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## **Status of Local Service Delivery by the Local Government in Nepal**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The main focus of this study is to assess the status of local service delivery by the local government in Nepal. It has used descriptive and analytical research design. It focuses on the service delivered by local government.. Service delivery of rural roads/bridges; livestock services; basic health services; primary education; small irrigation; and agriculture extension were found to be good, whereas the level of implementation of the sectoral functions of local government in community water supply and sanitation was found to be weak as per the collected data. The findings from this study can provide information about the status of services delivered by the local government in Nepal. It can be helpful to provide some special guidelines to the policy makers for improving local governance.

**Key words:** Local government, local governance, agriculture extension, livestock services, primary education, basic health services, rural roads/bridges, small irrigation, community water supply and sanitation.

### **1. Introduction**

Simply, local government is the authority to determine and execute policy in an area inside and smaller than a whole state. As per Muttalib & Khan (1982), local government is an institution with a concept of administration having a direct bearing with provision of services to citizens of the state. It is multi-dimensional and politically it is expressed as a governing institution presiding over a specific local sub-division of a state. Principally, federalism/decentralization constitutes a governing standard of local governments. In addition, there are other standards that represent bases to ensure improved local governance.

In other words, local government is the government of a specific local area constituting a subdivision of a major political unit where local governance is the set of institutions and mechanism regarding the process of planning, implementing, maintaining, evaluating and monitoring the affairs that have an impact on local population. Hence, it incorporates an established mechanism to determine and implement public choices and decisions at the local level. One should be aware about the fact that the ability of local government to address the needs and interests of the citizens at the local level is implicit in local governance as a system of governance that can give value both in the short and long run.

Local governance has now become a global phenomenon and is an integral part of the modern political system. It is practiced in both developed and developing countries at the central, provincial and local level for participatory local democracy, effective service delivery and addressing diversities. The current constitution, 2015 of Nepal has declared for federalism where the country is divided into seven provinces and local is divided into 77 districts & 753 local levels (including six metropolises, 11 sub-metropolises, 276 municipalities and 460 *gaunpalikas*). These 753 local units are known as the local governments in Nepal.

This study focuses only on the local services delivery by local government in Nepal. The study areas were chosen on the basis of researcher's convenience. The perception analysis done on these areas might not represent the entire national state. Despite the efforts to make the respondents aware about the local services delivery by local government and local governance, due to the difference in level of the respondents there might have been some biasness in the response which is not considered in this study. This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic period from April 2020 to August 2020. So, the perception of the respondents might be influenced by the COVID-19 period.

## 2. Problem statement

Governance has been an overarching development issue for the developing countries. Development challenges for the twenty-first century revolve around the issues of successful governance. To make development efforts people-centered, effective local governance should be ensured. The local government must represent the concerns, values and needs of the people and empower them through the realization of their basic rights, including the right to development and self-determination, by developing their access to markets, assets, goods and services and institutions. However, there has often been a gap between policy intentions and outcomes in the field of local government and service delivery. In this context, this study attempts to answer the research question i.e. how is the status of local service delivery by the local government in Nepal?

The objective of this study is to analyze the status local service delivery by the local government in Nepal.

## 3. Method and Data

The present study is based on a descriptive cum analytical research design. Descriptive research is a type of study which is conducted to access the opinions, behaviors or characteristics of the given population (Wolff & Pant, 2005). An interview schedule was administered in 2020. For analyzing "local service delivery by local government in Nepal", the population for this study was taken from Kathmandu. Convenience sampling was done. The population was comprised of local people, local leaders, govt. officials, academics, NGO/CBO officials and employees of municipalities. Sample size of 80 was taken from an unknown population. Purposive sampling technique was used.

## 6. Literature Review

Local government can be described as those government bodies elected by the people that have administrative, legislative and executive functions on the territories under their jurisdiction. According to Aijaz (2007) local government is part of the government of a country which deals mainly with problems or issues related to a given population within a given territory. This is done basically as per the responsibilities of a country that parliament decides to delegate by the laws to local governance.

While Lockard (1963) thinks that the local government can be defined as a public organization, authorized to establish and administer public policies within a given territory, the latter is a subdivision of the central government. In fact the organization of local government is public organization, changing from private organizations, they are aimed at the general interest of citizens. Stones (1968) defines local government as part of the governance of a country, but that deals with problems or issues of population within certain territory or location. According to him, this kind of government does the so-called "housework" so that living in these areas to be affordable for its residents. It achieves this by keeping the roads clean, children's education, residential housing construction etc.

