The Role of Social Mobilization to Empower Communities in Decision-Making

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Abstract

This paper draws on practical experiences gained from grassroots engagement and policy advocacy to explore the role of social mobilization in enhancing people's participation in decision-making processes. It examines community practices that influence various aspects of people's lives. The core questions addressed include the definition of social mobilization, its rationale, methods employed, and its overarching purpose. At its heart, mobilization is a facilitated process utilizing diverse tools and methods to achieve participation as its ultimate goal.

The paper emphasizes that "every person is political," highlighting the importance of accommodating diverse societal views, needs, and cultures in social mobilization efforts. It underscores the contextual and non-linear nature of mobilization, which varies across different segments of society. Furthermore, the long-term impact of mobilization is stressed, affecting broader spheres such as mass conscientization and policy governance over time.

Overall, the paper elucidates how social mobilization, through its multifaceted approach, strives to foster inclusive decision-making processes by empowering communities and amplifying their voices effectively. The role of social mobilization in Nepal's decision-making processes has been significantly influenced by the Civil Code of 2074 and other related policies. The achievements in this area demonstrate progress toward more inclusive and participatory governance. However, continued focus on addressing implementation challenges and enhancing community capacity remains crucial for realizing the full potential of these legal and policy frameworks.

Keywords: community, decision making, governance, participation, mass conscientization

Introduction

Mobilization serves as a crucial tool for empowering individuals and communities towards sustainable development. It involves equipping people with the capacity to engage as informed and proactive citizens, advocating for their rights and participating actively in shaping public opinion—a cornerstone of democratic principles aimed at democratizing democracy itself through robust mobilization efforts. The Government of Nepal (91999) has stated that social mobilization focuses on empowering people, establishing inclusive platforms and processes that foster community engagement in public discourse. Ministry of federal Affairs and Local Development (2008) has shown the ways that central to these efforts is education, which plays a pivotal role by providing knowledge, imparting practical skills to apply that knowledge effectively, and nurturing positive attitudes essential for active civic participation.

Social mobilization and community participation are closely intertwined, where mobilization acts as an initial effort and participation serves as a measurable outcome. The Government of Nepal (91999) has clarified that increased engagement of communities in both formal and informal public spheres serve as indicators of empowerment and widespread awareness. This includes the creation of inclusive policy environments that cater to people's needs. Ministry of federal Affairs and Local Development (2008) has described about the concept of the mobilization that Politically and socially, mobilization entails the dissemination and utilization of knowledge, aiming to empower individuals and enhance institutional collaboration for greater efficacy.

Participation encompasses involvement in structured organizations, expressing opinions, participating in deliberations, contributing ideas, fostering consensus, and influencing behavioral

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change—a collective effort towards common goals. The Government of Nepal (91999) has expressed the concept that social mobilization is broadly defined as a concerted movement to mobilize public participation, often employed by grassroots and political entities to achieve specific objectives. Ministry of federal Affairs and Local Development (2008) has pointed out that the Governments frequently utilize mobilization strategies to garner national support for initiatives beneficial to the entire populace, such as encouraging voter turnout and engagement in electoral processes and other civic events.

Disempowerment poses a significant risk in the context of social mobilization and community participation. Dahal (2009) has raised the important of people' participation in the election by the marginalized and backward groups. Ministry of federal Affairs and Local Development (2008) has provided the concept that factors such as mutual respect, dignity, economic status, and societal barriers often hinder the empowerment process, impacting individuals' ability to engage fully in public spheres. This dynamic mirrors natural behaviors where, for example, two plants initially planted under identical conditions may receive unequal care over time. Ministry of Federal Affairs and local Development, Working Procedures and guidelines (www.lgcdp.gov.np www.mofald.gov.np) has advocated about the procedures and the ways of development and has expressed that idea that the plant perceived as less vibrant may be neglected, reinforcing the belief that it is unworthy of attention, thus deteriorating further, while the healthier plant thrives with continued care.

Similarly, in communities, individuals with greater economic and social privilege tend to receive more opportunities and support, whereas those marginalized by poverty and social exclusion often face systemic barriers that limit their participation and empowerment in public life. Ministry of Federal Affairs and local Development, Working Procedures and guidelines (www.lgcdp.gov.np www.mofald.gov.np) has displayed the concept of the social mobilization and has further explained that social mobilization seeks to counteract these disparities by creating inclusive and supportive environments where all individuals can contribute meaningfully.

