

The Status Local Governance Practice: A Case Study of Local Government in Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City, Nepal

Shukra Raj Subedi*, Sunil Subedi

Social Science and Education, Nepal Open University, Lalitpur, Nepal

*Corresponding author: shukrarajsubedi.np@gmail.com

Received April 02, 2021; Revised May 03, 2021; Accepted May 11, 2021

Abstract Governance practice has become a central issue of the development process since the historical evolution of civilizations. It has counted as the heart of the process for public administration and organizations. The limited literature on the research entitled "The Status of Governance Practice" has shown the clear gap in the literature on how the local groups implement and practice good governance policies and existing practices and gaps between policy and practice in the Nepalese context. Following the interpretative paradigm with a qualitative approach, the research analyzes the existing practice, the situation of participation, and the gap between policy and existing practice. The primary data has been gathered from seven selected informants of Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City through judgmental sampling, and in-depth interviews and observation have been adopted as data collection tools. The study has explored the situation of meaningful participation, accountability, and transparency in the research area. The study has shown that even after the state's reconstruction, the local governments have not severed the governance practice satisfactorily. However, Nepal's restructuring process has increased local people's access to local government, but local people's meaningful participation in developmental activities, accountability, and transparency are still unsatisfactory. The finding has indicated the essentiality of good governance at the local level for local power. The federal government needs to monitor the provincial government and provincial to local government for reasonable control. The study has become an implication for policymakers and further researchers.

Keywords: *meaningful participation, accountability, transparency, good governance*

Cite This Article: Shukra Raj Subedi, and Sunil Subedi, "The Status Local Governance Practice: A Case Study of Local Government in Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City, Nepal." *American Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 9, no. 5 (2021): 263-271. doi: 10.12691/education-9-5-3.

1. Introduction

The worldview of local governance is to decentralize the responsibilities and budgets of governments. It has evoked the crucial question and encouraged research that emphasizes the importance of local leadership, civil society, and democratic accountability [1]. It is imperative to bring positive change in every local unit to properly develop a nation and meet citizens' needs by decentralizing the main functions, delegating to those closest to them. The local government, a local governance unit, has special powers to issue regulations or rules connecting with its legislative character. According to Abdulloh argues that local governments have become more arbitrary in the ruling. It is a reminder of whom they serve and how they come to their position must be made clear all the time in the recent decades. It improves local resources and triggers creativity and innovation for better public services and development by focusing on good planning, management, supervision, and the government's high accountability [2]. However, "The concept of good

governance evoked serious criticisms as well as praises worldwide. Good governance for whom and bad for whom became the sticky questions. These are key questions raised by social scientists and many politicians" [3]. As the local governance is diversified based on the status of local government, nature of society, state, and local environment, It is worth and relevant to know the status of local governance subjectively incorporating policy and practice based on national, regional, and local planning well as policy. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP] defines 'Governance' as the practice of political, economic, and administrative authority in the management of a country's matters at all levels, including the rule of law, legitimacy of the government, accountability to the people, transparent economic sector, corruption fewer activities of government and non-governmental sector [4].

Nepal's constitution has discussed that the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal's basic structure is three-tiered: federal, provincial, and local. These governments have formed and functioned accordingly with the particular purpose of government as guiding state policy principles. Likewise, good governance has ensured by

confirming the equal and easy access of the people to the state's services and facilities. It has focussed on making fair public administration capable, unbiased, transparent, less corrupt, accountable, and participatory [5].

Similarly, local governments are the nearby grassroots people's nearby unit, which helps institutionalize the governance system and create an enabling environment to promote democratic values and public participation, especially from the marginal section decision-making process. It also speeds up the economic progress leading to enhance peoples' capacity. It reveals that local governance is the essential part of the government's governing system responsible for maintaining linkage among local people [6]. Likewise, Mercy argued that local government represents the dispersion of political power in our society. It is the closest government to the people, and it brings development nearer to the grassroots. It is the best system of exercising good governance and engaging people in their governance [7]. In the similar vein, Addink argues properness, transparency, participation, effectiveness, accountability, and economic, social, and cultural human rights are vital aspects of good governance [8].

