

Community Based Social Therapy Approaches for Strengthening Local Governance in Kaski District, Nepal

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Abstract

Social therapy is known as an intersectional method for social audit within local governance. It is the process of revitalizing of community consciousness and accountability by seeding, feeding and bridging ethical governance through social therapy interventions. Social therapy affects questioning power of citizens and enhance inclusivity and responsiveness among authentic unit of government. The study based on 72 wards of Kaski District, Nepal. The major objective of this study was to examine the government officials' perceptions regarding elected representatives' decision-making dynamism, civic complaint facilities and hearings at the local levels. It applied community intervention and social prescribing theories to address governance challenges such as limited participation, weak accountability and service delivery gaps. It advocates mobilizing social therapy to rebuild civic trust, amplify citizen voice and foster collaborative governance. A descriptive and analytical study design grounded in a quantitative approach was employed in this study. A structured survey was conducted in line with cluster sampling of 82 government authorities from five local government units of the district. Data were collected with the support of structured questionnaires. The findings indicate that accessible civic complaint systems and frequent public hearings interventions through dialogic engagement and community-based participatory practices offer a transformative pathway for strengthening trust, accountability and civic engagement. This study may be useful for local bodies and future researchers.

Keywords: civic participation, community intervention, governance, social therapy

1. Introduction

Practicing good governance at the local level is not sustained by formal rules alone. It is embedded in social relationships, shared norms and the everyday interactions between citizens and state actors. From a sociological perspective, governance is both an institutional arrangement and a social process shaped by trust, reciprocity, collective expectations and civic culture. In Nepal's post-2015 federal context, particularly within the municipalities of Kaski District, local governments have acquired expanded mandates. However, they continue to encounter persistent structural and relational challenges. These patterns indicate that conventional administrative reforms, procedural standardization, digitalization and capacity-building are necessary but insufficient. Transforming governance efficacy requires interventions that heal weakened civic relationships, rebuild public trust and nurture meaningful citizen agency (Poudel, 2025). These include limited fiscal and human resources, accountability deficits, elite mediation of public forums and a widening gap between participatory rhetoric and lived experience.

This paper introduces social therapy intervention as an integrative governance approach that draws from sociological insights on social repair, community empowerment and people-centered practices. Adapted from community-based interventions, social prescribing and dialogic therapeutic methodologies, the approach treats governance failures not merely as technical breakdowns but as symptoms of deeper social disengagement, alienation, mistrust and weakened public accountability. The central proposition is that structured social therapeutic processes, such as facilitated dialogues, collective problem-solving exercises and culturally embedded civic rituals, can reanimate citizen-state relationships. For decentralization, inclusion, accountability and citizen participation, Nepal's 2015 Constitution institutionalized a three-tier federal structure (Government of Nepal, 2015). The Local Government Operation Act (LGOA, 2017) operationalizes these constitutional commitments by mandating public hearings, social audits, participatory planning and complaint-handling mechanisms (Law and Policy Reform Program, 2017). These legal frameworks reflect a global shift toward participatory governance and align with sociological theories emphasizing deliberation, inclusion and public oversight as foundations for democratic legitimacy (Guragain, 2024; Bhusal, 2023). As well as social therapeutic processes strengthen participatory mechanisms and improve accountability practices across local governments in Kaski District.

Yet, empirical studies reveal a substantial implementation gap. Gupta (2021) reports that although participatory planning is institutionally mandated, less than one-third of citizens experience genuine involvement in decision-making. Shahi (2025) and Adhikari et al. (2025) further note that participation often becomes ritualistic, performed for compliance rather than transformation and is constrained by elite dominance, administrative inertia and uneven civic awareness. Pandeya (2015) argues that effective governance depends on the everyday relational dynamics between elected representatives and bureaucratic actors, which determine whether participation becomes empowering or extractive. Urban units tend to have stronger institutional infrastructures and public awareness, while rural units face logistical constraints, limited staff capacity and weaker civic engagement (Paudel, 2025). Kaski District provides a rich setting to examine these tensions. It comprises both urban and rural municipalities: Pokhara Metropolitan City, Annapurna, Madi, Machhapuchhre and Rupa Rural Municipalities, each with varying socio-economic profiles and administrative capacities.

