

The Role of Good Governance in Strengthening Public Administration: Nepalese Perspectives

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Abstract

Good governance is a cornerstone of effective public administration, promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in government operations. This paper delves into the theoretical foundations of good governance and its role in public administration, drawing on global best practices and their applicability to Nepal. Key governance models, such as Network Governance, Weberian Bureaucracy, and New Public Management, are examined alongside Nepal's governance challenges, including corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and decentralization issues. Recommendations are provided for institutional reforms, capacity building, and e-governance technologies to align Nepal's governance structures with international standards. The article highlights how fostering public trust, efficiency, and citizen participation can strengthen public administration, ultimately improving governance outcomes in Nepal.

Keywords:

Governance, Public Administration, Transparency, Accountability, Public Participation, E-Governance

1. Introduction

Governance, in its broadest sense, refers to the structures and processes that ensure equitable management of resources, decision-making, and service delivery. Public administration, on the other hand, refers to the mechanisms and practices through which governments implement policies and deliver services to the public. The relationship between governance and public administration is inextricably linked, as efficient public administration depends on strong governance frameworks that emphasize accountability, transparency, and citizen participation.

In developing countries like Nepal, governance challenges are pronounced due to limited institutional capacities, corruption, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Strengthening governance is essential for creating an environment where public administration can function effectively, providing services that meet the needs of citizens while ensuring fairness and inclusivity. This article seeks to analyze the role of good governance in enhancing public administration through a comparative study of global best practices and Nepal's current governance systems.

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1.1 Governance Theories

The concept of governance has been extensively explored within academic literature. One of the prominent theories is the Principal-Agent Theory, which examines the relationship between citizens (principals) and public officials (agents). This theory underscores the power dynamics inherent in governance structures, where the principals delegate authority to agents with the expectation that their interests will be served. However, in the absence of adequate accountability mechanisms, agents may exploit their position for personal or political gain, leading to inefficiencies and misuse of resources in public administration (Miller, 2019). Similarly, the **New Public Management (NPM)** theory emphasizes efficiency in public service delivery, promoting privatization, performance measurement, and a results-oriented approach in public administration.

Another key governance approach is Network Governance, which recognizes the complexity of modern governance systems and the need for multi-stakeholder cooperation. Unlike traditional hierarchical models, Network Governance promotes collaboration between government agencies, private sectors, civil society, and international organizations in policymaking and administration (Rhodes, 2007). This model is particularly relevant to addressing complex issues such as corruption, poverty, and social inequality in Nepal.

For Nepal, this model holds significant practical implications, particularly in addressing entrenched governance challenges such as corruption, resource mismanagement, and inefficiencies in public service delivery. For instance:

- **Post-Earthquake Reconstruction (2015):** Network Governance could enhance the coordination between local governments, non-governmental organizations, and international donors to streamline aid distribution and reconstruction efforts.
- **Decentralization:** By fostering partnerships between federal, provincial, and local governments, Network Governance can mitigate jurisdictional conflicts and improve service delivery at the grassroots level.
- **Disaster Risk Management:** A networked approach could strengthen Nepal's preparedness and response mechanisms by integrating expertise and resources from various stakeholders, ensuring timely and effective action during emergencies.

Adopting Network Governance principles can enable Nepal to transcend its bureaucratic silos, align stakeholder efforts, and build a governance system that is flexible, inclusive, and resilient to complex challenges.

To mitigate such issues, the theory advocates for robust oversight frameworks, transparent decision-making processes, and effective mechanisms to align the actions of agents with the goals of the principals. These principles are particularly relevant for Nepal, where weak accountability systems and bureaucratic inertia often hinder effective governance.

1.2 Public Administration Models

Public administration has traditionally been associated with Weberian Bureaucracy, a model introduced by Max Weber in the early 20th century. This model is characterized by hierarchical structures, strict adherence to rules, and a focus on procedure over flexibility. While this approach brought order and predictability to public administration, its rigid nature often hindered adaptability, innovation, and responsiveness to citizen needs. Its limitations, particularly in addressing inefficiencies and red tape, have led to a shift towards more flexible and responsive governance systems.

