

Research Article

Performance Evaluation of Local Body of Pokhara Metropolitan City

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Abstract

Local governments are the closest unit of government to the people at grass root levels. The principal objective of this paper is to evaluate the performance of the local government of Pokhara Metropolitan City that lies in Kaski district, Nepal. This paper describes and analyzes the performance of the newly formed local government. It is based on the source of primary data from fieldwork with ground theory and secondary data- journal articles, books, Constitution of Nepal, 2015, act, rule, and regulations. The election of local government was held in Nepal in 2017, after 20 years. It is expected to bring political stability as well as peace and prosperity in Nepal. Nepal has been restructured as a federal democratic republic nation with federal, provinces and local government units- for sharing of power among the three tiers of government. Following the local elections, Pokhara Metropolitan City has already ratified more than six dozen laws (rules and regulations) for effective day to day service delivery to the local people. With grievances and grudges, the Nepalese people are experiencing the governance system of local bodies but the notion of people's participation is more rhetoric. Also, financial capacity-both expenditure capacity and revenue generating capacity has severely limited the operational efficiency of local government. Moreover, transparency in public affairs has not been fully achieved yet.

Keywords: Capacity, local government, prosperity, rhetoric, service delivery.

Introduction

Local government (LG) is a public institution established to rule and govern a small geographical area, such as a village, town, or semi-urban area, which is the closest public institution for the local people (Acharya, 2018). In 2015, Nepal promulgated a new constitution that has provisions of three levels of government- federal, provincial, and local. Nepal is a federal democratic republic nation of the 21st century in the world. Nepal has one federal government, seven province governments, and 753 local governments. In the federal system, three tiers of executive are in practice in Nepal (Diagnostic Study of Local Governance in Federal Nepal, 2017). With the local government as the third tier, the Constitution of Nepal envisages the concept of local governance in the country. The performance of local governance with the participation of local people can have a remarkable impact on the overall development of the local bodies. Michels & Graaf (2017) explored the theoretical claim that citizen participation in policymaking has positive effects on democracy. Theories of participatory democracy, deliberative democracy, and social capital assert that citizen involvement has positive effects on democracy". The people's participation has been shown in literature as a key component in policy decision-making and performance evaluation (Fitzgerald, McCarthy, Carton, Connor, Lynch & Adam, 2016). Proportionate development, equal distribution of budget and resources is a fundamental concept of local governance. Performance evaluation of local governance is how public resources are used in the public sector and how efficient and effective the government is in managing public resources (Zhao, 2016).

The constitution of Nepal (2015) confers a provision of 22 different powers and functions to the local government. The Local Government Operation Act (2017) has a provision to delegate different power and functions to the wards- the lowest units of the government. The wards are considered as the closest government unit to the local people and they ensure services to people at their doorsteps. They provide the day to day service delivery. The elected local government always has been accountable to the people. The ward office has been providing various functions in every ward of Pokhara metropolitan city (Local Government Operation Act, 2017).

As provisioned by the constitution of Nepal (2015), Municipal police, running of cooperatives, operation of local FM, local tax, management of local services, local statistics and record-keeping all fall under the jurisdiction of the local government. Similarly, the development projects and programs, basic and secondary education, basic health and sanitation, management of local markets, environment conservation and biodiversity, local roads, rural

roads, agriculture roads, irrigation are also the responsibility of the local government (Local Government Operation Act, 2017). Local government has the provision of a local judicial branch- led by the vice-chairman with two members of the local body- which functions as a local court, engages in dispute settlement and mediation. Furthermore, ‘management of local records, updated statistics of unemployed people, management, agriculture, drinking water, small scale power plant, alternative energy, disaster management, conservation of watershed, wetland, wildlife, mines and minerals, preservation and development of language, culture and fine arts’ come under the responsibilities of local government (Local Government Operation Act, 2017).

Local self-governance (1999) has institutionalized the process of inclusive development by promoting people’s participation- including the ethnic communities, indigenous people and politico-socio economically backward groups as well. It has also envisioned bringing out social equality in allocating resources for development of their region and in the equitable distribution of the fruits of development to all people of the local level.

Local Government Operation Act (2017) has provisioned rigorous performance management for the local government. In the local bodies, the ward offices have been providing day to day service delivery as provisioned in the list of citizen charter 64.

The main objective of this paper is to explore the performance of Pokhara Metropolitan City and do an evaluation of the results. The paper seeks to identify and critically analyze the key performance of local bodies in the context of federalism in Nepal. It focuses on the mobilization of local resources by abiding to new laws; perpetual improvement in local bodies’ performance and improvement of service delivery to the people. Through this, enhancement of service quality being provided to people and extension of responsibility towards people and promotion of good governance have been anticipated.