Similarly, Kharel states that every local community citizen feels a respected and decisive community member in a well-governed society. A well-governed society is a society that enjoys trustworthy and reliable participation and ownership in the overall activities of the government. There is a positive relationship between good governance and development [9].

A country with strong local governance management has possibilities of progressive development. The declining growth is due to a lack of good governance. More than six decades have been completed since the beginning of planned development in Nepal, but the development process has not run as expected. The reason behind it is the result of excluding the fundamental characters of good governance. The purpose of this research study is to investigate the local governance practice in Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City base on practice and policy.

Although the local bodies have tried to address governance and have seemed to assure accountability, transparency, and meaningful participation in service delivery, the service receivers have not been convinced that the mechanism has been adopted on the ground. There are widespread complaints about local governance service delivery maladministration, public funds abuse, abuse of authority or office, fraudulent dealings, and corrupt tendencies. It has shown that there is a problematic issue concerned with exploring the construction and implementation of good governance. The prior research studies have rarely included the issue in their researches. There is still a knowledge gap. The gap between the top-down policy implementation and on-ground practice has become the study's genuine issue at present in Nepal. This research study has been undertaken to explore governance and analyze the gap between existing practices. It has tried to explore, indicate and underpin the gap between policy and practice in the literature. The study's primary concern is how the local levels implement and practice good governance policies and issues? What are existing rules along with gaps between policy and practice? This research study has further aimed to inform the local

citizen to be aware of good governance issues from evidence-based information. The awareness among the local people has been able to knock policymakers to modify the mechanism if required. As there is a gap in top-down implementation policy and ground-level practice, the study has become a genuine issue for the study and significant for the policy arbiters, interpreters, implementation agents, local stakeholders, and researchers.

2. Literature Review

The literature has highlighted as governance is the complex management system that can manage people's social, political, and economic activities among its population. This chapter has dealt with the global understanding of the Nepal government's government and local governance policy.

2.1. Global Understanding of Governance

The World Bank has explained that governance is the exercise of the political, economic, and administrative authority to manage a nation's activities. It uses all of the methods that societies use to allocate power and manage public resources and problems to govern, to exercise power and authority over a territory system or institution [10], whereas good governance is a concern with utilizing power, accumulation of resources to maximize the people's welfare. According to UNESCAP, good governance has eight major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and follows the rule of law. Similarly, Rijal stated that lack of conceptual clarity about local autonomy, corruption, law and order, institutional capacity, empowerment level of local people, bureaucratic hierarchy, and problems in people's participation, structural constraints, power hierarchy, and psychological barriers [11].

Governance means the structures and processes of societies where people decide and share power in terms of ordered rule and collective action or social coordination institutions [12]. Foucault has injected an idea of governmentality to institute the art of governing system at the society including government's organs in 20th-century through the amalgamation of two concepts government and rationality, which has connected with classical liberalism neoliberalism [13]. In the same context, Tylor argued that governance is a collective activity practiced by a wide range of organizational forms, including governments, business firms, non-profit organizations, voluntary associations, and tribal, religious, or familial groups [14]. Similarly, Acharya states that local government is a public institution in a small geographic area, which are responsible organizations of the local citizen. He further added that local governance is a unique system gathering various actors together. It has discussed the local issues, elect their representatives, and take decisions on their behalf [6].

On the contrary, Dahal argues that several factors are responsible for Nepal's poor governance performance. Corruption, political instability, weak civil society, unprofessional bureaucracy, unregulated private sector,

lack of democratic practice in making plans and implementations, political and bureaucratic corruption, underdevelopment, unemployment are the major issues of good governance in Nepal [15]. Similarly, public service delivery at the local level is below the satisfactory level. The good governance concept is relatively new. Different organizations and researcher give their views on good governance [9], and the aspect of good governance as properness, transparency, participation, effectiveness, accountability, and economic, social, and cultural human rights [8].