For instance, in Nepal, Weberian principles dominate many public offices, resulting in procedural delays and inefficiencies, particularly in service delivery and policy implementation.

Recognizing these limitations, modern governance systems have increasingly shifted toward more flexible and responsive models. This shift is exemplified by:

New Public Management (NPM): Emphasizing efficiency, privatization, and a results-oriented approach, NPM seeks to reform traditional bureaucracy by integrating business principles into public service. For example, countries like New Zealand have successfully implemented NPM to enhance service quality and reduce administrative costs.

Participatory Governance: Emerging as an extension of New Public Administration (NPA) from the 1980s and 1990s, this model prioritizes citizen engagement, inclusivity, and transparency in decision-making. In Nepal, participatory governance is reflected in local government initiatives aimed at involving communities in resource allocation and development planning.

In the 1980s and 1990s, **New Public Administration (NPA)** emerged, advocating for greater inclusivity, responsiveness, and citizen engagement in public service delivery. This approach aligns with the principles of good governance, which prioritize transparency, participation, and accountability in decision-making processes (Frederickson, 1980). Nepal's adoption of certain aspects of NPA, especially after its democratic transition, reflects the growing emphasis on these principles.

The adoption of such responsive governance systems offers Nepal an opportunity to address systemic inefficiencies and create public institutions that are more adaptable, inclusive, and capable of meeting contemporary challenges.

1.3 Governance Indicators

Several international organizations, including the World Bank and the United Nations, have developed governance indicators to assess the quality of governance within states. Key indicators include:

- **Transparency:** The extent to which governmental actions, decisions, and policies are open and accessible to the public.

- **Accountability:** Mechanisms that ensure government officials are held responsible for their actions, particularly in terms of misuse of resources or corruption.
- **Rule of Law:** The enforcement of laws fairly and consistently across all individuals and institutions.
- **Public Participation:** The ability of citizens to engage in policy-making processes and hold officials accountable.

These governance indicators are particularly relevant to Nepal, where concerns about corruption, lack of transparency, and weak institutional accountability are prevalent. Strengthening these governance indicators is essential to improving the effectiveness of public administration in the country.

2. Good Governance in Public Administration

2.1 Global Best Practices

Countries like **Singapore, Denmark, and New Zealand** are often cited as models of good governance, having established systems that prioritize transparency, accountability, and effective public service delivery. In Singapore, for example, the government's commitment to fighting corruption and maintaining a highly efficient civil service has led to significant improvements in public administration (Tan, 2020). Similarly, Denmark consistently ranks high in governance indices due to its emphasis on inclusive decision-making processes, citizen engagement, and strong institutional frameworks (Transparency International, 2021).

2.2 Nepal's Context

In Nepal, the governance landscape is marred by challenges such as corruption, inefficiencies in service delivery, and limited public participation. These issues stem from weak institutional frameworks, a lack of political will, and insufficient accountability mechanisms. While Nepal has made some strides in governance reforms, particularly in terms of decentralizing power to local governments, there is still a long way to go in terms of enhancing transparency and reducing bureaucratic delays.

3. Challenges in Public Administration and Governance in Nepal

3.1 Corruption

Corruption is one of the most significant barriers to effective governance and public administration in Nepal. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, Nepal ranks low in perceived corruption, with high levels of mismanagement in public offices and weak enforcement of anti-corruption laws. Such corruption undermines

the functioning of public institutions, leading to inefficiency in service delivery, poor public trust, and a lack of accountability (Transparency International, 2021).

In many cases, public officials in Nepal often prioritize personal or political gains over public service, causing delays and misallocation of resources. Government procurement, the management of public funds, and appointments in civil service are often tainted by corrupt practices. For example, the construction of public infrastructure assets in Nepal has been known for cost overruns, delays, and low-quality outcomes due to corruption in awarding contracts.

