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Assessing the Culture of Deliberation in Local Governance: Evidence from Four Municipalities in Kailali, Nepal

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Abstract

This study critically examines deliberative practices within the executive bodies (karyapalika) of local governments in Nepal's evolving federal governance system, drawing empirical insights from four municipalities in the Kailali district, Nepal. Following the promulgation of the 2015 Constitution and the enactment of the Local Government Operation Act (LGOA) in 2017, Nepal laid a robust legal foundation for participatory governance at the grassroots level. This research explores how deliberative decision-making processes are implemented in practice and evaluates the extent to which local governments fulfill their constitutional commitments to inclusiveness and accountability. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates questionnaire surveys, qualitative interviews and observations, collecting data from 511 respondents, including elected representatives, administrative staff, and service recipients. The findings indicate that, although legal provisions promote deliberative governance, practical implementation is often constrained by political dominance, procedural rigidity, and limited stakeholder participation. Quantitative findings indicate that approximately 32 percent of key stakeholders (elected representatives and staff) express satisfaction with the deliberative culture of the local executive, while the remainders are neutral or dissatisfied. In contrast, qualitative insights highlight challenges, including the dominance of the ruling party and the influence of individual authority (mayor/chairperson), which impact the decision-making process in local governance. The results indicate a substantial connection between deliberative mechanisms, such as the holding of regular executive

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meetings, and the transparency in decision-making, which significantly aids in managing citizen grievances. Furthermore, participatory monitoring practices are often merely symbolic, characterized by tokenism, and are not well comprehended by the citizens. The research indicates that deliberative democracy within Nepal's local governance is still in a nascent stage. To unlock its full potential, it is essential to strengthen institutional capacity, promote civic awareness, ensure inclusive participation, and reinforce regulative mechanisms. Addressing these deficiencies is crucial for embedding substantive deliberative practices into Nepal's decentralized governance framework.

Keywords: Deliberative democracy, local governance, federalism, Nepal

Introduction

Deliberative local democracy is a form of local governance in which decisions are made through inclusive, reasoned dialogue between citizens and elected representatives, emphasizing public justification, mutual respect, and participation beyond mere voting. The primary drawback of depending exclusively on electoral democracy is that deliberative governance has attracted greater attention in the past decades within the realm of democracy (Parthasarathy et al., 2019). With the promulgation of the 2015 Constitution, Nepal transitioned into a new federal structure comprising three tiers of government: federal, provincial, and local (Nepal Law Commission, 2015). In the constitutional history of Nepal, local government has gained comparatively greater autonomy and responsibilities at the local level. The focus lies on how local democracy actually operates in practice particularly deliberative processes within the constitutional promise of autonomous local governments in Nepal. The umbrella legislation, the Local Government Operation Act (LGOA) 2017 clearly outlines the functions, powers, and responsibilities of local governments in Nepal (Nepal Law Commission, 2017). It further mandates deliberative decision-making either through unanimity or majority in the executive committee establishing a legal foundation for democratic local governance and effective service delivery. These provisions reflect the Act's emphasis on deliberatively local democracy and accountability at the local level, aligning with broader constitutional commitments to federalism and inclusive decision-making.

Deliberative local governance in Nepal has transformed from being centrally controlled to adopting a more participatory and constitutionally empowered local governance framework. It has resulted from a plethora of changes, including political shifts, constitutional reforms, and extensive local, as well as international, stakeholder engagement. The history of the local leadership and governance is traced back to ancient practices and the period of the Rana regime and the downfall in 1950 marked the start of a democratized system of parliamentary governance alongside the king (Chaudhary et al., *Far Western Review, Volume-3, Issue-1, June 2025, 170-190*)

2023). The local citizen engagement in governance has been a reform strategy in Nepal since 1990 with intensive focus at the local level. However, after the shift to a multiparty liberal democracy in 1990, participation became an inherent democratic right and as a result, gave rise to new laws and frameworks aimed at officially recognizing it (Khanal, 2006). In a similar vein, community governance has a long-standing history, representing a form of local deliberation at the grassroots level. Nepal officially initiated this process in 1989 with the implementation of the Forestry Sector Master Plan, which established Community Forestry User Groups (CFUGs) as grassroots entities for the management of forest resources and community governance (Acharya, 2016).

Thus, although the legal and political framework in Nepal supports deliberative local democracy, its effectiveness depends on addressing deep-rooted socio-political barriers and fostering genuine citizen engagement in governance. In this regard, this paper has examined the deliberative practices of local governance in the post-federal context of Nepal. For this purpose, four local governments in the Kailali district were chosen as the empirical data and observation. This study raises several key questions: How does the current practice of local governance align with the vision set forth in the Constitution and the LGOA? How is the culture of deliberative decision-making manifested within the local governance framework, and what are the key stakeholders' perceptions and experiences regarding its implementation and effectiveness? Consequently, the primary aim of this study is to assess deliberative decision-making practices within selected local government in the Kailali district of Nepal.