Mechanisms such as public hearings and complaint-handling facilities are treated in this study as relational indicators. Their functioning reveals how citizens perceive the state and how the state responds to citizen concerns. Examines how emerging social therapy interventions interact with, strengthen, or challenge existing governance practices, this study

explores three interrelated dimensions of participatory governance in Kaski District: The role and responsiveness of elected representatives, the accessibility and effectiveness of civic complaint facilities and frequency, quality and relational depth of public hearings. While federalism has opened new spaces for autonomy and participation, meaningful implementation depends on transforming not only institutional structures but also the relational and cultural foundations of governance. Drawing on field observations from 72 wards in Kaski District (January-June 2025), this article demonstrates that interventions of social therapy improving accountability and fostering good governance in Nepal. The widely accepted view in development studies by Amartya Sen is that development efforts should enhance citizen participation, improve their well-being and satisfaction as well as enlargement of people's choices (Sen, 1999). Such efforts typically arise from government, non-governmental and community actors. These operational styles capacities, policies and programs aim to cultivate governance behavior and generate positive social outcomes through targeted interventions. Drawing a metaphor from health sciences, just as sweat therapy (Swedana) helps the body expel toxins and enhance coping mechanisms (Lata, Mishra, Singh, & Tiwari, 2024). Social therapy models serve as deliberate interventions to balance governance challenges with citizen demands, thereby fostering reforms. Similar to how sweat therapy alleviates muscular sickness, social therapy practices are increasingly applied as mechanisms to address governance deficits and improve institutional responsiveness.

This analogy emphasize the potential of socially grounded therapeutic interventions in governance reform processes (Sen, 1999; Ginwright, 2018: 629-644). Such interventions encourage service-providing governmental agencies to measure their social accountability and facilitate the participatory models among service-receiving citizens. In essence, social therapy constitutes a governance accountability practice between the public and the state. In its manifest dimension, it facilitates citizens to question and hold authorities accountable. While in its latent dimension, it inspires policymakers and administrative personnel to strengthen governance systems dedicated to citizen satisfaction by enhancing institutional capacity and human resources (Merton, 1949). The manifest function of social therapy seen improving accountability, transparency, citizen participation and bridging the state-society trust gap. The latent function of social therapy seen strengthening informal civic culture, building interpersonal trust, fostering social cohesion and a sense of collective identity and generating resilience (Merton, 1949 p. 19-51). Thus, social therapy does not just solve immediate governance problems, but it also cultivates deeper systemic changes in civic culture and the relational foundations of governance.

According to the Encyclopedia of Corporate Social Responsibility (2013), Zu (2013) describes procedures for evaluating the state of social responsibility compliance, while Torrecchia (2013) outlines systems for coordinating institutional development policies and activities. Both of these frameworks can be understood as forms of social therapy aimed at enhancing governance performance. To internalize democracy, it is widely recognized that every resource, service, program and public investment of the governing system must be evaluated for its social legitimacy and accessibility. This principle, rooted in the concept of corporate social responsibility, has evolved into the practice of assessing the capacity of state institutions to fulfill social accountability in managing public resources (Zu, 2013; Torrecchia, 2013). Likewise, various social therapy models or governance appraisal systems have been employed as positive social interventions to improve institutional capacity.

In the same practice of maintaining annual audits of governmental resources and services, alongside periodic compliance audits to ensure regulatory adherence, has become governance appraisal mechanism. Governance appraisal systems provide structured frameworks to assess, monitor and improve institutional performance, ensuring accountability, transparency and participatory engagement. In the context of social therapy, these appraisal

systems act as instruments of positive intervention, helping institutions recognize their strengths and weaknesses, enhance accountability and strengthen citizen participation. By integrating manifest and latent functions, this approach captured both the explicit goals of governance reforms and the unintended, transformative outcomes explored the deeper societal impact of social therapy interventions.