Throughout this process, participatory tools play a crucial role in building knowledge, fostering positive attitudes, and empowering people to become active citizens. Baral (2009) has advised the way increasing the participation of the people in election through the social mobilization process. In this context, social mobilization efforts aim to inspire new ideas, motivate individuals, facilitate inclusive processes, and ultimately empower marginalized groups to engage more effectively in public spaces. Thus, mobilization serves as a catalyst for creating inclusive spaces where diverse voices can thrive and contribute to societal progress. The constitution of Nepal has managed better provision for the social mobilization to the communities in the process of decision Making in Nepal but it has become as hard as Adhikari et al (2020) have discussed about the condition of the global politics and it has turned out as complex as Adhikari et al (2022) have analyzed the condition of the global political situation and it has been realized as serious as Adhikari (2020) has explained about the global condition generated by the coronavirus. Even though it has become complex tasks, it must have been attempted for the social mobilization to empower the communities in decision making procedure in the country.

The Research Questions

The social mobilization is one of the policies of making decision in politics and it is the process of empowering the communities to involve all corners of people in politically in the process of activism. When social mobilization take place, then it becomes an opportunity to all to know about the contemporary issues and the on-going condition of the country and the people naturally get informed regarding the political scenario of the nation. The social mobilizers do have more information about the political condition both of national and international context and the common people get involved in the process of being activated in the political participation and in the political activities conducted by the political parties. However, the research has attempted in answering the following research

questions in exploring the facts of the political participation of the general people in the political process.

    A) What can become the motivating factors for the general mass of people through the social mobilizations?

    B) How do the common people get empowered in the participation of political process by the social mobilization?

The objective of the research

The research has got it objective of exploring the facts of the process of empowering the communities in the political process through the social mobilization. The primary objectives of the research are:

    A) To explore about what can become the motivating factors for the general mass of people through the social mobilizations

    B) To identify the facts about how do the common people get empowered in the participation of political process by the social mobilization

Research Methodology

The research has employed both historical and analytical approaches of about the process of social mobilization in empowering the communities. It utilizes a combination of descriptive and analytical methodologies, utilizing secondary sources gathered from various channels. These sources include library materials, online resources, published literature such as newspapers, books, magazines, and archived documents, focusing on themes related to inclusion, policy development, and political representation. Statistical data and historical evidence are sourced from reliable outlets to maintain the accuracy and validity of the information. Additionally, authoritative websites and external links are consulted to explore established theories and concepts.

Moreover, the study incorporates recent developments in the contemporary political landscape, engaging in critical analysis and constructive discussion. The researcher's personal insights and perspectives contribute significantly to enriching the study's findings, thereby enhancing the depth and breadth of understanding on the topic.

Literature Review

In Nepal, social mobilization has played a significant role in empowering communities and influencing decision-making processes, particularly with the provisions outlined in the Civil Code of 2074 (2017). Some of the key concepts of an overview of policy reviews and achievements in the area of social mobilization to empower the communities in decision making process have been presented in sub topics below:

Policy Reviews and Achievements

The policy reviews and achievements have been discussed on the basis of the civil code of 2074 of Nepal in different sub-topics.

Civil Code of 2074 (2017)

Empowerment of Communities: The Civil Code of 2074, also known as the Nepal Civil Code, represents a significant legal framework for social justice and community empowerment. It introduced comprehensive reforms aimed at enhancing individual rights, particularly for marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

Provisions for Social Mobilization: The Code includes provisions for promoting gender equality, protecting the rights of children, and supporting marginalized communities. These provisions are crucial for social mobilization as they establish legal frameworks that communities can leverage to advocate for their rights.

Decentralization Efforts

Local Governance Act (2017): This act complements the Civil Code by decentralizing administrative and financial powers to local government units. This shift empowers local communities by giving them more control over local decision-making processes and resource allocation.

Achievements: Increased local participation in governance, improved service delivery, and better responsiveness to community needs have been notable achievements resulting from this decentralization.

