly participate in governing themselves, still exist (Pandeya, 2015, p.72). Nepal experienced democratic practices after 1950 which institutionalized decentralization. During the Panchayat regime, institutions like Village Panchayats, Municipalities, Block Panchayats, and District Panchayats were established. This government, for the first time, officially focused on the importance of citizen participation in the local planning process, pointing out that unless the participation of people is ensured in every stage of programs and at all levels, a true sense of participation in government and further development of the nation could not be achieved (Pandeya, 2015, p.73) cited from Dhungel (2004).

After the restoration of democracy in 1990, citizen participation was focused both constitutionally and legally. The Local Self-Governance Act, 1996 was a milestone in this regard. It guaranteed the participation of women and other backward classes in the local council. The interim constitution of 2007 declared Nepal as a federal democratic republic and stressed participatory values. After the promulgation of Constitution of Nepal in 2015, the state was restructured in 753 local units and the first local level election took place in 2017. The 'Local Governance Operation Act 2017' was issued which emphasizes the consent of the governed in planning and policy formulation which affects them.

Despite the various constitutional and legal provisions in Nepal, the communities are fighting for the initial phase of citizen participation i.e., right to information as Karki (2019) concluded in his recent study of citizen participation in Karnali Province. This led to the result that laws made by various local units for instance, laws related to tax and education are contentious.

In research on the quality of citizen participation in the process of local development in Kutai Kartanegara Regency, (Yani et al., 2017) found that the quality of citizen participation was at placation level and the authority promoted participation for gaining support only. A Similar study conducted by Babooa (2008) in Mauritius at the Port Louis' local government also found a limited level of participation in policy making.

Pandeya (2015) advocated the importance of citizen participation as effective participation that depends on building the agency of marginalized groups, the mobilization of citizens, and on the establishment of which produce forces that may have various impacts on the effectiveness of participation. His emphasis here is on civic participation or participation through associational groups which affects them. He further pointed out the lack of systematic studies on the participation of associational groups and its role has yet to be clarified. There is a common argument

among scholars that interest groups can influence in planning as a vital element of local politics. Furthermore, the local level authority claims to participate the the members of associational groups like local leaders, women groups, Dalit Janajati and the business community, CBOs, and professional organizations in planning. It shows that associational groups' participation is acceptable to an extent.

As stated in the Integrated Urban Development planning (IUDP) report of Dhulikhel municipality, the municipality claimed the participation of the members of associational groups adequately via Focused Group Discussions (FGD), questionnaire survey, seminars, and other interactive programs while formulating the IUDP. In this connection, the study aims to conceptualize the means and examine the level of participation of the associational group members from the participants' perspectives taking the plan of two sectors i.e., social and tourism development under IUDP.

Literature Review

Empirical reviews

Not much research is available related to citizen participation in general and associational groups in particular public issues in Nepalese context. Some research in this field has been reviewed which has been done within the decade from national and global context. Karki (2019) studied public participation in planning and implementation in Karnali province. He made the study qualitatively using focused group discussion and key informants' interviews among the women and Dalit communities. He concluded that there was weak participation in planning and implementation in government activities. Among three pillars of participation, the communities are fighting for the initial phase of citizen participation i.e., right to information.

Dhungana (2018) studied the prospect of accountability in local governance in Nepal. He aimed to examine the government accountability system at local governance in Nepal and ways to make the government accountable where people are less aware of government decisions on public issues. He studied this with literature review and semi-structured interviews with concerned stakeholders. He advocated that accountability in the local governments can be enhanced through the practices of citizen interaction willingly in the public issues among the elected officials, citizens, and others. Further, the conclusion was that citizen demands and deliberations are needed regularly at the municipal level for enhancing accountability.

Yani et al. (2017) conducted research on the quality of citizen participation in the process of local development in Kutai Kartanegara Regency. They chose measuring variable access, awareness, control, and benefit to determine the quality of participation using descriptive methods. They found that the quality of citizen

participation was at placation level and the authority promoted participation for gaining support only.

