

Impact of IT on Transparency, Accountability and Corruption Control in Nepal's Local Governments

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Abstract

Information Technology (IT) is essential for improving transparency, accountability, innovation, and national development. This study investigates the impact of IT in selected local bodies for transparency, accountability, and corruption control. The main goal of this study was to evaluate how well local bodies utilize digital infrastructures to enhance governance and service delivery to the public. A mixed-method approach was used, incorporating online surveys and telephone interviews with local government officials and individuals. The findings show that, many local bodies have difficulties when utilizing IT-based system into place, despite increasing awareness of digital governance. Insufficient infrastructure, geographical obstacles, lack of technical expertise and political influence all make it difficult to utilize IT and enhance accountability and transparency in local bodies. As a result, the potential of IT to reduce corruption and strengthen good governance has not yet been completely fulfilled. The study indicates that in order to achieve accountable, transparency, and corruption-free local bodies, it is essential to improve digital infrastructures, strengthen the capacity of local officials, and ensure strong political commitment.

Introduction

Information Technology is process of collecting, processing, storing, manipulating, retrieving and displaying data using various electronic system such as computer, hardware, software, network, etc. Information Technology can be a helpful tool for addressing problem, making decision, promoting accountability, assuring transparency and improving efficiency and effectiveness. IT covers all areas of computing technology, including databases, security, communication, e-government, e-commerce, multimedia, servers, the internet, networks, hardware, software, and the people who utilize these technologies (Kumar, 2014). According to

Sharma (2020), the Information Technology plays vital role to support good governance in Nepal by enhancing transparency and accountability and minimizing corruption. The study highlights various tools such as e-government systems, e-service, e-record management which can minimize human interference, bribery opportunities, and become easier to track activities and monitor decision making. The federal government, provincial government, and municipal government are the three pillars of our country. Compared to the federal and provincial governments, corruption affects local governments more. One of the finest ways to increase accountability, transparency, and reduce corruption is to effectively use cutting-edge technologies in various government sector (Panta, 2016).

Accountability embodies the duty and responsibility of individuals or organizations for their actions and behaviors, aimed at enhancing service delivery to the public. It is particularly crucial within local governments for the effective functioning of service delivery. There are several mechanisms of accountability, Such as internal (village/municipal executive body, internal auditing) and external (social auditing and public hearing, final auditing). These types of system keep an eye and assess the actions and performance of local bodies and making sure that local bodies in Nepal operate transparently, effectively and responsible to the public they serve. (Kc & Paudel, 2025). Governments are subject to external enforcement of vertical accountability through formal processes such as elections or indirectly through citizens and civil society, including the media. Elections are the most prevalent means of exercising vertical accountability. Horizontal accountability pertains to the responsibilities held by governments, regional authorities, and the broader community (Sarah Lister et al., 2010). The primary means of communicating with citizens to learn about their issues is through the local government. Many countries employ a variety of accountability mechanisms, but those which are connected to information technology include the Citizen Feedback Model, I Paid Bribe, Seoul Municipal government (open & OASIS), the Fix My Street platform (a web-based accountability mechanism that enables citizens to report their problems), and My E-municipality (Ardigó, 2019). Digital complaint mechanisms offer access to phones, the internet, and other digital devices. Through the Program for Accountability in Nepal (PRAN), the Social Accountability Mechanism (SAc) has been implemented in a number of Nepali sectors. By empowering citizens, this system has provided enormous possibilities for enhancing governance and service delivery (Karkee et al., 2013).

Concept of transparency through a postmodern lens, identifying three key metaphors. A public value that promotes integrity and combats corruption, that is directly linked to accountability, promoting transparent decision-making in government and nonprofit organization, despite concerns about secrecy and privacy and operating as a governance tool that policymakers use to enhance accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness considered as first, second and third level of transparency, respectively (Ball, 2009). Strengthening preparations for the eventual implementation of a freedom of information law, expanding the scope

and accessibility of information made available through the government's various transparency portals, assessing the efficacy of the ombudsman system, and efficacy of the government's charter of citizens' service are important strategies to promote transparency and citizen engagement in various government sectors (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2012). Technology use may have an effect on the transparency of municipal government. Online Procedure Enhancement for Civil Application System (OPEN) is one of the top technologies. The Korean government implemented this technique to improve citizen relations and transparency. According to the Korean Ministry of Planning and Budget (2001), the OPEN system covered a wide range of operations, such as transportation, construction, the environment, urban planning, housing, industry and economy, sanitation and welfare, fire emergency service, payment of construction and logistical expenses.