The theory of global governance has dealt with the political system, and it is a system of political rule to form the structures of super and subordination for the exercise of basic goods and opportunities which are influencing, distributing, and expecting to be stabilized the concerning compliances [16]. Regarding good governance, Rahim has highlighted that good governance is the dynamic source of fruitful results. It has brought up the reformative nature of political and social development for governing any system [17]. Similarly to quote view of Kharel and many scholars for good governance, "Transparency and accountability initiatives have taken democratization, governance, aid and development circles by storm since the turn of the many actors involved with them regarding various donors, funders, program managers, implementers and researchers" (p.2) [18]. It is similar to Taylor's view that accountability makes for tyranny; democracy without capacity is a recipe for ineffectiveness where there is a lack of participation of authority and resources. The worldwide trend to decentralize governments' responsibilities and budgets have emphasized the importance of local leadership, civil society, and democratic accountability [1]. It seeks good governance at any level of government. In this regards, Handini and many other scholars argued that

Good governance is very urgent to be realized in the administration of government and public services at the provincial and district/city levels considering that much authority has been transferred to the government at these two levels. The realization of good governance is a catalyst and coordinator for semi-government and non-government institutions to form an effective collaboration to solve problems and meet community needs (p.3540) [19].

Abdulloh has highlighted that the local governments have become more arbitrary in ruling in the 21st century. The position of a ruler and ruled must be clear all the time. The budget created locally with local people's participation has helped improve public services and development by focusing on good planning, management, supervision, and the government's high accountability to the public [2].

The public trust in the local government depends on good governance practices, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness. It has created greater trust in the local administration than their counterparts [20]. In a similar vein, Lamichhane has argued that good governance is about the truthful utility of authority and utilization of belongings in imposing a coherent governing format for the super pastimes and priorities of human beings at large. It ambitions at protection and merchandising of rights, welfare, and well-being of the residents through legitimized democratic governance under the rule of law.

It is an avenue for peace, crime control, equity of public desire with criminal certain guess and equality. It avails bridled governmental power, certified administration, and a device of fraud and corruption-free nation operation [21], whereas accountability is one of the essential requirements within the general parameters of good governance and transparency [22]. The concept of local governance enriches the debate on methodological approaches such as top-down and bottom-top approaches. The formal top-down approach cannot capture the local reality's complexity as multiple local decision-making levels function differently. It is necessary to apply the bottom-top approach horizontally. It helps to understand the decentralization of agencies from the private sector to organizations from civil society or to other local governments under various schemes. It can integrate policies concretely, proactive political interventions and initiatives, and contribute to fundamental leverage of local autonomy; conceptually, local autonomy varies [23].

2.2. A Policy of Nepal Government on Local Governance

The concept of good governance enters Nepal only after the restoration of democracy in 1990. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal states that the source of sovereign authority lay in the people, established the equitable distribution of power among all governance institutions, and challenged power concentration. It aims to provide social, political, and economic justice to the people, assuring every citizen of Nepal's basic human rights [24]. Meanwhile, The Interim Constitution of Nepal has set up a provision of good governance. In article 33, the constitution mentions the responsibility of the state. Governance is a system that manages political, economic, social, and developmental equality to all who are staying in the territory of the authority [25]. In Nepal's context, The Constitution of Assembly 2007 has declared the country for the Federal Democratic Republic.

Government is an organization, and governance is the system of managing. Governance and good governance have become increasingly important topics of discussion in developed and developing countries. Good governance was developed in response to the governance and development challenges of developing countries since the 1980s. It is taken as the Millennium Development Goals' main target, making political and administrative authorities responsible for development needs that help tackle poverty and enhance a state economy [26].

The Constitution of Nepal 2015, Article 51(b) (4) has focused the governance as one of the guiding principles of the state policy to assurance good governance by confirming the equal and easy access of the people to the services and facilities distributed by the state whereas making public administration fair, unbiased, transparent, corruption less, accountable and participatory [5]. It has given a mandate to the local government for 22 exclusive powers and additional 15 concurrent powers to function locally. Further, the Local Level Restructuring Commission identified 753 local government units, including 293 urban municipalities and 460 rural municipalities. Competitively local government of Nepal has got more power, resources, roles, and responsibilities at the local

level. The constitution and the act have promulgated the provision for effective and efficient local government also. However, the practices of good governance and accountability mechanism haven't been institutionalized yet.

Similarly, article 56 (1) of the constitution has divided the provisions of a three-layer ruling structure joining the center, provinces, and local governments. According to these categories, there are three government levels: federal, provincial, and local, consisting of rural and municipalities. The local government in Nepal is the third layer of government which has its managerial division of power.