A strong centralization of government policy and functions prevailed in both the developed and developing countries during the period following the World War II, particularly during 1960s and 70s. The development theorists and practitioners then began to search for alternatives to a centralized state and the concept of people's participation played an important role for the development of the decentralization and local governance. Local governance then began to receive widespread attention in the late 1970s and early 80s. As a result, there was a shift of attention from the central authority to the local authority as seen in Asia, Latin America and Africa in the 1970s (Shah, 1997).

The newly emerged paradigm has gained acceptance in numerous paces including the institutions like UN systems and the World Bank. The emphasis of the newly developed paradigm is on the people's participation, decentralization of decision-making processes, targeting the marginalized groups, creation of specific policies on health, education and micro-enterprise development that would lessen the state interventions. This paradigm of development puts together the function of the market and the community and at the same time withdraws the state's effort through the decentralization and local governance process (Agrawal, 1998). The level of maladministration, mis-management, corruption and consolidating of democracy is diminished as local governance and autonomy increase the level of peoples' participation in the governance.

Despite of gaining popularity around the world, most countries have adopted different inter-governmental

structures, proceeded at uneven paces and adopted a wide range of implementing strategies. As the countries around the world greatly differ in geographical size, history, population, economic structure, and political dynamisms, all of which influence the form of local government and should take this diversity which is not surprising.

In Nepal, the concepts of local government and local governance are considered to be important phenomena in the study of public administration; traces of their existence can be observed in Nepal since pre-historic times. Self-organized irrigation systems that farmers created to meet their needs for water and conflict resolution mechanism at the local level was a reality long before the current emphasis on federalism development emerged.

Nepal started its attempts to promote people's participation in the early 1960 under the Panchayat system, when the elected bodies in various levels were given limited responsibilities for undertaking local level programs and charging local taxes. However, the system was centrally driven rather than locally. Later in 1980s, further progress was made with the division of country into districts for operating the country in a more decentralized manner. This gave a little emphasis to promoting local governance and fiscal decentralization. However, some of the issues like roles and tasks of local bodies, their relationships with the line agencies, overlap in functions and responsibilities, and accountability arrangements remained unanswered.

Nepal is currently in a new federal democratic structure. This new structure can be strengthened and sustained through the expansion of quality services to the people. Hence, the concept of rendering such services needs to be one of the cornerstones of Nepal's transformation in this context; Government of Nepal can facilitate the reform process that the transition to the new structure of national, provincial and local government requires (Association of District Development Committees of Nepal (ADDCN, 2010).

Federalism is a new movement for Nepal. The current constitution declared on 2015 (2072 Ashoj 03 B. S.) has provisions for federalism where the country is divided into seven states and three level governments i.e. central, state and local governments. Article 50 (1) of the present Constitution of Nepal 2015 has made provisions regarding decentralization. By acknowledging the sovereignty, independence and integrity of the country to be of utmost importance, the property, equality and freedom of the citizens are to be protected ensuring the rule of law, norms and values of fundamental rights and human rights, gender equality, proportional inclusion, participation and social justice through which a just system is to be maintained in all the spheres of national life along with the establishment of a government system aimed at public welfare and while the relations between the federal units are to be maintained on the basis of cooperation between them, the principle of inclusion in the governance system on the basis of local autonomy and decentralization is to be internalized.

The Local government operation Act 2017 gives certain functions and responsibility to the local governments in relation to service delivery. Variety of services had been provided by local government in Nepal including vital registration (birth, death, marriage, divorces and migrations), provision of social protection payments and funding for local projects as well as those provided under developed sectors The following seven services have been developed to local government in Nepal (NPC, 2010): Agriculture extension, livestock services, primary education, basic health services, rural roads/bridges, small irrigation, community water supply and sanitation.

## **8. Discussion and Result**

At present, the local government operation Act 2017 gives certain functions and responsibility to the local governments in relation to service delivery. The following seven services have been developed to local governments in Nepal (NPC, 2010) and (ADDCN, 2010):

### **8.1 Agriculture Extension**

Agriculture extension is vital for agricultural production. In rural areas, the demand for the expansion of agriculture services in the local governments is high (ADDCN, 2010). The specific functions of local governments are formulation of policy on agriculture and livestock development, formulation and operation of programmes, and inspection and monitoring of these programmes, arranging for seeds, fertilizer and other agricultural inputs as required, providing agriculture extension services in the concerning local government's area, promoting

agriculture haat (markets and fairs), and managing markets for agricultural products. Respondents' opinion regarding agriculture extension of government is given in Table: 01

**Table: 01 Status of agriculture Extension services of local government**

| Group of stakeholders | Local leader/ Local people | Government officials/ employee/ Academic/NGO CBO officials | Total | Percentage |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--|-------|------------|
| Strong                | 15                         | 12   | 27    | 33.75%     |
| Weak                  | 28                         | 25   | 53    | 66.25%     |
| Total                 | 43                         | 37   | 80    | 100%       |

Table - 01 presents the opinion of respondents on the agriculture extension of local government. The table shows that on an average, 33.75% of the respondents found the agriculture extension of local government to be strong and the rest 66.25% of the respondents found it to be weak. It indicates a lack of clear government policy as per the need of time due to which the fertile lands are being sold and used for settlement, agricultural programs are not being conducted in a good pace, and the monitoring and evaluation of agriculture is not organized.