This perspective has gradually emerged since the 1990s, grounded in the simultaneous evolution of sustainable development. During the internalization of democracy and efforts toward governance reform, after 2000 AD, as global practices sought to operationalize the Millennium Development Goals into broader sustainable development objectives, social therapy began to be recognized as a positive intervention aimed at strengthening governance systems. Specifically, it has been applied to facilitate the internalization of democratic principles and to ensure the social legitimacy and accountability of every public investment, thereby reinforcing institutional capacity for sustainable development. There are some critics on social therapy caution that by encouraging citizens to question governmental roles and make critical assessments there by exposing negative outcomes and undesirable practices of democratic governance, social therapy may inadvertently foster negative perceptions of democracy itself (Courville, 2003). This critique claimed the need to design social therapy interventions carefully, ensuring that they strengthen democratic engagement and institutional responsiveness without generating undermining public trust in governance. Although, periodic and regular audit systems are practiced as a form of social therapy to build social responsibility and ethical accountability in every commercial, community and public institution. In this context, based on field observations conducted from January to June 2025, this article examines the social therapy interventions implemented for good governance across 72 wards of Kaski District. This empirical focus allows a practical assessment of how theoretical principles of social therapy, governance appraisal and accountability manifest in local governance practices, thereby bridging theory and field-based evidence.

2. Research Methods

This study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design. Focused on primarily grounded in a quantitative approach to assess participatory governance practices in Kaski district. The descriptive component enabled the systematic measurement of government authorities' *De-jure* participation, accountability and citizen engagement. The analytical component facilitated the identification of patterns and variations in governance practices across five municipalities of Kaski district. The study was conducted five Local Government Units; Pokhara Metropolitan City (MC), Annapurna Rural Municipality (ARM), Madi Rural Municipality (MadiRM), Machhapuchhre Rural Municipality (MRM) and Rupa Rural Municipality (RRM): representing both urban and rural contexts. The population of study comprised key government authorities, including Chief Administrative Officers, Section Chiefs, Planning Officers and Information Officers. Using purposive sampling, a total of 82 respondents were selected (PMC: 34; ARM: 14; MadiRM: 14; MRM: 10; KRM: 10) based on their direct involvement in local governance and service delivery. Structured questionnaire was administered in May, 2025 for primary data.

The instrument consisted both of open ended and closed-ended questions measured on a five-point Likert scale. For capturing three core governance dimensions, survey were administered in: (a) engagement of elected representatives in decision-making, (b) accessibility of civic complaint facilities and (c) frequency of public hearings. Secondary data were obtained from policy documents, annual progress reports and relevant legal frameworks, including the Local Government Operation Act (2017) to support contextual interpretation. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools, particularly frequency and percentage distributions and were presented in tabular form. Comparative analysis across LGUs was

conducted to identify urban-rural variations in governance practices. Although the study primarily relied on quantitative data, limited qualitative insights from open-ended responses were used to support interpretation where necessary. Ethical considerations were maintained through free, prior and informed consent. Voluntary participation and confidentiality of respondents were maintained. While the study was limited to government authorities in Kaski District, its inclusion of both metropolitan and rural municipalities provided a balanced representation. Therefore, the methodological approach enabled a systematic and empirical assessment of governance, accountability and citizen engagement within local levels in the district.

3. Findings

This study demonstrates a sociological understanding of participatory governance in Kaski District. Study shows that governance functions not only from formal institutional arrangements but also through relational and cultural processes. It is shaped by trust, reciprocity and civic engagement. This interpretation is strongly supported by recent governance literatures. For example, finding that governance effectiveness in Kaski District depends on trust-based interactions and civic engagement rather than formal structures alone. The observation that elected representatives are generally active but not regularly engaged across municipalities. This line up with findings from participatory governance research ((Paudel & Baral, 2025). Fox (2015) put forward that accountability mechanisms most of the time produce uneven outcomes because effectiveness depends on 'thick accountability,' where institutional rules are reinforced by sustained citizen engagement and political speediness. The variations observed in Kaski District therefore reflect differences in relational governance capacity rather than purely institutional design. The finding that grievance-handling mechanisms are institutionalized but not always successful and in line with international data on public sector accountability systems.