Corruption is characterized by the misuse of power that has been entrusted to individuals for personal benefit, as defined by Transparency International. Nepotism, bribery, embezzlement, fraud, and the improper use of public funds are different forms of corruption. In the context of corruption, Nepal is placed 107th position out of 180 countries with score of 34 out of 100 according to Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) (Transparency International, 2025). The study highlights corruption can be divided into two main categories in public sector, namely bureaucratic corruption and political corruption. Political corruption takes place when ruling parties influence the formulation of national laws, policies, and regulations to suit their interests. This includes practices such as owning hospitals or colleges and shaping policies that benefit them, vote rigging, registering unqualified, deceased, or non-existent voters, purchasing votes, and altering or fabricating election results. Bureaucratic corruption occurs when government officials manipulate laws, rules, and regulations to benefit themselves (Mbaku, 1996). Both forms of corruption are main caused by a variety of actions including embezzlement, nepotism, fraud, extortion, cronyism, parochialism, patronage and influence peddling. In underdeveloped countries, e-government platforms have been crucial in the fight against corruption. Anti-corruption initiatives include GCNet in Ghana, COPARA in Chile, BKMS in Kenya, and BHOO MI in India (Twinomurinzi & Ghartey-Tagoe, 2011). The effect of information technology on local governments in Nepal is examined in this research. In order to combat corruption in all its manifestations, this article investigates how information technology affects local governments in Nepal.

Three levels of government, central, provincial (state), and local have been established in Nepal as a federal state under the 2015 Constitution. The Constitution grants significant power and authority to local levels. However, there are a number of significant obstacles that local governments must overcome, such as a lack of laws and policies, a lack of coordination between the local and central province levels, poor mobilization, inadequate infrastructure and tools for information technology, a lack of qualified staff, low accountability and

transparency, and weak anti-corruption mechanisms. The issue of effectively implementing IT is especially critical for local levels. Discussions in three local units uncovered a number of problems, including the following: the presence of multiple trade unions in the civil service, the lack of information technology within Nepal's civil service, corruption, postponements impeding the development of local governments, insufficient staff, disputes between staff and elected leaders, excessive taxes on residents instead of providing services, and gaps in technical and administrative knowledge and skills (Chaudhary, 2019).

Local governance has existed in various forms in Nepal for centuries. Local governments were only used for judicial and administrative purposes during the Kirat and Malla eras. Only after democracy was restored in 1990 did the true idea of local development through local governments come into being. With 276 municipalities, 460 Rural municipalities, 6 metropolises, and 11 sub-metropolises, the 2015 Constitution established a new framework for local government. There are still many problems and obstacles in the growth of society. The expectations of local residents regarding service delivery, infrastructure development, economic well-being, and local prosperity are quite high. However, there is still uncertainty about the power and duty of local governments with relation to budgeting, planning, and fiscal year execution. When it comes to providing public services, the three tiers of government don't always work together or occasionally contradict one another. At the municipal level, accountability and openness are also important concerns. A study on the deployment of e-services among Kathmandu Valley municipalities revealed a number of troublesome obstacles, such as a weak in strategic planning, change management, financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, a lack of construction expertise, a lack of leadership support, and security and privacy issues (Dhonju & Shakya, 2019).

The study highlighted that local governance in Nepal distinguished by strong informal political influence and encourage collusion and weaken accountability so employees of local government use traditional methods for public service delivery and misuse of public funds (TAF, 2015). There are various factors to the rise of corruption, such as political authority, geographical challenges, illiteracy, an information gap, poverty, and a shortage of technical personnel. There are various solutions explored in this study, one of the most effective approaches may be implementation of IT in local governments, that can enhance the accountability and transparency in Nepal's local governance and help in the fight against corruption.