Data and Method

At present, there are 753 local bodies and 6 metropolitan cities in Nepal. Pokhara Metropolitan City is the study area of this paper. As social science deals with human beings, data are gathered from human respondents that are qualitative. Hence a qualitative approach has been used in this study based on the bottom-up approach ground theory (Upadhyay & KC, 2017). Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. Primary data were collected from the fieldwork. The 7 wards (5, 10, 11, 13, 16, 21, and 24) were selected purposely. Primary data was collected from in-depth interviews with the Mayor, 2 officers (Administrative and Legal)

and 7 ward chairpersons of Pokhara metropolitan city. The interviews were conducted both in-person and through the telephone. Unstructured observations were also carried out in the field. The focus was on the performance evaluation parameter and the effectiveness in the budget implication. The relevant secondary data were gathered from the constitution of Nepal (2015), Local Government Operation Act (2017), books, articles and reports. Fieldwork for this study was conducted between February to June 2020.

For validity and reliability, a generic assessment specification was designed on the performance of local bodies and pre-test was done at ward 4, 15 and 20 with chairpersons on performance of the local body. It assisted in maintaining consistency of reliability across time, items and respondents and also facilitated in assisting validation of measurement tools to represent the variables.

The newly elected local government aims to reform how public services are delivered in health, welfare, housing, employment, education, communities, economic development, policing making, community safety, environment and beyond (Hand Book Definition, 2008). In Pokhara Metropolitan City, road transportation is given the first priority, clean drinking water supply system and reform the education system with new management committees at the local level are the subsequent second and third priorities of the local government.

Results and Discussion

Major Work of Pokhara Metropolitan City (PMC)

Local government is the government of the people at the grass-root levels. It is the people's government because it is focused on providing day to day services to the people at their doorsteps. It is a miniature government close to the people. Pokhara Metropolitan City has carried out much development works for people's welfare. All the ward offices are focused on providing essential services to their people. All 33 wards have made a connectivity road transportation system. Protection of Few lake, maintenance of roads, and various other development activities have been done through a public-private partnership. Other works of PMC, in the last two years, include arrangement of skilled administrative and technical manpower to the ward offices, effective traffic management, garbage management, and creation of employment opportunities, effective grant distribution, tourism development, and promotion of local culture (Tamang, 2020).

People's Participation

People's participation is the most important phenomenon at the local level. It tries to ensure democratic practices in different sectors of grass root. People's participation is the foundation of democracy because it tries to institutionalize leadership development from the bottom (Rijal, 2011). Upadhyay (2007) argues that people's participation, putting people first, empowering the locals, bottom-up approach, community participation are the essential parts of the strategies for development. However, people's participation is perhaps treated more as rhetoric in Nepal. In practice, people's participation has been interpreted differently by different people and sometimes there is extreme contrast between the two opinions.

People are seen active for different development and welfare activities at the local levels. There are many community development groups in every ward which manage mass meetings for Ward planning and select plans as per the public interest of local people. Thereafter, these selected plans are discussed in a mass meeting chaired by the ward chairman. Every ward chairman along with four members undergoes more intensive discussions with the mass before the final plans are forwarded to the metropolitan city, i.e. PMC. At the metropolitan, there are several sector committees for different categories like infrastructure development, social development, environment etc. The Pokhara Metropolitan City Council studies and defines the ward plans. In the end, priority-based plans are selected for a Ward in the metropolitan. If the plan/ project requires a huge sum of budget, it is forwarded to the provincial government and federal government.

Governance in Local Level

Local governance is necessary for all the grass root people. According to the constitution of Nepal, the people are sovereign. All activities of the government should be accountable to the people (ECN, 2017). The federal system has changed the concept of local governance and empowered people to participate in development works. Day to day service delivery is better at the local level. The people are powerful and can easily pay a visit to their representative at their closest local unit and share their problems. More than 75 percent of ward offices have published citizen charter in their office. The office management system is fine with new technologies including Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) surveillance. Digital citizen charter has also been managed in some ward offices. The Ward no. 13 of Pokhara metropolitan city is the first ward practicing and managing digital citizen charter to provide service delivery to the people and hanging the ward citizen charter at their office. CCTV has been installed in the ward office premises for the people's security. Thus, it proves that the ward chairman

is more responsible and accountable to the local people. However, the governance is not transparent enough and progressive as promised and announced in the manifesto during the times of election.