There are several challenges in the governing system at the local level—problems at the policy level, lack of people's participation. Lack of conciseness of people about their role and sometimes lack of professionalism on bureaucracy is local governance issues. However, the Good Governance Act [GGA] by Nepal Law Commission 2008 ensures that good governance is expedient to make legal provision concerning good governance by making public administration of the country pro-people, accountable, transparent, inclusive, and participatory and make available its outcome to the general public [27]. It also highlights the rule of law, corruption less and smart administration, economical and competent management of community work and public services speedily and cost-effectively. Article 8 mentions that the duty of the concerned authority shall carry out the country's administrative function according to this Act or other prevailing laws, in a speedy manner, to maintain good governance and make available its outcomes to the people in time. The concern of good governance policy in Nepal is to make effective public service delivery to the lower people. Despite policy and efforts towards good governance, there are many challenges in the wake of good governance.

Reviewing the prior literature in global and national context and also a policy of Nepal on local governance, it is clear that the literature and policy have discovered what out to be the local government. However, there is a need to research local governance practice subjectively at all possible local levels to know the local governance practice's real status. It is even more significant in Nepal as the country is interring to federalism and has three different government levels. The concept arises globally, and in developing countries like Nepal, there are several challenges in governance practice, especially at the local level. Deficiencies in the political and electoral system, nepotism, favoritism, political pressure, delaying in service delivery, inability to address local people's problems, and inability to prioritize the central issue of development are some representative cases of local level, so it has become genuine to do the research study and contribute the knowledge in literature.

3. Methodology

The governance practice has directly connected with the accountability, transparency, trust, and meaningful participation of the people. The reviewed literature and policies have indicated a research gap on perceiving and understanding governance practice at the local level. This

research has aimed to explore how the local groups implement and practice good governance policies and the existing practices and gaps between policy and practice in the Nepalese context.

The governance practice has depended on how people perceive it. It goes on local level practice as multiple localities are forming based societies to societies differently. It has shown the diversification of the local level after the establishment of federalism. There are three layers of government to function governance practice. It has indicated that governance practice is subjective according to governments' decentralization, which creates knowledge on governance practice at the respective government level. This research study has focused on the governance practice at local level. It is also perceiving differently as local authorities in Nepal. We have multiple knowledge on local level which need to identify from the perspective of local people. The knowledge derived from the selected informants' information is value-laden as local people perceive local governance differently. The study has based on inductive reasoning as it has followed a qualitative approach. The study has identified knowledge, verified with quality slandered, transferability, replicability, and creditability. This study has based on the interpretative research paradigm, which assumes the multiple realities derived from interaction among the various stakeholders. The researcher has tried to explore the considerable truth's subjectivity through the engaged interaction among the informants on Nepal's status of governance practice. More specifically, this research adopted a qualitative research method based on a case study to analyze the governance policy and practice. It has tried to explore the good governance policies and tried to compare existing practices and gaps between policy and practice in the Nepalese context.

The research has aimed an in-depth investigation of the phenomena through the information taken from the smaller number of informants. Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan city has been selected as a study area. It is the universe of the study. The seven total informants have selected for the case study adopting the purposive sampling design. The informants have been chosen from their sectors, such as local government representatives, government employees, and general people (service seekers). Three ward chairperson as local government representatives, three service seekers, and one government employee have chosen as informants. These informants have represented the policymaker as well as implementer, consumer, and participant of local development activities. The researchers have arranged the informants' time in their free time and visited five-time to collect in-depth information. The in-depth interviews and participatory observation have been applied to collect information from a total of seven individuals, such as local level representatives, bureaucrat, and general service seekers in the study area chosen through the purposive way. The interview data has been recorded, and some filed notes have been taken from observation. The researcher has applied the transcription of recorded information from the in-depth interview, coded them, decoded them, triangulated them, and linked them with the study theme regarding local governance practice and the policies practice. The collected information has rechecked with the

multiple meeting and conversations with informants. The thick descriptive model has been applied to trace the subjective finding from the informants. The vignettes and theoretical assumptions have further supported the global themes derived from the data. The researcher has become careful on the research process's ethics by informed consensus for data collection and maintaining confidentiality. The confirmability of the research has been assured by thick description and member debriefing.