Krawczyk & Sweet-Cushman (2017) researched on understanding local political participation in West Africa. The author suggested public administrators should play a vital role for the negotiation of citizen interest, helping to create shared values and articulate the values through democratic citizenship.

Sebola (2015) made research on "Public Participation in South Africa's Policy Decision-Making Process" taking the case of Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act 92. He aimed to find which factors, whether elite or mass, had more impact on policy decisions. He got two findings. Firstly, there are flaws in the participation process and next, there is true reflection of elites in policy decisions instead of citizens of the country.

Pandeya (2015) studied the contribution of citizen participation to strengthening local planning and accountability systems. He examined qualitatively using exploratory research and focused discussion. The finding showed participation strengthens the local planning and accountability system. At the same time, he concluded that outcome varies on the participation structure and other factors like local power and politics, incentives for participation, the capacity of citizens and local governments, and the level of support from elected representatives.

Zhao (2014) researched policy process and citizen participation in Chinese government where there is believed to be single party authoritarian rule with limited channel of citizen participation. The author identified two variables: citizen participation and accountability structural change in policy making. He also examined the impact of the variables. The conclusion was that China is moving from traditional authoritarian accountability structure towards participatory structure with citizen centric and downward focusing.

Malamulo (2012) researched on citizen participation in local policy making in Malawi. He aimed to investigate citizen participation level and develop a model to use public accountability in policy making. He used qualitative research design and evaluation approaches. The study concluded that there is poor citizen participation to influence accountability in policy making. He also suggested ways for improving public accountability through citizen participation.

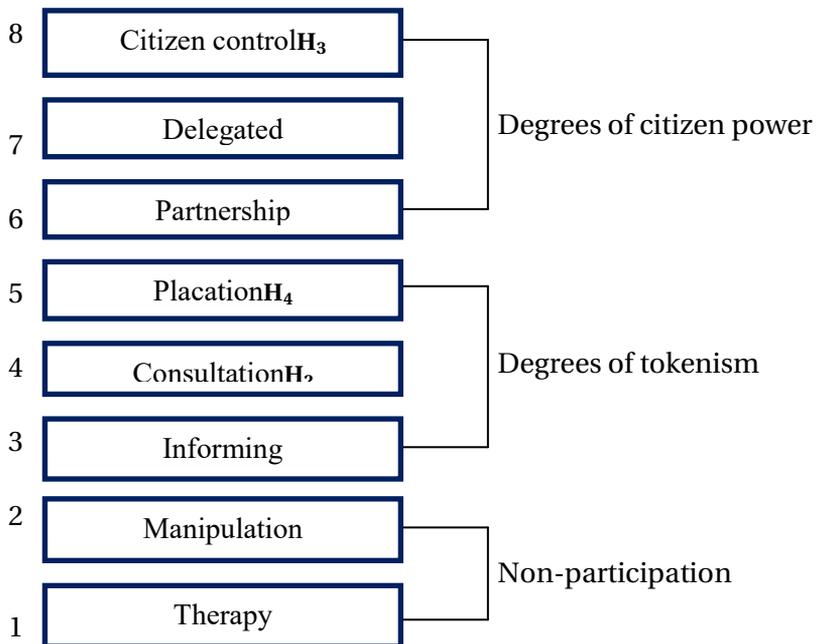
Babooa (2008) conducted research on the issue of public participation in the making and implementation of policy in Mauritius, particularly at the Port Louis' local government. He aimed to find the level, modes and influencing factors of participation using mixed technique with survey questionnaires and interviews. He recommended some ways for better participation. He also observed limited public participation in policy making.

From the above research review, it can be claimed that citizen participation is an important component of public accountability, and it strengthens local level democracy. Certain levels of citizen participation have been focused on all kinds of the political system, but the level of citizen participation is poor. Moreover, the study regarding the associational groups' participation is rare in Nepalese context, except few studies about women and Dalit participation in planning and policy process. This study seems justifiable to examine means and the level of the associational groups' participation in planning.