Hossain and Pandel (2022) showed that grievance redress mechanisms are increasingly adopted worldwide. But their effectiveness is highly dependent on administrative capacity, citizen awareness and implementation. In many contexts, such systems remain partially functional or only sometimes accessible. It helps explain the rural-urban variation observed in Kaski District. Findings show that public hearings are common but occasionally procedural or impacted by elite dominance is consistent with empirical studies on participatory government systems in certain nations. Kössler 2026 showed that participatory institutions such as public hearings often risk becoming symbolic when civic agency is weak. This echoes with the observed variation in deliberative quality across municipalities in Kaski District. The findings of this study are presented on the following 3 tables.

Table 1: *Elected Representatives in Municipal Decision-Making Process*

LGUs	Response Categories					Total
	Very Actively	Actively	Occasionally	Rarely	Not at all	
PMC	12	21	0	0	1	34
MadiRM	1	10	2	1	0	14
ARM	8	5	0	1	0	14
MRM	4	6	0	0	0	10
RRM	2	5	2	1	0	10
Total	27	47	4	3	1	82
Percent (%)	32.92	57.32	4.88	3.66	1.22	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*

The data from table 1 presents that majority of government authorities in Kaski District perceive elected representatives as actively engaging in local decision-making processes. 57.32% of respondents viewed them as Active and 32.92% as very active. It shows that nearly

90% perceived their meaningful and consistent involvement. This strong perception reflects a well-functioning relationship between political and administrative actors. Planning, budgeting and implementation procedures all demonstrate this kind of involvement. This demonstrate that the federal concepts of accountable and participatory administration in Nepal were in line with local governance.

This trend is further demonstrated by differences between municipalities. With urban areas like Pokhara Metropolitan City demonstrating particularly strong engagement while rural municipalities also show generally positive but slightly different levels of participation depending on institutional capacity and leadership dynamics. These differences may stem from differences in leadership capacity, administrative experience or local political conditions. Despite these limitations, the overall perception among government authorities remains highly positive. In order to guarantee uniform participation throughout all municipalities, these small gaps also show the need for stronger institutional relationships, capacity-building programs and better coordinating mechanisms. Therefore, the results show a successful trend toward collaborative governance that improves local decision-making in Kaski District in terms of accountability, transparency and efficacy.

The findings indicate that a substantial majority of government authorities in Kaski District perceive elected representatives as Active (57.32%) or Very Active (32.92%) participants in decision-making. It reflects a strong collaborative relationship between political and administrative bodies. This bolsters theoretical and empirical viewpoints on participatory government, according to which elected officials' active participation improves accountability and guarantees that the interests of citizens were taken into consideration during the policy-making process (Pandeya, 2015). The findings also show that empowered participation improved the quality and legitimacy of governance through collaboration between state actors and representative institutions (Fung, 2006) and that active political engagement results in more inclusive and responsive governance outcomes (Wampler & Avritzer, 2004). Limited or infrequent participation was reported by a small number of respondents. According to studies (Pandeya, 2015; Grindle, 2007), variances in engagement can be attributed to disparities in leadership skills, administrative knowledge and coordinating systems.

Table 2: *Accessibilities of Civic Complaint Facilities*

LGUs	Response Categories					Total
	Fully Accessible	Mostly Accessible	Partially Accessible	Poorly Accessible	Not Available	
PMC	19	12	1	1	1	34
MadiRM	4	7	3	0	0	14
ARM	6	8	0	0	0	14
MRM	3	6	0	1	0	10
RRM	3	5	2	0	0	10
Grand Total	35	38	6	2	1	82
Percent (%)	42.68	46.34	7.32	2.44	1.22	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*

With 46.34% evaluating civic complaint facilities as mostly accessible and 42.68% rating them as fully accessible; the data from Table 2 demonstrates that majority of Kaski District government officials consider them to be accessible. This suggests that grievance-handling procedures were seen by almost 89% of respondents as useful and well-integrated into local government operations. These favorable opinions imply that local administrations have made significant strides toward institutionalizing citizen feedback mechanisms such as assistance desks, ward offices and digital platforms which improve openness, responsiveness and public institutions' trust. This trend is further presented by variations among municipalities.