Law Making

The constitution of Nepal has provision of 22 rights and other concurrent rights to the local governments. Of these rights, an important one is the right to make necessary laws for the local body. Pokhara metropolitan city has so far made more than 73 important laws including act, rule, operation, guideline, policy and code of conduct, in the last three years of its tenure. It has made financial Act (2018), Judicial Committee Act, 2018, Disaster management Act, 2018, Tourisms Act, 2018 Pokhara Metropolitan City Governance Act, 2019 etc. As well as it has made Education regulation, 2018, Health Regulation, 2018, Cooperative Regulation, 2018, Town Planning Commission and Operation Regulation, 2018, Smart City Hub Operation, 2018, Public School Distribution Operation, 2018 and others. Also, infrastructure implication, home construction policy and code of conduct are made by the metropolitan city of Pokhara. It is a great achievement of the Pokhara Metropolitan City Office. People's representatives at the local level have made laws as per the people's interests and these laws are making service delivery easy to the local people. The local government is also working to make foundations for the smart city from policy levels. Few works are underway but no significant progress has been achieved yet- as expressed in the election manifesto during the local elections in 2017 to develop Pokhara metropolitan as a smart city. There are more possibilities for the metropolitan city to develop as a model one.

Resource Management

Pokhara metropolitan city has tried to use local resources and federal government grants for the performance of local bodies. Twenty-five million budget is allocated to each ward for development activities. Pokhara metropolitan city has an investment budget of almost 7 million for road connectivity with its neighboring rural municipalities. There is more budgeting for road extension and promoting road quality. The budget is spent on the road, drinking water, electricity, and playground maintenance, etc.

Importance of Local Governance

A local government is a locally elected body of representative responsible and accountable to its electorate. It is responsible for managing multi-dimensional local affairs including the political role, administrative role and development activities and delivery of services at the local level

(Dahal, 2014). Local government promotes and strengthens local democracy. As it provides the local people an opportunity to participate in the process of planning and decision making it has direct implications in the daily life of the people (Shrestha, 1989). Local government also serves as the basis for healthy growth of a national-level government. It serves as a training ground for the future leader of a country. Local government can be used as an “instrument of national integration” in countries having diversity in religion, culture, language and ethnicity (Shrestha, 1989).

The local government is elected for five years according to the new constitution. Its responsibility is to maintain peace and prosperity as well as carry on overall development activities. On the other hand, the local government provides its goods and service to the people. In the republic system, the people are sovereign and they rule themselves by electing their representatives through periodic elections. In a democracy, political parties are the lifeline and all state activities are centered on the people’s interest for economic development (Dahal, 2004).

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 itself has clearly defined legislative, executive and judicial powers for the local government. Acharya (2018) argues that “the provision of exclusive and concurrent rights of local governments is a major shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ and transformation from hierarchic to more network system”. The Government is committed to improving the quality of life in places and helping local authorities to provide better public services (CPN UML, 2017). The political administration of the country has been drastically changed and now exists 753 local governments that have replaced the earlier structure of 3,157 VDCs and 217 municipalities. These new local governments include 6 Metropolitan Cities (*Mahanagarपालिका*), 11 Sub-metropolitan Cities (*Upamahanagarपालिका*), 276 Municipalities (*Nagarपालिका*) and 460 Rural Municipalities (*Gaunपालिका*). The evaluation of government performance is an effective management tool for evaluating efficient governance at local levels.

All the local governments are responsible to the people and respecting the voice of sovereign people is their fundamental duty. Local government is a new constitutional provision in the federal context of Nepal. Before this, Nepal practiced a unitary system with constitutional monarchy (The Constitution Kingdom of Nepal, 1990). In the present governance structure, people can get essential services from the local government. So, this structure is making more democratic practice than the unitary system. Pokhara metropolitan city too is playing all these roles for its people.

The three years' time period is not a long time for development and initialization of a local body. However, the local government has made a foundation for more achievements in the future. The local government is trying at its level to fulfill the desires of the people however there are still many rooms for improvements.

Law Making and Implication for Governance

Local governments are given rights of lawmaking for their territory as a constitutional power. Lawmaking practices are very important processes in local government. Local leaders are involved in different capacities to discuss with their people to draft various laws required in their territory. The leaders are learning empirical knowledge about lawmaking from the grass root levels. They are also extensively engaged in planning, budgeting and lawmaking to address the needs of the people. If he /she becomes a leader at the province and federal level in the future, they can use this empirical knowledge for more effective planning and lawmaking. Thus, it is a great opportunity for the local leaders to empower themselves as future leaders of the country. It is the next valuable part of democratic exercises at the local level. Local democracy is the grass-root democracy. Its impact is even reflected in national and federal politics. The lawmaking practice is among 22 rights delegated to the local bodies and is gradually proving wrathful.