Framework for Discussion of Citizen Participation

The participation ladder provided by (Arnstein 1969, p. 217) is very useful for discussing the level of citizen participation. Arnstein (1969, p. 216) regarded participation by the governed in the affairs of government as the 'cornerstone of democracy' which should ultimately lead to citizen power. This is applied in assessing the citizen participation level in our study area. It consists of three major levels known as non-participation, tokenism, and citizen power. At the non-participation level, there is ineffective citizen participation which aims to "educate" or "cure" the participants. He further divided non-participation as manipulation and therapy. The tokenism is classified into informing, consultation, and placation. The higher level of citizen participation 'citizen power' consists of partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. Diagrammatically, it depicts as follows:

The Ladder of Citizen Participation



Source: Bishop & Davis, 2002, p. 17

The major levels of citizen participation are briefly described in three levels. The first is non-participation. At this level, people are informed what they should comply with. People are taken as the rubber stamp of the administrators. This stage makes up the bottom rungs of the ladder and it consists of two rungs namely manipulation and therapy. Arnstein (1969, p. 218) asserts that at the "manipulation" stage participation is only done to fulfill the objectives of the authorities, consequently, it does not benefit the participants. It represents the lowest level of participation. The second level is tokenism.

At tokenism level, people are allowed for their voice, but decisions are fully made according to the desire of administrators. There is one way of communication from top to bottom. It consists of three rungs which are informing, consultation and placation. Participants are given the opportunity to contribute. However, they lack the authority to ensure that their contributions are considered. Participants at this level cannot interfere with the status quo. Placation is a higher-level tokenism in which citizens are allowed to advise those in authority, but final decisions are made with or without regarding citizens' advice.

The third level is citizen power in which citizens can trade off and negotiate for their interest with the traditional power holders. It is the highest extent of participation with two-way communication. There is the realization of citizen control over the government actions. It consists of three rungs: partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. Partnership enables people to negotiate and engage with traditional power holders. In Delegated Power and Citizens Control, citizens are part of the decision-making, and they hold the majority decision-making authority. Citizens have control of the decision-making apparatus, and they influence the decisions made (Arnstein, 1969, p.221). At this stage, citizens are free to make decisions. As a result, they directly influence planning and policy choices as part of the decision-making apparatus.

Associational Groups and Means of their Participation

Different associational groups take part in public activities through various means at the local level. Some of the associational groups and their means of participation are being discussed.

Interest group, one of form of associational groups, consists of a group of people coming together to discuss a specific issue related to them. People claim that interest groups are responsible for promoting the interests of their members. Therefore, interest groups influence policy makers to establish meaningful priorities for general satisfaction of the members of the group. Political parties are also the principal pressure groups in policy making. The political party works as a major influencing group for incorporating people's aspiration in the planning and

policy agenda. Besides these, professional groups such as medical council, engineers' council and bar councils influence policy making and implementation which affect the interests of their members. Businessmen are also one of the stronger pressure groups because of their wealth, organization and their favorable position which provides them access to participation in the planning. Likewise, sports institutions, cultural and religious bodies also play the role to represent the voice of a section of people. Similarly, consumers and local government authority jointly involved in the planning. They agree to share the liabilities of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in a certain proportion.

There are various forms (direct, indirect, technical, etc.) of participation that help take part in public activities at the local level. One of the major dimensions of citizen participation is election in which the electorate chooses the candidates who they think are eligible for a certain post. Voting in periodic elections is regarded as the basic mode of public participation in policy choices at the local level. Consultation is another form of citizen participation. It focuses on taking the opinion of stakeholders which affects them as information or advice through the two-way process between officials and participants. Similarly, citizens participate in the planning process by means of nonviolent forms of protest such as marches, demonstrations, and mass meetings.

Among the various means, survey questionnaires are used for asking prepared questions to find out the attitudes, views, and opinions of citizens in a certain issue. Public hearings are other ways of searching public views on issues. Public hearings give the public an opportunity to express their views and ask questions on public policy issues. The municipal workshop also represents an event in which representatives of all social and institutional players encompassed in the process take part (Fred, 2003) cited in Babooa, (2008). Likewise, municipal workshop is a task-oriented meeting organized around a particular public policy issue. Conference is another forum at which a panel of six to ten citizens, selected from members of the various groups of people, discusses with the policy makers a particular issue. Committee meetings can also make in-depth discussions in planning and policy issues which affects them. Furthermore, public meetings usually involve a speaker or panel giving a presentation followed by a question-and-answer session on policy issues. Public meetings provide an opportunity for various group members and policy makers to highlight policy issues. In citizen initiative contact as another mode of participation, citizens convince authority for the inclusion of their demands in the planning.