Review of Literature

Deliberative democracy has emerged as a significant theoretical and practical model of democratic governance that emphasizes public justification, collective reasoning, and citizen engagement. It is widely viewed as a governance framework that emphasizes justice, equality, liberty, and fraternity through participatory and reasoned dialogue between citizens and their representatives (Bevir, 2007). Whether these types of democratic values exist in local governance is an intriguing matter. At its core, deliberative democracy insists that legitimate political decisions must arise from processes in which citizens are actively involved in public reasoning rather than passive recipients of policies. This approach contrasts with traditional majoritarian or representative models by highlighting the value of discourse, inclusivity, and mutual respect in policymaking (Barabas, 2004; Bohman, 1996; Dryzek & List, 2002; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004).

The philosophical foundation of deliberative democracy can be traced back to Rousseau's notion that political decisions gain legitimacy only through public deliberation, where citizens and representatives move beyond self-interest to reflect

on the general good (Rousseau, 1967 as cited in Bohman, 1996). Building upon this, contemporary scholars argue that deliberative democracy is more capable of addressing the complexities of modern governance such as moral disagreement and resource distribution than conventional models like majority rule or representative democracy (Melo & Baiocchi, 2006). Proponents contend that deliberative democracy holds both instrumental value, in improving policy outcomes, and intrinsic value, in shaping informed, responsible citizens (Sanu George, 2017).

Gutmann and Thompson (2004), in *Why Deliberative Democracy*, assert that the model's defining feature is its reason-giving requirement: political actors must justify their decisions with reasons that others can accept, while being open to counter-reasons from citizens. Historically, Aristotle is credited with defending the role of public discourse in governance, while John Stuart Mill viewed "government by discussion" as essential to democracy. These early thinkers saw deliberation not merely as a feature of democracy but as its necessary condition. In the modern context, Jürgen Habermas has played a central role in reviving deliberative democratic theory. His conception of "discourse ethics" insists that all those affected by social norms must engage in free, rational discourse to justify those norms (Cameron et al., 2007). Habermas conceives democracy as a procedural process rooted in public reasoning, where legitimacy is established through inclusive deliberation devoid of coercion and deception (Vitale, 2016).

Habermas further argues that discourse and democracy are interdependent, and political decisions should only be made after a process of collective discussion. His model has influenced contemporary deliberative theory, which presents decision-making as a rational, inclusive, and consensus-based activity involving ordinary citizens rather than solely experts (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Deliberation is thus not only a means of better decision-making but also a vehicle for ensuring the legitimacy of democratic institutions. This model has been applied to diverse challenges, including multiculturalism, moral pluralism, and policy allocation (Melo & Baiocchi, 2006).

The idea of a deliberative system, proposed by Parkinson and Mansbridge (2012), builds upon these theories by suggesting that deliberation can take various forms: civil dialogue, public demonstration, expressive discussion and should aim at seeking truth, establishing mutual respect, and promoting egalitarian participation. The deliberative ideal is grounded in the notion that democratic legitimacy arises when political decisions are subject to free and equal reasoning that no one can reasonably reject (Cohen, 1996; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Habermas, 1995 as cited in Parkinson, 2012). However, Parkinson (2012) also warns that deliberation does not always occur in democratic spaces; it may take place in elite or technical enclaves, disconnected from the broader public. Thus, not all deliberative systems are truly democratic unless they engage

the reflective preferences of affected citizens.

While many scholars celebrate deliberative democracy's potential, critical reflections also emerge. Morrell (2005) notes that, empirical studies reveal limitations, including the possibility of unproductive emotional expression, participant frustration, and inefficient decision-making due to time constraints. Despite its normative appeal, the actual implementation of deliberative practices often faces obstacles such as elite dominance, public apathy, and structural inequalities.