Social Mobilization Initiatives

Community-Based Organizations: Various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) have played a crucial role in mobilizing communities. They work on raising awareness, advocating for rights, and building capacity among local populations.

Achievements: Enhanced community engagement in policy dialogues, successful grassroots campaigns for policy changes, and increased local advocacy for rights and services are some of the key achievements.

Policy Frameworks and Programs

National Action Plan for Women: This plan aims to promote gender equality and empower women at the community level. Social mobilization efforts under this plan have led to increased female participation in decision-making processes and local governance.

Achievements: Improved representation of women in local bodies, more gender-sensitive policies, and increased awareness of women's rights in communities.

Challenges and Areas for Improvement

Implementation Gaps: Despite these advancements, there are still challenges related to the effective implementation of policies and ensuring that legal provisions translate into tangible benefits for communities.

Awareness and Capacity Building: There is a need for continued efforts in building awareness about legal rights and enhancing the capacity of local organizations to effectively mobilize and advocate.

The role of social mobilization in Nepal's decision-making processes has been significantly influenced by the Civil Code of 2074 and other related policies. The achievements in this area demonstrate progress toward more inclusive and participatory governance. However, continued focus on addressing implementation challenges and enhancing community capacity remains crucial for realizing the full potential of these legal and policy frameworks.

Findings

The principle of empowering the communities through the social mobilization and the support of making decision can depend in the various forms of policies and the strategies that have to be adopted and applied in the process of getting the common people participated in the political activities.

Policy Context

Following the restoration of democracy in 1990, Nepal underwent significant developments aimed at institutionalizing and practicing democratic norms and values. Key advancements included the establishment of a multi-party system, regular elections, the formation of people's governments, and the incorporation of fundamental rights in the constitution. Action Aid (2012) has analyzed that additionally, the government introduced the Local Self Governance Act in 1999, designed to promote local democracy. Subsequent policies, regulations, and guidelines were implemented to support this act. At the local level, Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Municipalities were structured with inclusive arrangements, such as ensuring at least 20% participation of women in village councils

(as per LSGA 1999). Likewise, the decentralization of essential services such as healthcare, education, and agriculture to local governments, such as District Development Committees, represents a shift towards greater democracy and participation. This includes a requirement for 33% representation of women in all formal structures, aimed at fostering women's leadership. Furthermore, there is a mandatory provision stipulating that key committee positions (chair, treasurer, or secretary) must be held by at least one woman. Action Aid (2012) has explained that the current governance system also embraces an inclusive structure with proportional representation based on gender, caste, and ethnicity, highlighting its diversity and inclusivity. Since the Maoist insurgency and the People's Movement II in 2006, there has been evident mobilization and empowerment among marginalized communities, illustrating ongoing societal shifts and initiatives aimed at fostering inclusivity in governance.

The Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCDP) represents a comprehensive framework for local governance, integrating programming and SWaP (Secoto Wide Approach of Programming), marking a significant step towards democratic development and community-led initiatives with a sense of ownership. It aims to address both the demand and supply sides through enhancing the capacities of rights holders and service providers, establishing essential structures. The enactment of policies underscores its significance. Romano (92013) has identified that the formation of inclusive community-led groups and bodies such as Citizen Awareness Centre (CAC) and Word Citizen Forum (WCF) at the grassroots level provides vital political arenas for ordinary citizens. Empowered politically and technically, citizens can effectively wield their influence within these spheres. Romano (92013) has further revealed that the authorization granted to these entities, along with their direct ties to local government mechanisms, further bolsters their role. Moving beyond traditional methods of savings and credit mobilization, the Reflect (Regenerated Freerian Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) initiative has been adopted to enhance mobilization impact, renaming it as the Transformative Social Livelihood Mobilization Empowerment Program for graduated CACS. Its linkage with WCF and influence on the annual planning process are well-articulated in policy papers; however, the actual implementation falls short of expectations.