3.2 Bureaucratic Inefficiencies

Bureaucratic inefficiency is another major issue plaguing Nepal's public administration. The country's public sector is characterized by excessive red tape, slow decision-making processes, and a lack of inter-departmental coordination. As a result, public services are delivered inefficiently, and the country suffers from frequent project delays, high administrative costs, and general dissatisfaction among citizens regarding the government's ability to provide basic services (Shrestha, 2022).

Nepal's bureaucracy operates hierarchically, often leading to rigidity in decision-making and a lack of flexibility in addressing emerging issues. Additionally, there is a significant gap between policy formulation and implementation, with many well-intentioned governance reforms failing to create an impact due to bureaucratic bottlenecks.

3.3 Decentralization Issues

Following the promulgation of Nepal's 2015 constitution, the country moved towards a federal system of governance, transferring significant powers and responsibilities to local governments. However, the decentralization process has faced numerous challenges. Many local government units lack the capacity and resources needed to function effectively. Additionally, there has been a lack of clarity regarding the division of powers between federal, provincial, and local governments, leading to confusion and conflicts over jurisdiction (Dahal, 2021).

The decentralization process has also been hindered by inadequate training for local government officials, leading to inefficiencies in service delivery at the sub-national levels. Poor coordination between federal and sub-national governments has further exacerbated governance challenges, with local governments often feeling neglected or inadequately supported by the federal government.

3.4 Case Studies: Governance Failures in Nepal

Several case studies highlight the governance challenges in Nepal. For instance, the reconstruction efforts following the 2015 earthquake were marred by delays and inefficiencies in resource allocation. Despite international donors pledging billions of dollars for reconstruction, the slow response from the government and corruption in fund management meant that many affected people did not receive timely assistance (Paudel, 2021).

Another example is the management of Nepal's COVID-19 response. While many countries swiftly enacted policies to control the spread of the virus and support their citizens, Nepal struggled with bureaucratic delays and poor coordination between federal and provincial governments. This lack of preparedness and mismanagement had severe consequences for the public health system and the overall pandemic response. Dahal, R. (2021)

4. Role of International Organizations in Governance Reform

4.1 The United Nations and Governance Programs

The United Nations has played an important role in promoting governance reforms in Nepal, particularly through the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**. The UNDP's Governance Programme focuses on building institutional capacity in Nepal, supporting the decentralization process, and promoting human rights and the rule of law. These initiatives aim to strengthen the capacity of government institutions to manage resources more effectively and to promote transparency and accountability in public administration (UNDP, 2022).

The UN's role has also been significant in supporting electoral processes, fostering democratic institutions, and encouraging citizen participation in governance. Through its programs, the UN has worked closely with local and federal governments to promote inclusivity, especially in marginalized groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, and the Dalit community, in governance.

4.2 Donor-Driven Governance Reforms

Donor organizations, such as the **World Bank** and **USAID**, have been supporting governance reforms in Nepal. The World Bank, for example, has supported several governance projects aimed at improving the management of public finances, enhancing public procurement systems, and reducing corruption. These projects often come with conditions, requiring the Nepalese government to undertake certain reforms in exchange for funding.

However, there is an ongoing debate about the effectiveness of donor-driven reforms. While international organizations have provided much-needed technical assistance and funding, the sustainability of these reforms is often questioned. Once donor funding ends, many reforms struggle to be fully institutionalized within the public sector, indicating a need for a stronger commitment from the government to continue these initiatives (World Bank, 2020).

4.3 International Best Practices

Countries like **Denmark**, **Singapore**, and **New Zealand** serve as models for governance reform in developing countries. Denmark, for example, is known for its strong institutional

frameworks that promote transparency and citizen participation. Singapore's governance model, with its emphasis on merit-based civil service, stringent anti-corruption laws, and the use of technology in governance, provides valuable lessons for Nepal (Tan, 2020). By studying such best practices, Nepal can adopt key strategies to enhance the efficiency and accountability of its public administration.