Finally, the internet and mass media are used as means of participation. Citizens can give their opinion using the internet on policy issues which is the fastest means of citizen participation at present. With the establishment of a local government

website, citizens provide information on different policy matters easily. Mass media such as radio and television broadcasting also play a vital role in disseminating information on public policy. Radio, television, newspaper, magazines are used by different people to provide their views on the policy issues.

Methodology

To study the practice of participation at local level planning, taking a particular case of Dhulikhel municipality, descriptive research design is used under quantitative approach. For answering the research questions regarding means and level of the citizen participation, quantifiable information is collected. Two dimensions are taken as the basis of measuring the level of citizen participation which are access and control. Different quantitative tools and techniques are employed for measurement and analysis of data like average, standard deviation, percentage and pie chart. Characteristics of the population and phenomenon are measured, compared, and interpreted to get the answer to the research questions.

There were around 500 participants' altogether who were engaged in preparing the IUDP. The respondents of the study were members of professional organizations, education related associations, business operators, members of CBOs, racial groups, women organizations, and consumer groups of the study area. 60 respondents were chosen based on the availability belonging to either social or tourism development areas. Convenience sampling method was applied for primary data collection. The respondents were chosen from the executive members of associational groups related with the IUDP planning of tourism, education, or social development sectors of the study area. Few senior citizens, local leaders, and ex-representatives of people who belonged to the related associational groups were also taken for study who had participated in programs related with IUDP formulation.

The level of participation is measured by access and control aspects. Each aspect has eight indicators in the questionnaire which is composed of multiple-choice questions with four categorical alternatives in Likert scale. For discussing means of participation, respondents were asked to select or mention the means and invitation method as in the questionnaires. The base of the questionnaire is Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation.

Primary data are obtained through interviews using structured questionnaires. The sum of average scores of indicators of access and control are found separately. After that, the result was converted and confirmed into the level of participation status as presented below:

Measurement of Participation through Arnstein’s Ladder

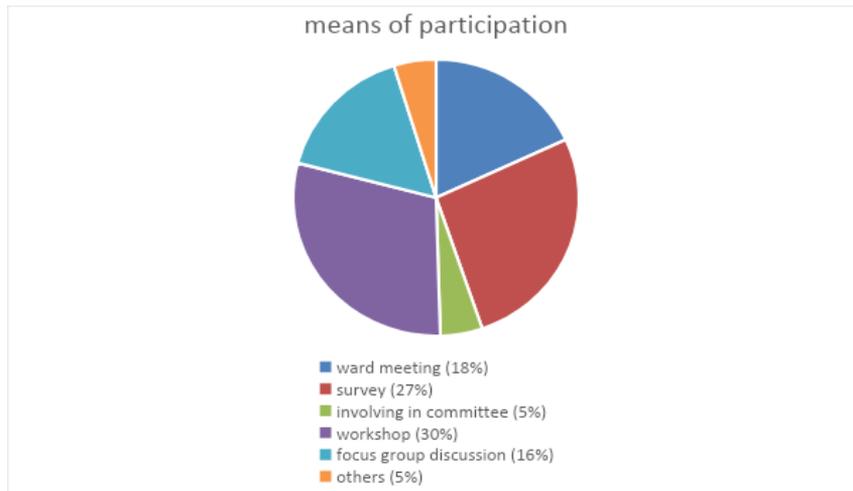
Scores	Ladder Participation
28.57-32.00	Citizen control
25.06-28.56	Delegated power
21.55-25.05	Partnership
18.04-21.54	Placation
14.53-18.03	Consultation
11.02-14.52	Informing
07.51-11.01	Therapy
03.50-07.50	Manipulation

Source: Yani, A., Hidayat, A., Hans, A., Yunus, A., Tadjang, S., & Agam, A. (2017). *Measuring Quality of Citizens’ Participation in Local Development*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/icas17.2017.5>

Analysis and Discussion

Means of Participation

60 respondents had been chosen who had participated in various meetings during the IUDP formulation. They were the members of different associational groups working in the municipality. The associational groups were women, Dalits, Janajati, consumer groups, educational associations, political parties, business operators, CBOs, media.