Election Commission Report 2064 B.S has emphasized in the process of maximum participation of the people. The role of social mobilization by local non-governmental organizations and the establishment of an independent facility, the Local Governance Accountability Facility (LGAF), highlight a transformative shift in government commitment and responsibility towards the democratization process. Simultaneously, Dahal (1997) has focused in the participation of people in large number in election and it shows that the introduction of decentralization initiatives led to the creation of various public platforms through policy measures. These include the implementation of Minimum Conditions and Performance Measures (MCPM), mandatory provisions for Social Audits, Public Hearings, and Public Audits, supported by operational guidelines. Romano (92013) has displayed that the enactment of the Right to Information Act and Citizen Charter with compensation, alongside the integration of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI), Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG), and Environment-Friendly Local Governance (EFLG), are pivotal steps in enhancing local governance practices.

These policies are designed to encourage social mobilization and foster people's participation in decision-making processes. Baral, and Leo E. Rose. (1998) have discussed about value of people's participation in the process of politics through social mobilization. When effectively implemented, they can serve as models for citizen-led local development. Various mobilization practices such as political and knowledge mobilization have been employed globally to achieve sustainable development and eradicate poverty. A wide array of tools, approaches, and methodologies have been utilized by diverse stakeholders for this purpose.

The involvement of local non-governmental organizations in social mobilization and the establishment of the independent Local Governance Accountability Facility (LGAF) to ensure local government accountability are clear indications of how governmental understanding and commitment to the democratization process have evolved. Concurrently, Mishra (2008) has focused on the

importance of social mobilization and it is political participation in the decentralization program has led to the establishment of multiple public forums through policy initiatives. Key components of these policies include the Minimum Conditions and Performance Measures (MCPM), mandatory provisions for Social Audits, Public Audits, and Public Hearings with operational guidelines. Additionally, Chambers (2013) has pointed out that the enactment of the Right to Information Act and the implementation of Citizen Charters with compensation, along with the integration of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI), Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG), and Environment-Friendly Local Governance (EFLG), represent critical avenues for enhancing local governance practices.

All these policies emphasize the importance of social mobilization to enhance people's involvement in decision-making processes. Participatory tools such as social mapping, resource mapping, transect walks, seasonal calendars, accessibility mapping, and power mapping have been consistently used as facilitative tools across various forums like REFLECT, WCF, CAC, women's groups, cooperatives, and farmer groups. Chambers (2013) has shown that in the past, skill development, apprenticeship programs, and income generation training were widely employed methods for mobilizing people. These practices were implemented at the individual, group, and community levels. To integrate and advance our understanding of mobilization practices, it's essential to explore the following approaches and their interconnectedness and contributions.

a. Enabling and Empowering

Mobilization is a universal concept, but community mobilization specifically focuses on groups marginalized from development due to social, cultural, economic, or political disenfranchisement, or violations of their fundamental rights. Chambers (2013) has depicted the fact that to combat these injustices based on fabricated identities, it is crucial to build the capacities of these groups or individuals. Only when individuals possess the necessary capabilities can they effectively claim and expand their rightful space. Empowerment and enabling are processes essential for individuals to fully enjoy their human rights. Action Aid International Nepal (2012) has given the information that tools and methodologies such as REFLECT have become widely adopted for mobilizing communities. REFLECT focuses on identifying and addressing both internal suppressors (personal barriers) and external oppressors to achieve liberation from oppression. Its core principle is "review yourself and review the world." Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools serve as crucial instruments within REFLECT, maximizing community mobilization where the entire process is community-driven. Werner (1991) has provided the ideas of participation of the people in large number in election. The reflection-action cycle within REFLECT empowers individuals to introspect and take appropriate action. This process reveals that marginalization stems from historical processes rather than being inherent or natural; it is a product of human actions. Unlike natural constructs like winter cold that require adaptation, human-created structures such as societal norms can be dismantled and rebuilt according to changing human needs and contexts.