4. Result

The study entitled "Status of local Governance Practice in Nepal" has focused on exploring the perception of local people on the status of governance practice and governance policies that have enriched the gap in the literature. This section has explained the interconnection of government policy and the rule of governance at the local level. The entire research study has been guided with two major thematic aspects: meaningful participation for local-level development and accountability and transparency as an essence of local development. The responses gathered from seven selected informants have separated the thematic elements for and against exploring the ground-level governance practice situation.

4.1. Meaningful Participation for Local-level Development

Peoples' participation is an essential element of good governance at the local level regarding the planning process. There is an explicit provision of people's involvement in planning as well as the implementation process. The policy has guided the local government to incorporate public participation in the planning process at a community level by cluster meeting, but the only formality of cluster meeting is conducted at the local level. The national policy has indicated that every planned activity has to be implemented with public participation. The construction projects have the consumer cost sharing as 20% cost-sharing in normal public works, 30% contribution for maintenance and construction of blacktop, gravel, soil feel and paved road, and 10% construction work for embankment construction building of stone. This research study has tried to gather information on local governance based on the meaning of this section following depth investigation, which will adopt in-depth interviews with selected informants.

In response to the means of participation, interviewee C reported that we never interfere in the formation of Tole Bikash Samiti¹ and Upabhokta Samiti². The local People use to practice democratically and make the committee for management of local-level activities. There used to be fewer women participate in the groups. Similarly, in regards to local-level activities, interviewee D has responded that the community people are willing to participate in local-level activities. They are highly motivated to involve in activities of development, but it is

difficult to arrange the public contribution from the lower class³ people due to low per capita income.

Contrary to interviewees C and D's perception, interviewee A has highlighted a *competition to hold the post, such as chairperson and treasurer in the local level management committee of a big planned project but a low attraction in other non-vital posts and members of Upabhokta Samiti. Local people have less attraction in small projects sometimes, and there is a debate of trust on vital post members and conflict of interest by committee members.* Similarly, interviewee B explained that it is difficult to arrange participation in Tole Bikash Samiti. *Although we have formed Tole Bikash Samiti, all the members are not active. The chairperson of the committee takes a chance in every context. They are even discontinuing their regular meeting.* Likewise, interviewee E has expressed that *people try to select their near one but not the right man in the right place. Poor people do not have time for their work. Sometimes they do not get information about Tole Bhela⁴ and sometimes, they have no time to participate in the Bhela.* In a similar vein, interviewee F reported that *some people get information of the meeting just after the meeting over from the neighbor involved in the meeting co-incidentally. This is because of the poor information system in Tole bhela.* In the same way, interviewee G has exposed, *"I do not want to participate in the meeting of Tole Bhela and local level activities though I gets the information because the leading members use to impose their own plan for the decisive process."*

Two informants out of seven have responded that there is somehow meaningful participation of local people informing local level consumer committee, involvement of local developmental activities, and willingness to support local activities with a contribution. However, seven informants have expressed their view that there is a lack of meaningful participation in local development activities and involvement in local level consumer groups due to various reasons such as trust, corruption, and lack of information.

4.2. Accountability and Transparency as an Essence of Local Development

Accountability and transparency are key aspects of good governance. This study has followed the exploration of local governance in terms of accountability and transparency. The study's primary concern is to perceive the knowledge on the status of local governance linking people view on public audit, public hearing, service delivery, placement of citizen charter, and grievance management mechanism at a local level for the assurance of accountability and transparency. The Dhangadi Sub-metropolitan City has taken as the case to observe the existing practices of transparency and accountability.

4.2.1. Public Audit

The public audit is directly related to people's participation, accountability, and transparency, and it is

¹ Tole Bikash Samiti is the local development committee formed to regulate local development

² Upabhokta Samiti is a local consumer committee that utilized the local development

³ Lower Class is a group of people with low socio-economic status

⁴ Tole Bhela is a gathering of local community people for preparing local planning

one of the crucial elements regarding good governance at a local level. The project progress and financial settlement have to be open to consumers and all respective stakeholders. It includes the entire implementing process, reporting, survey procedure, attachment of necessary bill of quantity, etc. This research's concern is to collect informants' opinions regarding local activities' public auditing status in Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City.