As mentioned earlier, Pokhara metropolitan city has practiced and till the date made more than 73 laws, acts, and rules for its governance. Residents of the city have elected the legislature of Pokhara metropolitan city. The people are sovereign and the people use their voting rights to elect their representative for their development and day to day service delivery. Legislative bodies are responsible for making effective laws within the constitutional and legal boundaries set by the constitution of the nation. Accordingly, the legislature of Pokhara metropolitan city has made Financial Act, 2018, Judicial Committee Act, 2018, Disaster Management Act, 2018, Tourisms Act, 2018, Pokhara Metropolitan City Governance Act, 2019 etc.

Pokhara Metropolitan City has made an Education Regulation Act, 2018 for promoting the quality of education in the public-schools. Earlier there was no clear provision for regulating the quality of public schools at the local levels. The Education Regulation Act. 2018 has attempted to set enough provisions to promote the quality of education in public schools. As per the guidelines of the act, PMC has tried to ensure an efficient management committee in each of the public schools. The school management committees are working to ensure quality education, motivate teachers and students. Several reform plans, teachers' training

programs and implementation of students centered teaching methods are underway in several schools. The schools are well managed as compared to previous conditions. Health regulation, 2018, Cooperative regulation, 2018, Town Planning Commission and Operation Regulation, 2018, Smart City Operation, 2018, Public School distribution operation, 2018 etc. are some more initiatives taken by the PMC.

The local government is a miniature government. It is a home town government of people. It can see problems of the people and can take steps to solve them. Local government has provided effective service delivery to the people. Its main aim is to fulfill their people's desire. So, it is called the people's government. Local government is also the foundation of democracy. In a short time, they have demonstrated a significant role at the local levels. The federal system of Nepal is constituted in a cooperative model. Central governments provide grants as well as other rights for the development of local levels (Subedi, O. P., Personal Communication, March 19, 2020, Appendix). Now, the people feel *Shinghadurbar* at their home town. The local government provides service through the nearest unit of village/city people.

Conclusion

The election of the local governments of Nepal was held in 2017. The elected local governments are implementing welfare programs to the people at the local level. Pokhara Metropolitan City has so far made 73 laws (acts, rules, and regulations). These laws need to be evaluated in light of Local Self-Governance Act, Local Self-Governance Regulation, and Local Bodies Financial, Administration Regulation, 2007.

New legitimacy is necessary for governing different levels of the governments. Local bodies got legitimacy from the local election. In Nepal, the election of the local level was held after 20 years in 2017. The elections were held to give a new mandate for ruling for five years. Election is the best way of democratic practice for the institutionalization of democracy in Nepal. Local government is regarded as the foundation of democracy. It provides a platform for the participation of people in development and governance. Pokhara Metropolitan City has attempted to achieve aforementioned works at the local level. Ward connectivity, road transportation, day to day service delivery, CCTV for people security are some of its achievements. The people are participating in the planning system and many development projects are on the verge of being done.

It is argued that financial capacity largely determines the operational efficiency of the

local governments to effectively operate programs. However, expenditure capacity has been a significant challenge for the Pokhara metropolitan. Also revenue-generating policies and plans have been improper and lack a scientific approach in most cases. This study recommends that the federal government should have different strategies for the metropolitan cities and other local units so that they would improve their performance. As the metropolitan city is most distinguished among the local bodies, its criteria are also distinguished and are higher than other units. Hence, different laws should be formulated and operated accordingly. Seeking local people's participation is imperative for the success of local bodies, but till now, pursuing people's participation has been rhetoric rather than a reality.

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APPENDIX

Participants of Key Informant Interview (KII)

Number	Date	Location
Respondent 1	March, 2020	Pokhara Metropolitan City Ward 5 Office
Respondent 2	March, 2020	Pokhara Metropolitan City Ward 16 Office
Respondent 3	March, 2020	Pokhara Metropolitan City Ward 21 Office
Respondent 4	Jan, 2020	Pokhara Metropolitan City Ward 13 Office
Respondent 5	March, 2020	Pokhara Metropolitan City Office
Respondent 6	March, 2020	Pokhara Metropolitan City Ward 11 Office
Respondent 7	March, 2020	Pokhara Metropolitan City Ward 24 Office
Respondent 8	March, 2020	Pokhara Metropolitan City Ward 10 Office
Respondent 9	June 2020	Pokhara Metropolitan City Office
Respondent 10	June 2020	Pokhara Metropolitan City Office