Source: Field Visit (Oct. 2021)

Various means of participation have been used like ward meeting, survey, workshop, focus group discussions, involving in committee and others. Among these, 30% (31) involved in workshops, 27% (28) involved in surveys, 18% (19) involved in ward meetings, 16% (17) involved in focus group discussion and 5% (5) in both involving committee and others. Here, the same participants have been found to be involved in more than one means.

Level of Participation with Respect to Access

There were 8 indicators to express the view of respondents regarding their access in IUDP formulation through various means. The average score of each indicator and total score are as follows:

Summary of Access Indicators in IUDP Formulation

Indicator	Average score	Standard deviation
Method of invitation to participate	2.45	
Prior information about agenda	2.34	
Hearing of the voice of participants	2.5	
Authorities' concern towards participants' advice and aspiration	2.72	0.22
Opportunity for dialogue	2.97	
Opportunity to have specific role in planning	2.42	
Opportunity to decide	2.44	
Overall perception towards participation	2.37	
Total	20.21	

Source: Field Visit (Oct. 2021)

The average score of each indicator lies between 2 and 3 out of 4. There is not much deviation among the value of the indicators. However, the mean score for opportunity to dialogue is the highest with 2.97 value. It shows that there was access to dialogue for participants to some extent. The total value of all indicators is 20.21. Since S.D among the scores is less (0.22), it shows the consistency in the responses among the indicators. According to our conversion table shown in the data analysis sub heading of the research methodology chapter, this value lies on placation level of participation under tokenism. Therefore, it can be claimed that people are allowed for their voice, and they are also given the opportunity to contribute. However, authority may or may not consider their contribution. It is status quo oriented instead of change. It is the highest level of tokenism because tokenism ranges from informing, and consultation to placation. It implies that the access for participation is for channeling the needs and demands to the authority instead of showing high concern in IUDP planning.

Level of Participation with respect to Control

There were 8 questions to assess the control aspects of respondents in IUDP formulation. The information obtained from the respondents for each question are presented and analyzed below:

Summary of Control Indicators in IUDP Formulation

Indicators	Average score	Standard deviation
Whether participants or authorities determined planning	2.17	
Purpose of participants to engage	2.47	
Authorities' encouragement for participation	3	
Participants' adequacy in planning	3.37	
Role of involved participants in planning	2.67	
Environment to dialogue and negotiate for determining planning	3.02	0.37
Space to participants to determine the plan	2.78	
Changes in the initial plan according to participants' demand	2.53	
Total	22.02	

Source: Field Visit (Oct. 2021)

The average score of each indicator lies from 2.17 to 3.37 out of 4. There is slight deviation (0.37) among the value of the indicators compared to the access aspect. However, consistency can be seen in the responses among the indicators. The score regarding adequacy of participants is the highest (3.7) which is followed by the score of environments to dialogue and negotiate for determining planning (3.02) and authorities' encouragement for participation (3.0). It shows that these three indicators have shown comparatively higher levels of participation. However, the mean score for 'whether participants or authority determine the planning' is 2.17 which indicates authority had more influence on planning than participants. The sum of average scores of all the indicators is 22.02. According to our conversion table shown in the data analysis sub heading of the research methodology chapter, the value lies in the partnership under citizen power.

At the citizen power level, citizens can trade off and negotiate for their interest with the traditional power holders. It is the highest extent of participation with two-way communication. It consists of three rungs: partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. The indicator shows the status of partnership which is the lowest level of citizen power. Partnership enables people to negotiate and engage with municipal authority. During IUDP formulation, it can be claimed that associational groups were able to negotiate and engage in incorporating their voices to some extent.