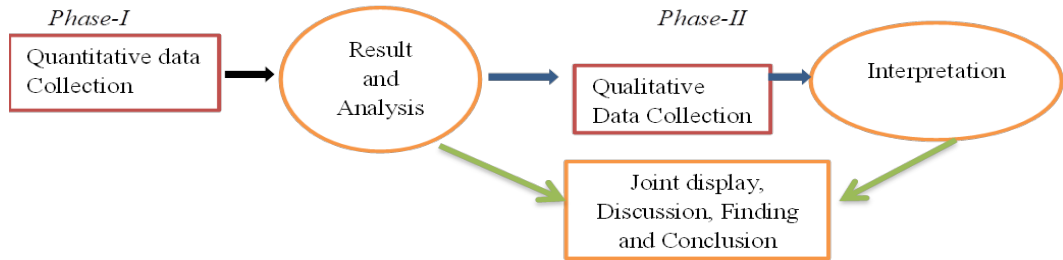
In the context of local governance, deliberative democracy is particularly relevant. Chhotray and Stoker (2009) conceptualize governance as collective decision-making among diverse actors without hierarchical control, which necessitates inclusive dialogue and mutual accountability. Effective local governance, they argue, requires systematic deliberation to mitigate accountability deficits and improve decision-making. Rational, consensus-based public discourse can enhance both legitimacy and responsiveness in local government structures (Avritzer, 2006). Thus, deliberative democracy provides not only a theoretical ideal but also a practical mechanism for promoting transparency, inclusivity, and legitimacy in decentralized governance systems (Collins, 2018). Thus far, the question remains whether the foundation of deliberative democracy is functioning effectively within local governance, in accordance with the philosophical, constitutional, and legal provisions established in Nepal.

Methods and Materials

This research is grounded in a pragmatic ontological perspective and with explanatory sequential mixed method (Quan-qual) design (Creswell, 2014). This study posits that the actual state of local governance can be discerned through various realities within the context at the grassroots level. Both objective facts (quantitative data) and subjective perceptions (qualitative information) are considered valid representations of reality. Similarly, this research endeavors to observe the phenomena of local governance through both quantitative and qualitative information and knowledge. This factual data and subjective information were triangulated, thereby improving both the empirical validity and contextual significance of the findings. The comprehensive conceptual research framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Research Design of the Study



Note. The figure illustrates the explanatory sequential mixed methods design employed in this study. The process begins with quantitative data collection, followed by results and analysis, which are subsequently interpreted to identify patterns and relationships. The findings from the quantitative phase inform the joint display, discussion, findings, and conclusion, which are further enriched through qualitative insights. This design enables the integration of statistical trends with contextualized, in-depth perspectives, thereby enhancing the validity, depth, and interpretive strength of the research outcomes (Creswell,2014).

The empirical data and information were gathered from the four local governments (Lamki-Chuha and Bhajani Municipality, Joshipur and Bardagoriya Rural Municipality) in the Kailali district of Nepal. The survey respondents in this research included Elected Representatives (ERs), Administrative Staff (ASs), and Service Recipients (SRs). Additionally, the key informants for the study comprised local government representatives, civil society members, experts, journalists, and school head teachers.

Table 1

Population and Sample Size of the Respondents of Local Government Key Stakeholders

Name of Local Government	Elected Representatives (ERs)		Administrative Staffs (ASs) (Section-heads)		Servicer Receivers Respondents (SSs) Observed Sample
	Population	Observed Sample	Estimated Sample	Observed Sample	
Lamki Chuha Municipality	60	12	22	19	123
Bhajani Municipality	55	13	21	20	118
Joshipur Rural Municipality	43	9	19	13	86

Bardagoriya Rural Municipality	38	8	18	15	75
Total Respondents (511)	196	42	80	67	402

Key Informants =20 (*Local Government Representatives= 7, Civil Society Member =4, Journalist =4, School Head Teacher=3, Expert=2*)

Note. The table presents the population and observed sample size of key local governance stakeholders across four local governments in Kailali district. Respondents are categorized into three groups: Elected Representatives (ERs), Administrative Staffs (ASs), and Service Receiver Respondents (SSs). A total of 511 respondents were observed, comprising 42 elected representatives, 67 administrative staff, and 402 service receivers. In addition, 20 key informants were interviewed, including 7 local government representatives, 4 civil society members, 4 journalists, 3 school head teachers, and 2 local governance experts, enhancing the depth and triangulation of qualitative insights.

The primary instruments for data collection included: a questionnaire survey, an Institutional Observation Check List (IOCL), and Key Informant Interviews (KII). The questionnaire survey was conducted using the KoBo Collect Android application. The data collected in Excel format were subsequently imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software for quantitative data processing and analysis. To investigate the causal relationships among the variables, regression analysis, and ANOVA tests were utilized. The results were presented in various formats, including text, tables, figures, and themes, in alignment with the research questions. Qualitative data were collected through Key Informant Interviews (KII) and observational techniques. The qualitative findings and quantitative results were merged into a comprehensive display table, employing mixed methods approaches.