5. Analyzing Perceptions of Good Governance and Public Administration in Nepal

This chapter presents findings from a survey conducted among 100 respondents to assess perceptions regarding good governance and its role in strengthening public administration in Nepal. The survey focuses on key governance dimensions such as transparency, accountability, inclusivity, efficiency, and citizen participation. Respondents included government officials, local representatives, civil society members, and general citizens.

The survey targeted 100 respondents representing local government offices, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the general public. A structured questionnaire was designed with Likert-scale questions (1- Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neutral, 4- Agree, 5- Strongly Agree). The questions covered governance indicators such as transparency, accountability, public participation, technology adoption, and service delivery efficiency. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and percentage) were applied for interpretation.

Given table shows the Survey Questions with their dimension

S.N.	Survey Question	Governance Dimension
1	The government ensures transparency in decision-making and public resource allocation.	Transparency
2	There are adequate accountability mechanisms to hold public officials responsible for their actions.	Accountability
3	Citizens can actively participate in policy-making processes at the local and federal levels.	Public Participation
4	Corruption significantly hampers effective public administration in Nepal.	Corruption
5	Bureaucratic inefficiencies lead to delays and reduced quality in public service delivery.	Efficiency
6	The adoption of e-governance and technology can improve transparency and service delivery in Nepal's public administration.	Technology Adoption
7	There is sufficient capacity among local government officials to implement good governance practices effectively.	Capacity Building

S.N.	Survey Question	Governance Dimension
8	Decentralization has enhanced service delivery at the grassroots level.	Decentralization
9	International organizations have contributed effectively to strengthening governance frameworks in Nepal.	International Contribution
10	Nepal can learn valuable lessons from global best practices like Singapore or Denmark to improve public administration efficiency.	Global Best Practices

On the above questions, the summarized data of responses from 100 participants on the Likert scale.

Survey Question (Summarized)	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
Transparency: The government ensures transparency in decision-making.	10	20	30	25	15	3.15	1.14
Accountability: Adequate mechanisms to hold public officials accountable exist.	15	30	25	20	10	2.80	1.15
Participation: Citizens actively participate in policy-making processes.	12	22	35	21	10	2.95	1.10
Corruption: Corruption hampers effective public administration.	5	8	12	45	30	3.87	1.04
Efficiency: Bureaucratic inefficiencies delay public service delivery.	6	12	18	40	24	3.64	1.08
Technology: E-governance improves transparency and efficiency.	3	10	22	35	30	3.79	1.05
Capacity Building: Local officials have sufficient capacity for good governance.	20	30	28	15	7	2.59	1.13
Decentralization: Service delivery has improved through decentralization.	10	18	35	27	10	3.09	1.10
International Contribution: International organizations support governance frameworks.	5	12	30	32	21	3.52	1.09
Global Practices: Nepal can learn from global governance models.	2	8	18	42	30	3.90	1.01

Source: Field Survey 2024

The survey findings reveal key insights into the state of governance and public administration in Nepal. Regarding transparency, the mean score of 3.15 indicates mixed perceptions among

respondents. While 30% remained neutral, 35% either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the government ensures transparency in decision-making and resource allocation. This highlights the urgent need for reforms to strengthen transparency mechanisms. In terms of accountability, the low mean score of 2.80 reflects significant weaknesses in holding public officials responsible for their actions. Nearly 45% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that adequate accountability measures exist, pointing to the necessity of establishing robust oversight frameworks.

Citizen participation in policy-making processes was also found to be limited, with a mean score of 2.95. The responses suggest that citizens lack sufficient opportunities to engage in decision-making, signifying the need for improved platforms and mechanisms to promote inclusive governance. Corruption emerged as a critical issue, with a high mean score of 3.87. Approximately 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that corruption significantly hampers effective governance and public administration, emphasizing the need for stringent anti-corruption measures.