The study examined the existing condition of information technology and its effects on transparency and accountability in public service delivery in selected local bodies. The study aims to understand the current level of transparency and accountability in service delivery through the use of IT, examined the impact of IT on accountability, transparency and anti-corruption efforts, and analyzed how IT helps reduce corruption and improve openness and accountability. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to improving governance practices in Nepal's local bodies by highlighting the role of IT in promoting transparent,

efficient, and accountable public service delivery. The findings of this study provide valuable insights for local governments to improve service delivery, reduce corruption, promote transparency and accountability, and enhancing public trust in local governance in Nepal.

Methods and Materials

This study uses a descriptive and exploratory research approach to examine the impact of information technology on openness, accountability, and corruption control in selected local bodies. The descriptive approach focuses on describing the current situation of service delivery, transparency and accountability using information technology. The exploratory approach tries to discover the fundamental factors influencing the adoption of IT tools and techniques and their link to minimizing corruption. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed: telephone interviews offered qualitative insights into regional issues including political interference and geographical difficulties, while an online survey was used to collect quantitative data from local bodies employees and citizens. This integrated approach allowed a more comprehensive understanding of the current situation and the potential of IT in promoting good governance at the local level. Sudurpashchim Province has been the exclusive focus of this study. There are nine districts and eighty-eight local units in the province of Sudurpashchim, including one sub-metropolitan city, thirty-three urban municipalities, and fifty-four rural municipalities. Out of all the districts, the study has only looked at four of them, each of which has one urban and one rural municipality. These four districts include the rural municipalities of Patan and Surnaya in Baitadi district, Amargadhi and Bageshwar in Dadelhdhura district, Dhakari and Ramaroshan in Achham district, and Bogtan and Purbichauki in Doti district respectively. In order to evaluate the present situation and the service facilities offered by both rural and urban towns, the researcher has selected these particular locations.

There are two types of sampling techniques that are probability and non-probability. For this investigation, a probability random cluster sampling technique was employed to ensure that each cluster within the population had an equal chance of selection. This method was considered the most appropriate approach for selecting sampling units from a large and diverse population, as it enhances representativeness and minimizes sampling bias. The primary data were gathered through an online survey conducted among employees of local governments in the hilly regions of Sudurpashim Province. The email addresses and contact numbers of the employees were sourced from the websites of rural /urban municipalities. There were total 232 employees working on the research purpose selected rural/urban municipalities of Sudurpashim Province. Out of 232 employees, only 108 employees have email addresses. Out of 108 employees, some of them are active and some of them are passive which have been shown in table 1.

Another method of gathering primary data is by conducting telephone interviews with 22 individuals, 10 of whom are LG employees and 12 of whom are

members of the public. Every respondent came from a different town. By examining these respondents' backgrounds, motivations, visions, and policies, the researcher was able to comprehend the nature of local leadership.

Both primary and secondary data, incorporating quantitative and qualitative approaches, were used in this study. Primary data collected through an online survey and analyzed it according to study's objectives and data characteristics, while secondary data provided the background information of the study. The qualitative method was mainly used to understand current condition of IT mechanisms, planning conditions, and processes of local bodies through analysis of current activities, discussion and conversation. The results were analyzed and coded in tabular form using descriptive and analytical approach for data interpretation. Charts, graphs, statistical tools, and suitable software were used as necessary to ensure accuracy and clarity.

Results

The Data Analysis Focused on the Email Addresses of Employees Listed on Local Government Websites.