Results

Legal Context of Deliberative Provision

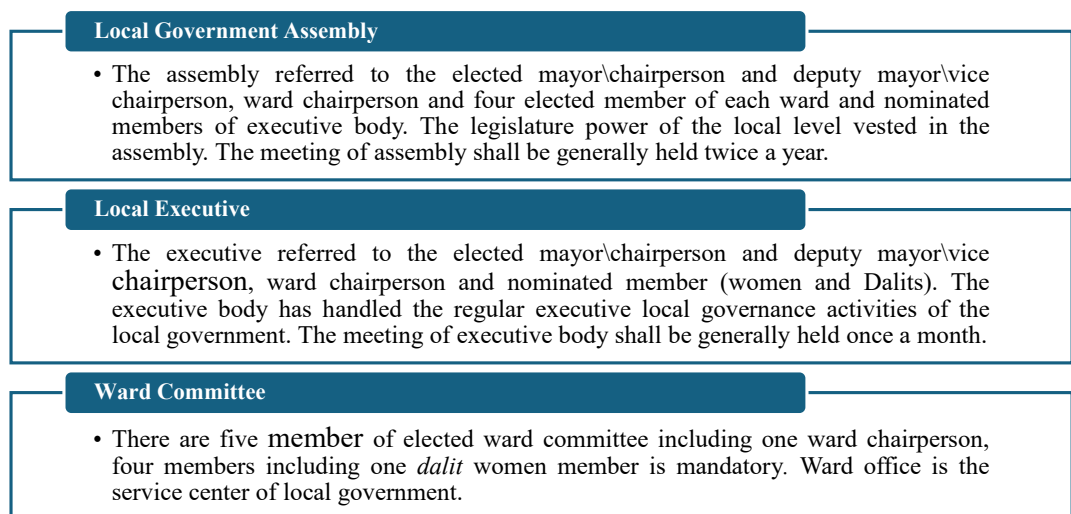
The deliberative local democracy through participatory decision-making procedures in local government in Nepal is articulated by the Constitution and the Act. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) provides a comprehensive framework for local governance, emphasizing decentralization, autonomy, and deliberative democratic practices. Key provisions such as Articles 57(4), 59, 214, 221, and 228 establish the legal foundation for the functioning of local governments, granting them executive, legislative, and financial authority within their jurisdiction. These articles reinforce the principle of subsidiarity by vesting decision-making powers ranging from budgeting and taxation to lawmaking in local assemblies and executives (Nepal Law Commission,

2015). The constitutionally mandated powers aim to promote participatory governance, enhance accountability, and ensure responsiveness to local needs. However, despite these formal provisions, the actual practice of deliberative governance remains challenged by capacity constraints, political interference, and inadequate institutional mechanisms at the local level. Thus, while the constitution enables deliberation, its effective realization depends on the strengthening of local institutions, civic engagement, and consistent implementation of laws.

The *Local Government Operation Act 2017* operationalizes the constitutional vision of deliberative democracy at the grassroots level by institutionalizing mechanisms for inclusive governance, participatory decision-making, and accountability. Key provisions such as regular meetings of the executive (Clause 17), provisions for assembly meetings initiated by members (Clause 19), and the delegation of powers (Clause 18) suggest efforts to democratize governance processes and empower local leadership. Additionally, mechanisms like social audits, public hearings, and code of conduct enforcement (Clauses 78 and 112) aim to ensure transparency and responsiveness in public service delivery. However, while the Act embeds deliberative structures, their implementation remains uneven due to political centralization, limited administrative capacity, and weak civic engagement. The twice-yearly assembly meetings (Clause 19) may not sufficiently ensure continuous deliberation, and coordination with non-state actors (Clause 25) often lacks clarity and enforcement (Nepal Law Commission, 2017). Thus, although the Act establishes a legal framework conducive to deliberative democracy, its transformative potential is contingent on institutional strengthening, civic awareness, and political commitment at the local level.

Figure 2

Deliberative Structure of Local Government in Nepal



Note. The figure illustrates the deliberative structure of local government in Nepal, as defined by the Constitution of Nepal and further detailed by the Local Government Operation Act (LGOA) 2017. It outlines the hierarchical roles of the local government assembly, executive body, and ward committee. The assembly holds legislative authority and supervises the executive, which is responsible for implementing governance decisions. The ward committee, as the grassroots unit, is primarily accountable for delivering services to the citizens and operates under the guidance of the executive body.

Deliberative Practices in Local Governance

The constitution of Nepal (2015) has granted legislative authority to the local level assembly and conferred executive power to the executive body. At all local levels, the executive body is formed under the coordination of the chairperson or mayor. This body is responsible for performing all administrative and regular functions of local governance. In this way, the executive is responsible for discussing, debating and implementing the citizens' issues, agendas, and interests. The members of the executive committee actively engage in the deliberative process of policymaking; similarly, they must be informed about the provisions and procedures of the executive body.

Table 2

Role of Members in Local Government Executive Body

Statement (<i>n</i> =42)	Yes (%)	No (%)
Are you actively participate in the discussion of agendas of executive meetings	85	15
Are you fully informed about the decision-making procedural process of executive body	78	22
Do agendas are informed to the members before meeting	64	36

Note. Table shows the role of members in the local government executive body.