In terms of efficiency, the mean score of 3.64 reveals that respondents perceive bureaucratic inefficiencies as a major barrier, with 64% agreeing that delays and poor coordination undermine service delivery. On a more positive note, technology adoption received a favourable response, with a mean score of 3.79. About 65% of respondents agreed that e-governance can enhance transparency and improve the efficiency of public service delivery, reflecting optimism about leveraging digital tools for governance reform.

Conversely, capacity building remains a significant challenge, as reflected by the low mean score of 2.59. Respondents highlighted that local government officials lack the capacity to implement governance practices effectively, necessitating targeted training and skill development programs. Regarding decentralization, the mean score of 3.09 indicates mixed responses. While some improvements in service delivery at the grassroots level were acknowledged, gaps in effective implementation and coordination persist.

The role of international organizations in supporting governance reforms was moderately recognized, with a mean score of 3.52. Respondents acknowledged their contributions in strengthening institutional frameworks and promoting good governance. Finally, strong optimism was expressed about learning from global best practices, with a mean score of 3.90. The relevance of models from countries like Singapore and Denmark was emphasized as a valuable reference for improving Nepal's public administration systems.

The survey findings indicate that while technology adoption and international best practices offer significant opportunities for strengthening public administration, challenges such as corruption, weak accountability, and limited capacity persist. Addressing these issues through institutional reforms, capacity building, and enhanced transparency can contribute to good governance, aligning Nepal's public administration systems with global standards.

6. Recommendations for Strengthening Governance and Public Administration in Nepal

6.1 Institutional Reforms

One of the key recommendations for improving governance and public administration in Nepal is the need for **institutional reforms**. This includes strengthening the legal framework for anti-corruption, improving the accountability mechanisms for public officials, and fostering a more merit-based civil service system. There is also a need to streamline bureaucratic processes and reduce red tape to ensure that public services are delivered more efficiently.

6.2 Capacity Building

Capacity building is critical to improving the performance of Nepal's public administration. Public officials, particularly at the local level, require training and technical support to effectively carry out their roles. International organizations can play a significant role in providing such support, but there must also be a concerted effort from the government to invest in building the capacity of its workforce.

6.3 Public Participation

Enhancing **public participation** in governance is essential for creating a more inclusive and accountable system. The government should create more opportunities for citizens to participate in policy-making processes, such as through public consultations or digital platforms that allow citizens to provide feedback on government initiatives. Promoting civil society engagement in governance processes will also be key to ensuring greater transparency.

6.4 Technology and E-Governance

Technology can be a powerful tool for improving transparency and accountability in public administration. Nepal can benefit from the implementation of **e-governance** systems, which would allow for greater transparency in public procurement, efficient management of public resources, and the delivery of online services to citizens. Singapore, for example, has successfully integrated technology into its governance systems, resulting in significant improvements in service delivery and public sector efficiency (Tan, 2020).

7. Conclusion

Good governance is fundamental to strengthening public administration, particularly in developing countries like Nepal. The country faces significant challenges, including corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and limited capacity at the local level. However, there are clear opportunities for improvement through institutional reforms, capacity building, and the integration of technology. By drawing lessons from global best practices—particularly from

countries with robust governance frameworks—Nepal can implement meaningful reforms to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of its public administration. Promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen participation will enable the government to improve service delivery, build public trust, and ensure the effective management of public resources.

The survey findings underscore both the opportunities and challenges for strengthening governance and public administration in Nepal. While technology adoption and learning from international best practices provide significant potential for reform, persistent systemic issues—such as corruption, weak accountability mechanisms, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and capacity gaps—continue to impede progress.

Addressing these challenges through institutional reforms, targeted capacity-building initiatives, enhanced public participation, and the adoption of digital governance tools can lead to tangible improvements in governance outcomes. Aligning Nepal's governance frameworks with global standards will not only enhance public service delivery but also foster greater transparency, accountability, and trust among citizens.

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