In response to the public audit, interviewee C reported that *Upabhokta Samiti uses to conduct a public auditing program by informing and gathering all the consumers. Local people use to attend the program and get detailed information of all local-level projects. It's going according to the process, as we know.* Similarly, the interviewee has expressed the view that *we are conscious about the public audit. It is conducted as directed by the process, but there are still some issues. As we practice a new system, there may be something lacking, but we have worked according to the rules, regulations, and system as much as we can.* Interviewee A reported that *there is a provision of closing the official file of every development activity after the public auditing in a similar vein. Occasionally, some complaints are coming to our office regarding the information on the project and public audit. We are trying to manage them gradually. Overall, it is in systematic form.*

On the contrary, interviewee E has responded that *there is no particular program for public audit I have heard so far. They come house to house to get signature in this regard.* Similarly, interviewee D has expressed that *Public audit is accurate on paper. Everybody knows that this is made only for the time of the payment. But it is still running.*

On the one hand, the policies are created with foreigner help by staying in a star hotel in Kathmandu without knowing the local level's ground reality. On the other hand, the system being weakened under the pretext of practicality in implementation. Likewise, interviewee F has highlighted that *the local development activities are not publicly audited through a mass meeting of stakeholders. In a similar vein, the interviewee has reported that we do not know about the project budget, how the activities are going, and who is implementing the activities.*

4.2.2. Public Hearing

According to the Good Governance act 2008 of Nepal, the head of the officer performing services at the province, district, or local level needs to provide public hearing service to people and conduct public hearings as directed. It helps to make the law clear, transparent, and objective.

In response to the question: what do you hear about public hearing? Interviewees A, B, C, D, and F have a similar view that *the Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City has conducted public hearings twice a year. The municipality has continued public hearing programs to make its day-to-day administrative and development work more efficient and increase accountability for the job done as guided by the annual policy and budget program.*

However, the interviewee E and G have a common understanding that *the municipality's local wards have not following and organizing public hearing inward level.*

Their perception of a public hearing is an extra burden and unnecessary event. It might create conflict between elected representatives and the public.

As an essential component of local government, service delivery has been linked with public service at the local level. The system of service delivery needs to be systematic, maintain a level of satisfaction among local people, and ensure accountability as a good governance tool. The researchers have collected the views of informants in this regard.

In response to service delivery, interviewee A reported that *we are training to accelerate the ward's service flow as much as possible. No service recipient has to come again and again for the same work.* Likewise, interviewee C argues that *there are no questions of delaying the work of local people. We are in touch with almost all people. We know about the ground reality of people of the ward. Hence there is no problem in working for people. We have worked on time.*

Similarly, interviewee D states that *we have provided service delivery fast as much as possible from the municipality level. But if there is no proper documentation according to the municipality's rule, they must be returned. It is a process.*

On the contrary, interviewee B argues that *though a sound mechanism is made to address local people's issues, there is a problem in a big planned project that needs to arrange support from the municipality. We have to propose big planned projects through Tole Blela, but sometimes we do not know about the plans of big-budget projects that come to our wards from the municipality. Such programs without any coordination with the ward are creating a situation of confusion in service delivery.* Similarly, interviewee E focused on new trends of slowing down on service delivery by asking for tea/water, even for regular work as before. *All the leaders and bureaucrats have focused only on their facilities. It does not seem that much attention has been paid to address the actual problems of local people.* Likewise, interviewee F reported that *we have repeatedly raised the ward's operating bank account in the executive meeting, but no hearing has been held so far.* In a similar vein, interviewee G responded that *Earlier, the village development committee⁵ used to work from the office near the house, but now we have to go to Dhangadhi at 15/20 km. Both time and money are spent.*

4.2.3. Placement of Citizen Charter

Placement of Citizen Charter during the field observation, the researchers have observed that some of the wards of Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City have placed the citizen charter in their wards and the central office. They are updating the citizen charter following the norms of good governance. But some wards have not placed citizen charter and adopting the mechanism of accountability and transparency. However, the majority of wards follow the compliance of the provision of the good governance act. Some local government service units are not accountable for displaying their service quality, types and procedures.