The data shows a generally encouraging trend in how local government executive members are engaging in discussions, with a notable 85 percent participation rate and 78 percent awareness of procedures. However, the fact that only 64 percent of members are getting agendas in advance points to a gap in transparency and communication. This lack of prior information could make it harder for members to engage in informed discussions and might compromise the quality of their decisions. To ensure effective participatory governance, it's crucial to maintain consistent communication before meetings and provide clear procedures. This approach will help promote inclusive and accountable decision-making at the local level.

The study similarly noted how local government key stakeholders, including elected representatives and staff, perceived the local government executive meetings and

their deliberative processes. A five-point Likert scale was employed for each statement, and their responses are presented in the table within the descriptive statistics.

Table 3

Local Government Key Stakeholder's Perception about Transparency of Executive Meetings

Statement (n=109)	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Executive meeting held regularly basis	2	5	3.58	.628
Decision are made in deliberative discussion	2	5	3.45	.713
Decisions of executive meetings are published on the website	2	5	3.21	.832

Note. The table showcases how key stakeholders (ER & AS) view the transparency of local government executive meetings, using a Likert scale that ranges from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The responses reflect a moderate level of agreement across all statements, with average scores falling between 3.21 and 3.58.

The data shows that stakeholders generally view local executive meetings as happening quite regularly ($M = 3.58$) and believe there's a decent amount of thoughtful discussion taking place ($M = 3.45$). However, the lower average score ($M = 3.21$) for posting decisions online highlights a gap in how transparent the institution is. While people feel there's a moderate level of transparency and participation, the unevenness in public communication could undermine civic trust and accountability. To improve deliberative governance, local governments need to make it a habit to share decisions routinely and boost public access to meeting outcomes through digital channels.

Although the objective fact noted in the survey has been perceived positively, conversely, the subjective observations from the Key Informant Interviews (KII) reveal that the participants have varied experiences regarding the executive meeting and its deliberation process. A participant of Joshipur Rural Municipality (June 9, 2024) has claimed that deliberative decision-making in local government bodies often lacks sufficient discussion and is limited to mere formalities. In rural municipalities, where a single party holds a majority, there is a concern that minority opinions are not adequately heard or considered. Similarly, a school head teacher (participant-7, June 9, 2024) acknowledged the absence of a deliberative process in the decision-making of the local government's executive body. He pointed out that decisions are often imposed through a majority vote by the ruling political party. Likewise, the experience of ward chairperson who won the second tenure of Bajani Municipality has shared.

The meeting of the executive committee is held once a month, but more if necessary. In the meeting, the proposal is discussed on agenda basis. But the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) says that writing decisions in minutes takes time. The CAO says that three people should sign when closing the minute, while writing the decision, legal language should be written, it takes time, and it took 15 days to write the decision of the executive meeting at some point. In this way, some decisions are added after the meeting by the influence of Mayor. Executive members have raised the issue on this matter. In the first term, the CAO used to send a written decision to the ward office in a week and also put it on the official website, but this kind of practice has not been done since the last one year (Participant -18, June 14, 2024)

This statement indicates that the postponement of the writing decision in minute book suggests a potential personal interest or influence from the local government's chief. It highlights a lack of integrity on the part of the CAO and Mayor of the local government, implying that not all decisions are reached through a transparent and deliberative process.

The concept of deliberative local democracy and the LGOA-2017 have underscored the importance of inclusive or participatory decision-making. Nevertheless, the claims made by the participant are not reflected in actual practices. Local governance experts, former federal government secretaries have remarked as:

Everything is done procedural by the local government. There is also a provision to give priority to discussion and debate. But some chiefs of local government seem to use executive powers. As far as the background of the chairperson and mayor, is based on their understanding of democracy. But the chiefs understood themselves as a person with executive authority, everyone has the same rights in the executive branch, when making decisions, a single individual or party was concentrated in many places. It takes time to implement local democracy in practice (Participant-A, 9 May, 2024).

Satisfaction toward Deliberative Culture

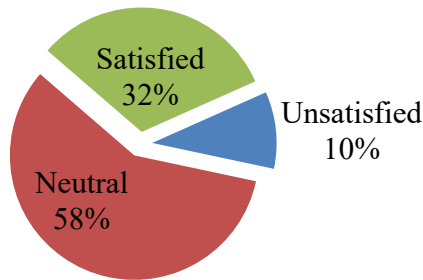
Democracy is characterized by its ability to facilitate deliberation among individuals, which is a fundamental idea of democracy. The deliberative model of democracy, as proposed by Jurgen Habermas, promotes the co-existential practice of actively seeking mutual understanding and striving toward an anticipated consensus (Susen, 2017). Local government can also serve as a platform for formulating policy choices rooted in a culture of thoughtful deliberation at the local level. The LGOA-2017 has provisioned the significance of majority and consensus in decision-making within the local government. The study aims to investigate the satisfaction level of the overall

deliberative decision-making process conducted by the representatives and employees of the four local governments. The figure below displays the responses obtained.