While comparing the sum of average scores of the indicators of access and control aspects, the total score of control (22.02) is higher than the total score of access

(20.21). It indicates that the status of control is slightly better than the status of access. However, the former is at the lowest level of citizen power and later is at the highest level of tokenism. These two levels are after each other, but it can be observed that there is not enough mechanism to provide access for the participant but those who got access could control in planning.

The study attempted to conceptualize the various means and level of participation in the IUDP planning of Dhulikhel municipality. For conceptualizing the means, the participants were asked to choose among the given or mention (if any other) the means of the participation which they had used. The responses of participants showed the varieties of methods were used to invite them. However, the authorities applied mass media which does not guarantee participation. Rather, specific invitation techniques such as individual letters, mails and phone contacts to associational groups or their members could be a more effective way.

Regarding the means of participation, workshop and questionnaire surveys were found to be used mostly while ward meeting and focus group discussions were moderately used. Very few members of associational groups were involved in different committees to decide the plan. Few respondents have used active participation like initiative contacts. It indicates the lack of citizen power in formulation of the plan.

The level participation with respect to access indicators is placation, the highest form of tokenism which implies the access for participation is for channeling the needs and demands to the authority instead of showing high concern in IUDP planning. It is the moderate access to the participants' views without getting access to a decisive role in the planning. The access should be prolonged up to citizen power. The finding is similar to Yani et. al. (2017) and Babooa (2008). Both have used the same framework of participation to measure the level of participation.

The level of participation with respect to control indicators is partnership which is the lowest level of participation in the form of citizen power. Partnership enables people to negotiate and engage with municipal authority. During IUDP formulation, associational groups who got the access, were able to negotiate and engage for incorporating their voices in the planning to some extent. The finding was slightly higher than the findings of Yani et. al. (2017) and Babooa (2008). Lower standard deviation showed that the internal consistencies seemed well in both access and control indicators of the participants' perspective. Further, it indicates that the status of control was slightly better than the status of access. The former is partnership level and the later placation is in level in the conversion table of the

study. On the one hand, it was observed from the data that there was not enough mechanism to provide access for increasing the number and variety of participants, on the other hand, those who got access, had played decisive roles in controlling IUDP formulation to some degree.

Varieties of challenges were also experienced regarding participation during the study. The common challenges relate to time, resources and information. Besides these, there is a lack of inspiration among participants. They are not sufficiently aware and sensitive about their needs. Also, the trust between authority and participants is at a low level which causes the culture of denying feedback. In addition, conflict is found among the participants because of disagreements regarding political and economic interests which worsens the meaningful participation.

Conclusion and Implication

It is evident that members of associational groups had participated in IUDP formulation using the various means. The various means of participation were identified as workshops, surveys, ward meetings, focus group discussion, involving committee and other means. The authority has managed various ways of inviting the participants to participate in planning. However, there was not enough access for participants to participate in IUDP formulation. Therefore, the invitation methods and means of participation should be reviewed so that participation could be enhanced by number, variety, and quality. The findings revealed that in the access and control aspects of citizen participation, the level of participation was found to be at the placation and partnership level respectively which is similar to Yani et. al. (2017) and Babooa (2008) in the case of access aspect while control aspect is slightly higher than in their findings. More specifically, citizens are allowed to negotiate with those in authority, but final decisions are made with or without the citizens' voice. There is not enough mechanism to provide access but those who get access, play decisive roles in controlling plan formulation to some extent. Finally, it can be concluded that increased access of associational groups contributes to control the planning by improving their ownership. Hence, improvements are needed in the channel to participate and space to decide by overcoming the potential challenges.

The study of participation of associational groups at the local level planning is concentrated on the relation between citizens and local government from associational groups' perspective, and analyzes the practices of participation. This study definitely fills the gap in literature regarding citizen participation at the local

level to some extent. The findings of the study expect to promote the inclusion of citizens in the policy process enhancing rational decisions based on their knowledge and skill. Moreover, it helps make citizen participation more effective by overcoming the prevailing challenges. Authorities can also be benefited by realizing the means and the level of participation at the local level and finding the measures to improve the participation.

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