Table 1

Active and Passive Employees in Selected Rural and Urban Municipalities

Rural/Urban Municipalities	Total employees	Employees with email	Employees without email	Active employees	Passive employees
Mangalsen nagarpalika	11	9	3	4	5
Dhakari gaupalika	30	18	12	4	14
Purbichauki gaupalika	20	18	2	6	12
Bogatan –phudsil gaupal.	25	16	9	5	11
Amargadi nagarpalika	50	17	33	7	10
Bhageshwar gaupalika	24	10	14	5	5
Patan nagarpalika	50	10	14	8	2
Surnaya gaupalika	22	10	12	9	1
Total	232	108	99	48	60

As shown in Table 1, the total numbers of employees & their email address were collected from official website of local bodies except Patan Nagarpalika and Surnaya Gaupalika. The active respondents in online survey were 51 but 3 were not counted in this table due to inaccurate entries regarding the local bodies type. Here active employees are those who have given quick response of email and passive employees are those who have not given response of email. Still many employees do not have their own email address. This analysis shows many employees of

rural/urban municipalities are not actively engaged with email technology in their daily administrative activities.

Data Analysis of Responses to Yes/No Questions

Table 2

Responses to Yes/No Questionnaires

Survey questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total Respondents
Do you have to deal with political pressure at work?	80.9	19.1	47
Is every staff room equipped with CCTV?	10.2	89.8	49
Are biometric devices used for attendance in your office?	64.0	36.0	50
Do you think that work is delivered quickly and corruption is reduced using technology?	91.8	8.2	49
Do you have separate personal computer in office to work?	92.0	8.0	50
Is there a website for your office?	96.0	4.0	50
In your workplace, are you a technical person?	70.0	30.0	50
Do you think your office needs more tech with so many technical staff?	94.0	6.0	50

As shown in Table 2, maximum number of respondents stated that CCTV cameras were not installed at their workplace due to administrative, political and other technical problems. Many respondents are technologically competent and positive towards IT, many offices still do not use biometric device for attendance management. All local governments have their websites but some of the respondents do not know their rural/urban municipalities' websites. The finding suggest that technology is most important tool to control corruption and enhance transparency, accountability, efficiency and easy to service delivery but political, administration and technical problems are major obstacle to the effective implementation of technology.

Data Analysis of Existing IT Infrastructure

Table 3

Availability of Office IT Infrastructure Among Respondents

IT Infrastructure	Number of respondents
Biometric device	29
CCTV (Closed Circuit Television) camera	32
Computer server	23
Computer (Desktop or Laptop)	50
Digital notice board	28
Digital Voice recorder	4
E-municipality service	4
Fax	11

Internet	50
Multimedia projector	47
Photocopy machine	49
Printer	50
Scanner	49
Scrolling led board	6
Toll free call system	14
Website	49

Table 3 shows, here some of the technologies such as printers, photocopies, computers, scanners, internet and websites are mostly available but others like CCTV cameras, digital notice boards, toll free call systems are few available as much as possible in office to provide services to the public. It suggests that many forms technological infrastructure are still lacking and require further implementation by local bodies in Nepal

Data Analysis of Respondents' Current Hardware and Software Capabilities

Table 4

Respondents' Current Hardware and Software Capabilities

Hardware/Software	Number of respondents operationally capable
Biometric device	29
CCTV (closed circuit television) camera	30
Computer (laptop, desktop)	47
Computer networking	27
Database software	40
Digilocker App	1
Digital notice board	25
Digital Voice recorder	4
Financial transaction app	13
Income Tax and PAN Card App	3
MS office package	47
Multimedia projector	40
Photocopy machine	45
Photoshop	39
Printer	44
Public complaint app	4
Scrolling led board	7
Tally	24
Telephone	42
Toll free call system	13

As shown in Table 4, the hardware and software capabilities of the responders indicate a requirement for additional staff capacity building. Strengthening these digital skills is essential for enhancing the efficiency and quality of public service delivery in local bodies.