Figure 3

Satisfaction Level of Key Stakeholders towards Overall Deliberative Decision-Making Practices of LG

Responsives of ER & AS(%)



The pie chart shows how satisfied key stakeholders are with the decision-making process in local government. A large portion of respondents(ER and AS), about 58 percent, said they were moderately satisfied, while 32 percent felt highly satisfied, and just 10 percent reported low satisfaction. This breakdown indicates that most stakeholders see some value in the deliberative processes, but there's definitely room for improvement. The moderate satisfaction levels might suggest that some of the key principles of deliberation like inclusiveness, participation, and transparency are being met, but not fully. The fact that only a small number of respondents are highly satisfied points to the possibility that local governments still have work to do in fostering genuine deliberation, timely communication, and building consensus. Additionally, even though the dissatisfied stakeholders are a minority, their presence highlights some inconsistencies and gaps in how engagement practices are carried out.

Deliberative Executive Practices Influence on Addressing Citizens' Complaints

The ANOVA and regression analyses for model examine how executive-level governance practices influence the responsiveness of local governments to citizen complaints. The model is statistically significant ($F = 1.667, p = 0.049$), indicating that the combined influence of regular executive meetings, deliberative decision-making, and transparency through the online dissemination of decisions has a meaningful impact on how complaints are addressed. However, the relatively low R Square value (0.046) suggests that, while these variables contribute to explaining some of the variation,

their overall explanatory power is modest. Among the predictors, regular executive meetings show a significantly positive effect, deliberative processes have a marginal impact, and online dissemination of decisions appears statistically insignificant. These findings highlight the partial but meaningful role of structured executive functions and transparency in enhancing local government accountability and responsiveness.

Model: Factors Affecting Local Government Responsiveness to Citizens' Complaints

$$Y_5 = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Meetings regular} + \beta_2 \text{Deliberation process} + \beta_3 \text{Decisions web} + \epsilon$$

Where, $\alpha, \beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ are coefficients to be estimated

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Y_5 : Response to citizens' complaint

Meeting_{regular}: Executive body meetings held regularly

Deliberation_{process}: Deliberative decision-making in the executive body

Decision_{web}: Decisions disseminated on the website

Table 4

Analysis of Variance Model

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1.879	3	.626	1.667	.049 ^b
Residual	39.083	104	.376		
Total	40.963	107			

Note. The model provides a statistically significant fit, showing that, collectively, the regularity and transparency of executive meetings significantly predict how citizen complaints are handled by the municipality. However, with an F-value just above the threshold for significance and a relatively low regression sum of squares compared to the residual, the explanatory power of these variables is likely modest. This suggests that while these governance practices matter, other factors not included in this model remain important for explaining variation in how citizen complaints are managed. The detailed regression analysis and causal relationship are presented in Table 6.

Table 5

Estimated Result of Regression Analysis

Dependent Variable: <i>Response the Citizens' Complaints</i>				
Variables	Coefficients	SE	t	P-value
Constant (n=109)	2.767	0.394	7.014	0.000
The executive body meeting is held regularly	0.186	0.105	1.770	0.040
The process of deliberative decision-making within the executive body.	0.031	0.094	0.331	0.041
LG decisions are disseminated in website	0.060	0.077	0.777	0.439

R Square= .046

Note. The dependent variable denote= (Citizens’ complaints are addressed), and there independent are: The executive body meeting is held regularly, the process of deliberative decision-making within the executive body, LG decisions are disseminated in website.

The regression analysis offers a model that evaluates how specific practices of local government (LG) impact their responsiveness to citizens’ complaints. Interestingly, the model only accounts for 4.6 percent of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.046$), which points to a rather weak explanatory power. Among the factors considered, the frequency of executive body meetings stands out with a statistically significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.186$, $p = 0.040$). This suggests that holding meetings more often is somewhat linked to improved responses to citizen complaints. On the other hand, the deliberative decision-making process also shows statistical significance ($p = 0.041$), but the coefficient ($\beta = 0.031$) is quite small, and the t-value (0.331) is surprisingly low. When it comes to sharing decisions through websites, there’s no significant impact ($\beta = 0.060$, $p = 0.439$), which emphasizes that simply being transparent online doesn’t necessarily lead to better responsiveness unless it’s paired with proactive follow-up actions. Overall, while a few variables show statistical significance, the low R^2 indicates that the model lacks strong predictive power. This suggests that we should consider other important factors like citizen engagement, how complaints are handled, or staff accountability to gain a clearer understanding of what really drives responsiveness to public complaints. Overall, the relationship indicates that the adherence to deliberative local governance activities supports to response of citizens’ complaints.