## 8.2 Livestock Services

The specific functions of local governments under livestock services are formulation of policy on livestock development and formulation and operation of programmes, as well as inspection and monitoring of these programmes. Respondents' opinion regarding livestock service of government is given in Table: 02

**Table: 02 Status of Livestock Services of local government**

| Group of stakeholders | Local leader/ Local people | Government officials/ employee/ Academic/NGO CBO officials | Total | Percentage |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--|-------|------------|
| Strong                | 20                         | 39   | 59    | 73.75      |
| Weak                  | 6                          | 15   | 21    | 26.25      |
| Total                 | 26                         | 54   | 80    | 100%       |

Table - 02 presents the opinion of respondents on the livestock service of local government. The table shows that on an average, 73.75 % of the respondents found the livestock service of local government to be strong and the rest 26.25 % of the respondents found it to be weak. According to the respondents, the reason for this is because of the availability of transportation and other required facilities for livestock in the local level as well as a good market due to the dense population.

## 8.3 Primary Education

The specific functions of local government under the primary education are setting priorities for the establishment of schools and making recommendations for these, making recommendations for the approval and dissolution of schools in the district, supervising, monitoring and assisting in the operation and management of schools, and formulating policies and programmes on district level adult education as well as informal education. Respondents' opinion regarding primary education of government is given in Table: 03

**Table: 03 Status of primary education services of local government**

| Group of stakeholders | Local leader/ Local people | Government officials/ employee/ Academic/NGO CBO officials | Total | Percentage |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--|-------|------------|
| Strong                | 25                         | 27   | 52    | 65         |
| Weak                  | 17                         | 11   | 28    | 35         |
| Total                 | 42                         | 38   | 80    | 100%       |

Table - 03 presents the opinion of respondents on the primary education of local government. The table shows that on an average, 65% of the respondents found the primary education of local government to be strong and the rest 35% of the respondents found it to be weak. It indicates that both the government and private schools

in the study area are following the government policy. The government policy to make the primary education free is also one of the reasons for the local services regarding primary education to be strong.

#### 8.4 Basic Health Services

Quality health services are crucial to the general people. Simple argument for decentralizing health has been that there will be greater community participation in providing the local health care services which will lead to improved service quality and coverage (Lama, 2009). Specific functions of the basic health services are: operating and managing hospitals, health centers, health posts, sub-health posts, health offices, ayurvedic dispensaries, etc; formulating and implementing programmes on family planning, mother child welfare, extensive vaccination, nutrition, population education and public health; providing approval for the opening of sub health posts and monitoring them; making arrangements for the supply of medicines, materials and equipment relating to treatment, inspecting them and monitoring their quality. Respondents' opinion regarding of basic health services government is given in Table: 04

**Table: 04 Status of Basic Health Services of local government**

| Group of stakeholders | Local leader/ Local people | Government officials/ employee/ Academic/NGO CBO officials | Total | Percentage |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--|-------|------------|
| Strong                | 30                         | 25   | 55    | 68.75      |
| Weak                  | 15                         | 10   | 25    | 31.25      |
| Total                 | 45                         | 35   | 80    | 100%       |

Table - 04 presents the opinion of respondents on the Basic Health Services of local government. The table shows that on an average, 68.75% of the respondents found the Basic Health Services of local government to be strong and the rest 31.25% of the respondents found it to be weak. Respondents viewed that the hospitals and health care centers have been providing good services as per the government policy in the study area which is located in the country's capital. Furthermore, family planning programs, mother child welfare programs, extensive vaccination etc. have also contributed to improve the status of basic health services by the local government in the study area.

#### 8.5 Rural Roads/Bridges

The specific functions under rural roads/bridges for the local government are preparing a master plan for district level roads that includes building, operating, monitoring, evaluating, maintaining and repairing the district level roads; making necessary arrangements for the operation of the means of transport within the district; developing and promoting waterways and ropeways; and formulating, building, maintaining and repairing suspension bridges in the district. Respondents' opinion regarding rural roads/bridges of local government is given in Table: 05.