Analysis of Predominant Factors Based on Multi-Choice Questions

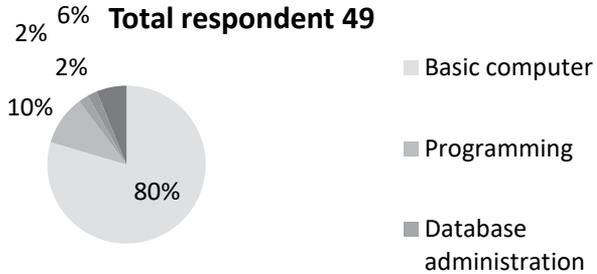
Table 5

Multiple-Choice Questions Include in the Survey

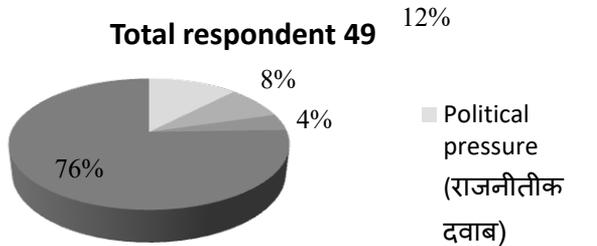
Fixed choice

Representation of results

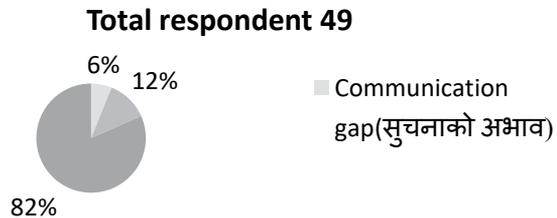
Which type of computer knowledge do you have?



What is main cause of the corruption in local governments?



What gap do you feel between municipality and public?



How do you receive your salary?



Table 5 shows that continuing political pressure, insufficient IT infrastructures for service delivery to the public and limited number of technically skilled staffs are the main factors that contribute to corruption in local bodies. Nevertheless, the

implementing of bank-based salary disbursement systems indicates that improving transparency, accountability, and financial integrity in local bodies operations.

Perception of public and staff for accountability, transparency, and corruption

A number of local government employees and members of the public were interviewed via telephone. Their perceptions and views are summarized as follows.

Public of LG

Public are not fully satisfied from their rural/urban municipalities. They claimed that local administration did not employ the necessary technology to provide services in a transparent and accountable manner. Local bodies have not fully implemented measures to promote transparency and citizen engagement in government, including implementing freedom of information laws, improving transparency portals, assessing the effectiveness of citizen services, and evaluating the ombudsman system. They accused LG personnel and elected officials of being biased in providing services to the public. Only those who are related to them receive favorable treatment from LG staffs. They claimed that elected officials just act well for their cadres and do not act fairly toward the general population. There is no transparency technology in various areas like transportation, construction, environment, housing, urban planning, industry and economy, sanitation, welfare, fire services, and payment systems.

The perception of the public indicates that lack in accountability and transparency within local bodies. Technology not so much engaged with citizen & partial corruption occurring in LG. Overall, to improve transparency & accountability in local government required to implement and adopt effective technological systems for service delivery to the public.

Employees of LG

According to the employee perception, the local bodies are slightly improving in official service delivery by adding necessary technology and manpower, but there are still insufficient of infrastructures, technology and manpower. They accepted that the sufficient Information Technologies related with accountability mechanism are not accessed & implemented in the local government such as Fix my street platform (Web based accountability mechanism that allow citizen to report their problem), Citizen feedback model, I paid bribe & My E-municipality etc. Some of technologies are available but not used by maximum people such as Digital complaint mechanism (access to phone, internet and other digital device), MIS etc. Some section of the municipal population deals with issues like transportation problems, inconsistent electrical supply, limited access and illiteracy. These types of problems are also obstacle to implementation of IT in rural/urban municipalities. IT tools and infrastructures need to present in both sides (administrative and public area) for openness and accountability.

The perceptions of public and employees have shown that essentially IT tools and infrastructures are most important to access and service delivery. Illiteracy,

fluctuation electricity and geographical difficulties are obstacle in implementation of IT tools and infrastructures. No Transparency and accountability have shown as much as required by people in municipalities. If there is no transparency and accountability as much as required by people then there is risk of corruption.