Result Joint Display

Participatory monitoring is one of the mechanisms of local government deliberation and accountability. This research observed four local governments’ participatory monitoring mechanisms implemented and perceived by key stakeholders of the local government. The joint display table below presents both quantitative and qualitative empirical responses, highlighting their contrasting realities.

Table 6

Joint Display Result on Key Stakeholders Perception towards Participatory Monitoring Practices in Local Government

Theme: Participatory Monitoring in LG	<i>How do you assess the effectiveness of local government monitoring action?</i>
QUAN Result	QUAL Finding ($n=18$)

<u>Response of Local government Authority</u>				
<u>(n=109) Three-point Likert Scale</u>				
Statements	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	
Regular monitoring of the project by LG authorities.	56	40	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It seems that the monitoring work has been done, but the efficiency and quality are not visible.”(P-1 Community leader JRM) • “The municipal level monitoring committee oversees all the plans, although it cannot be guaranteed that there is no room for improvement in quality..”(P-3 Ward chairperson JRM) • “More seems to be limited to formality only. Because the report of the monitoring committee is required final payment . I don’t think the quality is going to increase”.(P-7 Head teacher JRM)
The development quality has been enhance by monitoring task	64	33	3	
LG has the participatory monitoring practices	60	32	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “As far as monitoring has improved the quality of the project. We have also asked the citizens of the project site to monitor the plan at the settlement level”.(P-9, Chairperson BRM)
<i>Service Receiver Citizen response (n=402)</i>				
You are aware that the monitoring committee of the municipality has been overseeing the completed projects in your area.	Yes % 20	Don’t know % 60	Don’t care % 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The project site has been personally visited by the chief administrative officer and the monitoring committee in order to supervise the plans and make payments for them”. (P-10 head teacher) • “It seems that the current monitoring committee has worked better than before. It seems that after the regulatory agencies have started showing interest in recent times, they are taking up the monitoring work with a little priority”.(P-14, Journalist LCM) • “Monitoring has been done only to complete the process, but it has not been done according to the purpose of monitoring. Until today I have not seen any fear of failure due to lack of quality. Instead, it seems that the amount has been reduced”.(P-16 Journalist BM)

Note. P indicates the participant of the key informant interview; LCM denotes Lamki Chuha Municipality, JRM denotes Joshipur Rural Municipality, and BRM denotes Bardagoriya Rural Municipality. The joint display presents both quantitative perceptions of 109 local government authorities and qualitative insights from 18 key stakeholders

on the effectiveness of participatory monitoring practices in local governments. It also includes the awareness level of 402 service-receiving citizens regarding municipal monitoring activities.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data offers a deeper understanding of how participatory monitoring practices are viewed in local governments (LGs). On the quantitative side, a significant number of local government authorities 56 percent believe that regular monitoring takes place, and 64 percent think it improves project quality, with 60 percent supporting participatory monitoring practices. However, this positive outlook doesn't quite match the qualitative insights. Interviews reveal that while monitoring activities do exist, they often lack the necessary depth, rigor, and true quality control. Many key informants describe the monitoring process as mostly procedural or formal more of a box-ticking exercise for financial disbursement rather than a genuine quality assurance tool. Community leaders and stakeholders have their doubts about how effective monitoring is in raising project standards, although some do recognize recent improvements thanks to external oversight.

Additionally, the feedback from service recipients is troubling: only 20 percent are aware of any monitoring efforts in their area, while 60 percent are completely unaware and 20 percent are indifferent. This highlights a significant gap between policy execution and citizen involvement. The main takeaway from this analysis is that even though participatory monitoring frameworks might exist, their actual implementation is often inconsistent, merely symbolic, and fails to engage citizens meaningfully emphasizing the urgent need for more transparent, accountable, and inclusive monitoring practices in local governance. The key takeaway here is that even though local government officials believe that monitoring practices are effective and involve the community, the reality is that the way these practices are carried out often feels more like a formality and doesn't really make a meaningful difference. Moreover, the level of citizen awareness and participation in these monitoring processes is alarmingly low, which points to a significant disconnect between what policies aim to achieve and what actually happens in practice.

Discussion

The aim of the study is to investigate the deliberative decision making practices within local governance in Nepal. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) has conferred legislative authority upon local government assemblies and executive bodies. These entities serve as the foundation of local democracy, where policies, programs, and budgets are developed and implemented on the basis of deliberative procedure. In a similar manner, deliberative democracy underscores that political decision-making is a legitimate process rooted in public discourse and debate, wherein citizens and their representatives transcend mere self-interest to consider the broader public interest or common good

(Bohman,1996). This raises questions regarding the study of the deliberative culture within local government executive bodies and assemblies. However, it is observed that many decisions lack transparency and is not based on thorough discussion or deliberation in local governance.