⁵The village development committee is a local government unit before Nepal's reformation.

4.2.4. Grievance Management Mechanism

Grievance Management Mechanism according to the good governance act 2008, every governmental office has provision to arrange a complaint box in a visible place to understand the public's opinion about the respective office's activities. The field observation has helped understand that Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City has set up a grievance management mechanism in every ward. But nobody has put any written complaints and suggestions into the complaint box till the date. It shows the lack of public awareness and lack of habit to the complaint in proper place and person.

5. Discussion

The research study "Status of local Governance Practice in Nepal" has focused on exploring the situation of governance, local people's participation, accountability, and transparency of respective stakeholders in local-level governance. The research study has tried to explore the policy and practices at the local level. It has also explored the situation of meaningful participation of local people in local level development activities, accountability of local service providers, and transparency in service delivery mechanism applying the qualitative research approach. The study has reconnected the perception of local people and observation of researchers with two major thematic aspects: meaningful participation for local-level development and accountability & transparency as an essence of local development. The following sub-section has described the major finding of the study.

5.1. Meaningful Participation for Local-level Development

The government policies have seemed to be inadequately applied at the practice level. It has shown that from the beginning of the planning process, there has so-called participation. It was supposed to mean, but at the practice level, it has been affected by political issues, only competition in central post, inadequate service delivery mechanism, and unbalance behavior among service seekers. The level of consciousness and unwillingness in the local people's social activities are central to the local level. People from the local level are only in the role of clapping. In the name of participation, Cleaver among them planned and made Upabhokta Samiti. In reality, our ruler has no willingness to change society's existing pattern rather than changing the mindset of the local people they are enjoying.

According to GGA 2008, it has been explained that public participation and ownership in good governance have ensured the arrangement of broad public participation in the operation of any plans or projects [27]. In a similar vein, Dhangadhi sub-metropolitan city has formulated monitoring and evaluation procedure 2075, which clarifies that the monitoring and evaluation of any plans are in three levels: local beneficiary group level, ward level, and finally Metropolitan City Level. In the policy and program of the Fiscal Year 2066/67, Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City has prioritized in the

topic such as infrastructure development (improved road), agriculture, education, health care, information and communication, entrepreneurship and cooperatives, human resources and social development, tourism, environmental conservation, natural disaster management respectively. There is also a mandatory provision of people's participation as (10-30) % *shramdan*⁶ by cost in every planned project at the local level. But it is not practiced that the amount of labor at the local level. The consumer committee has been adjusting bills on another topic, motivating the local consumer to increase the bills more than in reality. It is the result of lacking meaningful participation of local people in local development activities.

5.2. Accountability & Transparency as an Essence of Local Development

The study has shown that the public auditing system has not been applied inadequately in local-level development activities. It has seemed an effect on local governance, accountability, and transparency. Exploring the public hearing has declared that the municipality has continued public hearing programs to make its day-to-day administrative and development work more efficient and increase accountability to the people for the work done as guided by the annual policy and budget program 2077. The study shows that Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City has conducted Public Hearing twice a year, but it is not found organizing public Hearing inward. The study found that their perception of the public Hearing is not favorable. A public hearing is an extra burden and unnecessary event. The representative also added that it might create conflict between elected representatives and the public. Service delivery is another crucial component of local government. It is public service at the local level. The state of service delivery indicates the level of satisfaction of local people and good governance at the local level.

During the field observation, it was observed that some of the wards of Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan city placed the citizen charter in every ward as well as the central office. But some wards were not placed citizen charter yet. However, the majority of wards follow the compliance of the provision of the good governance act. Some local government service units are not accountable for displaying their service quality, types and procedures. The field observation shows that Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City has set up a grievance management mechanism in every ward. But nobody has put any written complaints and suggestions into the complaint box till the date. It shows that the Lack of public awareness and Lack of habit to the complaint in proper place and person. The field observation checklist shows that Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City has its updated website and notice board at the central and ward level office. It has also formed mobile apps and has disseminated most of the information through its website, Radio/FM, or published through print media. The attempt of accountability about information dissemination of Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City was found satisfactory.

⁶ *Shramdan* is the process and adaptation of local labor contribution in development activities.