Finding

The results of the online survey's data analysis and interpretation show a number of important observations regarding the impact of information technology in local bodies. Most staff of local bodies do not actively utilize email or other digital communication tools in their daily work. Although respondents are favorable about IT tools and infrastructures, political influence, illiteracy, geographical limitations, and electrical fluctuations impede their deployment. Insufficient of digital infrastructures, skilled manpower and improper use of IT challenges are continue faced by local bodies. Enhancing the capacity of existing staff for efficiency and effective service of local bodies. Weak transparency and accountability remain in local bodies due to the limited adoption and ineffective implementation of IT systems. Political influence, inadequate IT infrastructure, lack of skilled human resources, and insufficient mechanisms are the factors to increase corruption in local bodies. Moreover, Lack of IT tools and infrastructures in both sides (citizen and government employee) restrict meaningful impact in local bodies to access and interaction between client and server. Many elected representative and employees have been misusing their entrusted power for private gain from local bodies. Hence, the effective implementation of IT tools and infrastructure is crucial to enhancing transparency, accountability, and the overall integrity of local governance in Nepal.

Discussion

According to the study, corruption in local bodies is caused by several reasons, such as political influence, geographical restriction, lack of skilled manpower, insufficient of IT tools infrastructures, reliance on the traditional administrative practice, union of employees and lacking of capacity development program. The adoption of effective information technology can be reduced corruption and enhance transparency, accountability and efficiency in service delivery. To find out the current state of IT implementation, e-services, technological initiatives and its impact on local bodies, researcher used an online survey.

Municipalities still struggle with planning, budgeting, coordination and providing public services even after local governing institutions were established in 2015. Inconsistent services, a lack of transparency, and favoritism in administrative procedures are among the complaints made by public. By encouraging open data access, real-time monitoring, and improved citizen participation and effective utilization of IT could help address these governance issues. However, there are still barriers to advancement, such as political influence, lack of human resources, and limited access to technology.

Examples from throughout the world highlights how IT can revolutionize governance. For example, by reducing bureaucratic discretion and corruption, Seoul's Online Procedures Enhancement for Civil Applications (OPEN) system, has improved transparency and citizen engagement (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2012). In similar vein, global accountability initiatives like I Paid a Bribe, FixMyStreet, and My E-Municipality demonstrate how digital platforms enable people to hold authority responsible (Ardigó, 2019). On the other hand, Nepal's local bodies have few staff in charge of handling public input, and they do not have an efficient complaint and feedback system.

Nepal has to prioritize the development of IT infrastructure, improve digital literacy, institutionalize accountability procedure and promoting transparency through e-government platforms in order to strengthen local governance. These efforts can not only reduce corruption but also build trust, enhance accountability and transparency, and promote sustainable community development.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Local bodies of Nepal still fall behind in efficiency and effective use of information technology to enhance transparency, accountability and service delivery. The complete adoption of IT is hampered by inadequate infrastructure, shortage of skilled personnel, political influence, and outdated administrative procedures, despite significant advances. These elements support corrupt practices, inefficiency and ineffective law enforcement. However, effective use of IT has enormous potential to change local bodies by enhancing transparency and accountability, minimizing corruption and boosting public trust. Local bodies must place high priority on the development and efficient and effective use of IT tools and infrastructure, supported by capacity-building and institutional reform, in order to obtain these advantages.

Several challenges with local bodies were found after questionnaire and interview data were analyzed. The following suggestions are proposed for policymakers and local officials in order to enhancing accountability, transparency and IT integration. Local governments should provide official email accounts to all staffs and mandate their use for documentation and communication, ensuring transparency through posting on official websites. The central government should establish continuous IT training programs to improve digital skills of its employees. Anti-corruption reporting procedures should be created to enable the confidential reporting of misbehavior and political intervention.

A national IT expert team should be established to support local bodies for enhancing transparency and accountability, monitoring, assessing, and technical assistance. To reduce the monopoly of union of employees and elected representative, central government has to dismiss the union of employees and strictly implement the IT tools with rule and regulation. Additionally, moral education with rule and regulation for implementation of IT is most important to control corruption.

To achieve sustainable digital governance, the central government should make investments in essential IT infrastructure, including as communication networks, electricity and the internet. Although this study has focused on selected local bodies to know their existing capacity & impact of IT tools on transparency, accountability & corruption control. Future studies should focus on health, education and other sector of the local bodies to further understand how IT supports sound governance.

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