Responses qualitatively reveal concerns and discrepancies in decision-making practices. Certain participants express that meetings often serve as mere formalities with minimal discussion, particularly when one party possesses a majority, thereby suppressing minority perspectives. In contrast, other participants describe a more inclusive approach to decision-making that involves community members. The concentration of power within executive roles is also examined, with some respondents pointing to a dominance of authority in individuals such as mayors or chairpersons.

According to Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy, political decision-making should occur within a context of extensive public discourse, allowing all participants to engage in reasonable and rational debate on various issues (Vitale, 2016). Furthermore, Aristotle argued that collective deliberation among ordinary citizens can lead to superior decisions compared to those made solely by experts (Gutmann & Thomson, 2004). Unfortunately, such practices are currently lacking in the democratic processes of local government in Nepal. Un assessment of local government deliberative *Gram Sabhas* in Tamil Nadu India reveals truly serve as spaces for open discussion, where citizens feel empowered to question officials, seek transparency, and bring up issues related to development. However, there are notable gender disparities although women make up the majority of participants, they tend to speak less frequently, have limited sway over the meeting agendas, and are less likely to get responses from officials (Parthasarathy et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the results of the research regarding the state of deliberative culture in local democracy in Nepal indicate a lower level of deliberative culture and a gender disparity within the agenda and discussion environment of assembly and executive body meetings.

The findings related to decision-making processes within local governments reflect some elements of deliberative democracy (Guttmann & Thomson, 2004) but fall short of its ideals. While there is some evidence of collective discussions, the dominance of majority rule and limited debate opportunities highlight a departure from the principles of reasoned and inclusive deliberation. This suggests that while deliberative mechanisms are present, they are not sufficiently robust to foster genuine deliberative democracy in local governance in Nepal. Nevertheless, an empirical study provided evidence that the principles of deliberative democracy could be applied to urban governance in India (Collins, 2018).

The complexity of governance, as highlighted by Governance Theory (Chhotray & Stoker,2009), is evident in the study's findings. The involvement of multiple

stakeholders' local authorities, citizens, and civil society organizations reflects the pluralistic nature of governance. However, the significant gap between the perceptions of service providers and recipients suggests a disconnect that governance theory would attribute to a lack of coordinated efforts and inclusive processes. The study indicates that improving governance requires not only the presence of mechanisms but also their integration into a more cohesive and inclusive governance framework.

Within the deliberative framework, organized methods of dialogue, reasoning, and consensus formation are crucial for improving the legitimacy of decisions, promoting mutual respect, and attaining fair outcomes (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). However, the research reveals significant gaps in the actual deliberative practices of local government assemblies and executive bodies, especially concerning participatory planning and monitoring. Although the institutional framework is designed to support deliberation, qualitative evidence points to inconsistencies in implementation, poor grievance management, and a limited understanding of democratic principles among elected officials. Moreover, personal interests and political party loyalties often interfere with collective decision-making, ultimately undermining the potential for consensus and weakening the effectiveness of local governance.

The observations of key stakeholders expressed their experiences regarding their occasional involvement in the planning process. However, actual practices may differ, as decisions are often influenced more by political factors than by the needs of the community. Additionally, the commitment of local governments to principles such as transparency, accountability, participation, empowerment, deliberative systems, ethics, and organizational management exhibits significant variation, with performance ratings ranging from moderate to low across different municipalities. A similar finding was documented in another study titled "Five Years of Local Democracy in Federal Nepal (2017-2022)." This research indicates that ordinary citizens were not provided with adequate opportunities to participate in the various informal, semi-formal, and formal forums where policy-making activities took place. Moreover, the budget allocation did not follow any specific guidelines to ensure that the demands and needs of marginalized communities were met (Bhusal & Acharya, 2024).

Conclusion

Although deliberative local governance is theoretically essential for rational decision-making and effective administration, the study reveals a significant gap between theory and practice. Stakeholders, including elected representative and administrative staff, often express neutrality or dissatisfaction with current deliberative processes. Executive meetings are largely procedural, with minimal dialogue, especially under dominant party control, which limits minority participation. The concentration of power

in mayors or chairpersons further undermines collective decision-making. Key barriers to fostering a deliberative culture include partisan interests, limited democratic awareness, weak dialogue norms, and concerns over the integrity of decision-makers.

The research highlights the critical role of deliberative mechanisms, including participatory decision-making, active engagement of citizens, participatory planning and monitoring. These elements contribute positively and substantially improve governance performance, service delivery, and transparency for local democracy in Nepal. Finally, it has been proven that while deliberative culture in local governance as a crucial component of effective local governance and service delivery, its realization in practice remains elusive. The findings suggest that addressing the gaps in knowledge, commitment, and implementation is essential for achieving meaningful accountability in local governance.

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