As the study has limited only to meaningful participation, accountability, and transparency in local development activities, it has not covered various aspects of governance practice of the local level of Nepal due to time, research boundary, resources, and availability of information. Somehow, it has tried to explore the current situation of local governance practice in Nepal. So, the study has become the reference for policymakers, researchers, and general readers.

6. Conclusion

The study has analyzed government policies and explored local governance practice status in terms of meaningful participation, accountability, and transparency in local development activities. It may provide insight into governance practice to the policymakers and implementers for adopting the appropriate mechanism to put the policy into practice. The lack of the existing policies of Nepal and the implementation mechanism revealed by the study have been utilized to make the implementing system more inclusive, accountable, participatory, and result-oriented. As the research study has tried to explore the gap between policies and practice at a local level, it has investigated how the local levels implement and practice good governance policies and issues? What are existing rules along with gaps between policy and practice?

This study has applied the interpretative paradigm to address the research gap, which assumes the multiple realities derived from interaction among the various stakeholders. This research adopted a qualitative research approach applying an inductive process based on a case study method to analyze the governance policy and practice. The researchers have collected the information from sample informants selected by purposive sampling, employing open-structured in-depth interviews with informants and participatory observation. Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City is the universe, and seven selected informants, such as local level government representatives, bureaucrat, and general service seekers, are a sample of the study. It has two thematic aspects, such as meaningful participation and accountability as well as transparency. The seven selected respondents' responses have gathered on both thematic elements for and against exploring the ground-level situation. The research study has identified that the government policies are not inadequate application at the practice level. It has clearly shown that there is so-called participation from the beginning of the planning process to implementing the local level activities. The existing policies have supposed to be active in practice, but it has to lack practice due to the political issues, willingness, transparency and accountability. There has seemed competition to hold local consumer committees' central post, but there is not caring on the service delivery. It has indicated the inadequate service delivery mechanism and unbalanced behavior among service seekers. The study found that their perception of the public hearing is not favorable. However, the attempt of accountability about information dissemination in Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City has been found

satisfactory. Though the municipality has set up grievance management mechanisms in every ward, the grievance management mechanisms are rare. Even some wards have applied the system, but the system is not effective. Local people are not a habit of putting the written complaints and suggestions into the complaint box. There has seemed a lack of public awareness and no idea of complaint in the proper place and to the proper person. It has indicated that there is inadequate local governance.

However, the majority of wards follow the compliance of the provision of the good governance act. Some local government service units are not accountable for displaying their service quality, types, and procedures, but service delivery is a problem as the ward does not operate its bank account. Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City has made a mandatory public audit requirement in the final payment of the infrastructure-related projects. However, it is ongoing just for formality, which allows many points to raise questions about public audit's effective practice. In conclusion, the study has revealed a real situation of governance that needs to be improved to implement local development. The research study has established the importance of local governance at a local level for meaningful participation, accountability, and transparency for local-level activities. Due to the limitation of time, resources, and frequent movement by the pandemic of Covid-19, many other aspects of local governance are not focused on the study. Further research can be made to niche the local governance of many local units regarding other aspects of local governance besides meaningful participation, accountability, and transparency.

Acknowledgments

This research article entitled "Status of Local Governance Practice in Nepal: A Case Study of Local Government in Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City" is the output of the rigorous study of the researchers and the regular support and guidance of the experts from the Nepal Open University (NOU), Nepal. Firstly, we would like to extend our deep sense of profound gratitude to all the faculty members (Department of Social Science and Education, NOU) for guiding us with regular inspiration, encouragement and insightful suggestion throughout the study. We would like to acknowledge their invaluable instructions, and strong cooperation in completing this study.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to Prof. Dr. Ram Chandra Paudel (Dean of NOU) for his inspiration. We express our profound gratitude to all those friends for their regular inspiration and enthusiastic encouragement both to complete this research and in our academic life. We would like to convey hearty gratitude to all informants for their support in providing valuable perceptions and their experiences during our field stay for information collection taking part our in-depth interviews in the difficult situation of COVID-19, pandemic. Final thanks goes to our family members for invaluable support as well as encouragement for academic writing. Last but not the least, I accept responsibility for any flaws or errors found in the paper.

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