**Table: 05 Status of Rural Roads/Bridges services of local government**

| Group of stakeholders | Local leader/ Local people | Government officials/ employee/ Academic/NGO CBO officials | Total | Percentage |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--|-------|------------|
| Strong                | 27                         | 24   | 51    | 63.75      |
| Weak                  | 13                         | 16   | 29    | 36.25      |
| Total                 | 40                         | 40   | 80    | 100%       |

Table - 05 presents the opinion of respondents on the Rural Roads/Bridges of local government. The table shows that on an average, 63.75% of the respondents found the Rural Roads/Bridges of local government to be strong and the rest 36.25% of the respondents found it to be weak. Respondents viewed that the major contributing factor for this service to be strong is because the study area is the capital of the country where the roads as well as bridges have been constructed according to the government policy.

#### 8.6 Small Irrigation

Irrigation is crucial for agricultural production. Demand in rural areas for the expansion of agriculture

services in the local bodies is high. Work relating to minor irrigation is the specific functions of local government. Respondents' opinion regarding small irrigation of local government is given in Table: 06

**Table: 06 Status of small irrigation services of local government**

| Group of stakeholders | Local leader/ Local people | Government officials/ employee/Academic/NGO CBO officials | Total | Percentage |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|---|-------|------------|
| Strong                | 14                         | 9   | 23    | 28.75      |
| Weak                  | 28                         | 29  | 57    | 71.25      |
| Total                 | 42                         | 38  | 80    | 100%       |

Table - 06 presents the opinion of respondents on the small irrigation of local of local government. The table shows that on an average, 28.75% of the respondents found the small irrigation of local of local government to be strong and the rest 71.25% of the respondents found it to be weak. Respondents viewed that the study area does not have a well-managed system for irrigation as it does not have good agricultural services. Majority of the population are not involved in agriculture as the study area is in an urban place due to which agriculture as well as irrigation services were found to be weak.

### 8.7 Community Water Supply and Sanitation

Community water supply and sanitation are the developed sectoral/sub sectoral services of the local governments. Local governments formulate drinking water plans for the benefit of people in the local level under community water supply and sanitation. Respondents' opinion regarding community water supply and sanitation of local government is given in Table: 07

**Table: 07 Status of Community Water Supply and Sanitation of local government**

| Group of stakeholders | Local leader/ Local people | Government officials/ employee/Academic/NGO CBO officials | Total | Percentage |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|---|-------|------------|
| Strong                | 20                         | 18  | 38    | 47.50      |
| Weak                  | 25                         | 17  | 42    | 52.50      |
| Total                 | 45                         | 35  | 80    | 100%       |

Table - 07 presents the opinion of respondents on the Community Water Supply and Sanitation of local government. The table shows that on an average, 47.50% of the respondents found the Community Water Supply and Sanitation services of local government to be strong and the rest 52.50% of the respondent found it to be weak. It indicates a lack of proper policy for long term services regarding water supply and sanitation. Respondents viewed that the government policy for long term drinking water services as well as garbage management is not satisfactory.

## 9. Major Finding

The following table has been constructed from the major findings in the discussion section above:

| S. N | Local government's Services           | Percentage |       | Remarks |
|------|---------------------------------------|------------|-------|---------|
|      |                                       | Strong     | Weak  |         |
| 1    | Agriculture Extensions                | 33.75      | 66.25 | Weak    |
| 2    | Livestock Service                     | 73.25      | 26.25 | Strong  |
| 3    | Primary education                     | 65.00      | 35.00 | Strong  |
| 4    | Basic Health Services                 | 68.75      | 31.25 | strong  |
| 5    | Rural roads/bridge                    | 63.75      | 36.25 | Strong  |
| 6    | Small Irrigation                      | 28.75      | 71.25 | Weak    |
| 7    | Community water supply and sanitation | 47.50      | 52.50 | Weak    |

From the above table, we can see that Agriculture Extensions, Small Irrigation, and Community water supply and sanitation were found to be weak due to the lack of proper government policy and monitoring, urban

status of the study area, lack of long term vision, etc. and Livestock services, Primary education, Basic Health Services, and Rural roads/bridge were found to be strong due to availability of transportation and other facilities, educational institutions following government policy, good hospitals and health posts with plenty of programs, and well planned and constructed road systems.

## 10. Conclusion

In conclusion, the level of execution of the local services of local government like rural roads/bridges; livestock services; basic health services; primary education was found strong, whereas the level of execution of the sectoral functions of local government in community water supply and sanitation; small irrigation; and agriculture extension were found weak. Despite some of the services provided by the local government were not satisfactory, the majority of the services were found to be good. It indicates that the local services provided by the local government were satisfactory. It can be concluded that as the services provided in the local level are enhanced, the local governance will also be improved.

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