Creating groups of like-minded individuals, mobilizing and training them, developing leadership, understanding political policies and economic dynamics, promoting accountability, encouraging participation, and empowering people with awareness of political and economic opportunities are all examples of enabling and empowering individuals. ActionAid Nepal (2009) has made aware that these activities create political spaces, including "invited space" and "claimed space." In the context of participatory democratization, claimed space holds greater power than invited space. Invited space often operates as a ceremonial process constrained by legal boundaries, limiting individuals to conform to established policies or state systems. It serves primarily to facilitate processes outlined in policy documents. Nohlen (1996) has investigated about the social mobilization and empowering the communities through election system. Claimed space, on the other hand, goes beyond these limitations, providing room to nurture progressive ideas and advocate for the realization of rights in a dynamic and evolving manner. Throughout the process of progressive transformation, local-level groups and methodologies like REFLECT play pivotal roles in enabling and empowering

marginalized communities. These tools serve as key instruments in facilitating empowerment and fostering inclusivity within communities.

b. Mass Conscientization

Development signifies positive changes that lead to sustainable progress, achieved through collective efforts. Shah (1998) has focused about the process of election participating the people. The essence of development hinges on fostering prosperity and happiness, with the latter intrinsically linked to human rights. Therefore, mobilizing specific groups or segments of society alone cannot guarantee human rights. Chambers (2013) has identified the concept that the concepts of mobilization and participation do not entail denying individuals' rights to replace them with others. Instead, they center on progressively realizing the rights of every individual. In this process, Reflect Mother Manual (91996) has explored the fact that ensuring the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized requires that ordinary citizens perceive their own liberation and actively work towards realizing the rights of others. Central to this approach is building a critical mass, fostering solidarity, and mobilizing the majority to address the concerns of minorities. Reflect Mother Manual (91996) has given the idea that power serves as the primary tool for transformation, yet its potential for misuse for personal gain is evident. From a broader perspective, Dalits endure the dehumanizing practice of untouchability, rooted in the caste system which categorizes individuals as high or low based on birth. This practice not only perpetuates the suffering of Dalits but also significantly hinders societal progress, pushing development back by centuries.

Simultaneously, while Dalits suffer from untouchability, those considered high caste are burdened by the mindset of caste superiority and inferiority, as well as concerns over purity and impurity. ActionAid Nepal (2009) has indicated that within the Dalit community itself, there exist various hidden factors and hierarchies. Despite these complexities, the issue of untouchability exemplifies the need for mobilization to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor simultaneously. Addressing untouchability requires more than just raising awareness and mobilizing Dalits. ActionAid Nepal (2009) has further clarified that it necessitates widespread education among the general populace about the realities on the ground, supported by evidence gathered through processes of empowerment and enablement. Upreti (2009) has discussed about the electoral system and empowering the communities and it has shown that the majority of society must play a supportive role in dismantling this discriminatory practice, recognizing its pervasive impact and actively contributing to its resolution.

Conclusion

Mobilization fundamentally aims to "empower citizens" across diverse domains without limitation to specific contexts. Practical insights highlight that capacity—comprising knowledge, skills, and attitudes—is pivotal in mobilization efforts. The development of social, political, and cultural frameworks mandated by policy plays a crucial role in harnessing citizen capacity. These elements collectively function as interdependent variables within the context of conditional dependency theory. They serve as foundational prerequisites for fostering an environment conducive to people's participation and empowerment.

Mobilization extends beyond the mere mobilization of people; it encompasses the mobilization of capacity, policy, and structures, influenced by various interconnected factors. Attitudes, behaviors, and practices serve as critical catalysts driving the mobilization of these components. A positive attitude, proactive behaviors, and inclusive participatory processes play pivotal roles in motivating both individuals and systems towards effective mobilization. These factors collectively contribute to meaningful participation across different levels of development initiatives.

In conclusion, mobilization is a multifaceted process that encompasses various dimensions. Over time and in different contexts, we have employed diverse forms of mobilization to tackle distinct challenges. Achieving synergy among sensitization, economic empowerment, and the creation of a socially supportive environment for people is crucial for sustainable mobilization efforts. These three

components are inherently interconnected and should not be treated in isolation. Therefore, meaningful participation in decision-making processes relies on the active involvement of people, influenced by a range of actors including social, economic, and political entities. To ensure effective mobilization and sustained participation in development endeavors, it is essential to integrate these influential elements into a cohesive framework that promotes both sensitization and economic empowerment, while fostering a socially conducive environment for all. The role of social mobilization in Nepal's decision-making processes has been significantly influenced by the Civil Code of 2074 and other related policies. The achievements in this area demonstrate progress toward more inclusive and participatory governance. However, continued focus on addressing implementation challenges and enhancing community capacity remains crucial for realizing the full potential of these legal and policy frameworks.

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