Pokhara Metropolitan City shows particularly strong accessibility because of its better administrative capacity while rural municipalities like Annapurna, Madi, Machhapuchhre and Rupa also show generally positive but different levels of accessibility depending on infrastructure and resources.

A small percentage of respondents claimed that limited or partial accessibility indicating that there were still gaps in some places. Geographical remoteness, inadequate staffs, lack of technology infrastructure and lack of public knowledge regarding grievance procedures can all contribute to these difficulties. Complaint-handling procedures are in place in the majority of rural municipalities, although their efficacy and uniformity differ among wards. A rising dedication to accountability and citizen-centered governance is reflected in the general believe expressed by government authorities in the use and accessibility of civic complaint services. To guarantee comprehensive and equal access for all people, the existence of small gaps shows the necessity of better access, decentralized services and increased digital and administrative capabilities.

The findings from table 2 indicates that a large majority of government authorities in Kaski District perceived civic complaint facilities as "Mostly Accessible" (46.34%) or "Fully Accessible" (42.68%), suggesting that grievance-handling mechanisms were well-established and functional within local governance systems. In accordance with Table 2, the majority of government officials in Kaski District consider civic complaint facilities to be mostly accessible (46.34%) or fully accessible (42.68%). It indicates that grievance-handling procedures were well-established and effective within local governance systems. This aligns with theoretical and empirical viewpoints that show the significance of easily accessible feedback mechanisms in fostering accountability and citizen engagement. Since institutionalized public voice channels improved governance outcomes and citizen-authority interaction (Fung, 2006; Joshi, 2013). A tiny number of respondents stated that limited accessibility reflects ongoing challenges related to awareness institutional responsiveness and infrastructural disparities particularly in rural areas (Fox, 2015; Joshi, 2013). Differences in administrative capacity and resource availability were further presented by variations between municipalities. For instance; better accessibility in Pokhara Metropolitan City compared to other rural municipalities. Therefore, the results show the need for ongoing efforts to improve inclusivity and equal access to grievance resolution systems. Also suggesting significant progress in institutionalizing citizen-centered accountability mechanisms.

Table 3: *Public Hearings in the Local Government Units*

LGUs	Response Categories					Total
	Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Annually	Rarely	
PMC	2	16	6	9	1	34
MadiRM	4	7	3	0	0	14
ARM	4	10	0	0	0	14
MRM	4	5	1	0	0	10
RRM	4	4	2	0	0	10
Grand Total	18	42	12	9	1	82
Percent (%)	21.95	51.22	14.63	10.98	1.22	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*

The data from Table 3 indicates that a majority of government authorities in Kaski District perceived public hearings as a regular and institutionalized feature of local governance. 51.22% of respondents reported that hearings are held frequently and 21.95% very frequently approximately 73% of total responses. This majority implies that local governments had successfully integrated participatory tools into their administrative procedures. This makes it

possible for residents and officials to discuss matters like budgeting, planning and service delivery. A favorable trend toward accountability and inclusive governance is reflected in the perception. Rather than being seen as formalities, public hearings were seen as vital venues for democratic engagement. This pattern is further demonstrated by differences between municipalities in both rural and urban areas.

There are variations in the frequency of public hearings among local government entities as seen by the lesser percentage of respondents. Respondents, who said that they only happen seldom or once a year. Differences in administrative capability, financial availability and degrees of political commitment to participatory activities could all be the cause of these disparities. Although rural municipalities exhibit robust and steady involvement, certain discrepancies in bigger administrative units point to unequal ward-level implementation. Public hearings are often seen by government officials as useful instruments for encouraging accountability and community input. In order to guarantee consistent and significant public participation throughout the district, these small gaps show the need for more uniform procedures, better coordination and greater policy enforcement.

The findings from table 3 reveals that a majority of government authorities in Kaski District perceive public hearings as being conducted “Frequently” (51.22%) or “Very Frequently” (21.95%), indicating that such participatory mechanisms are increasingly institutionalized within local governance practices. This aligns with the concept of empowered participatory governance, which emphasizes that regular and structured citizen engagement enhanced transparency, legitimacy and effectiveness in decision-making (Fung, 2006). Similarly, the results support the argument that sustained and institutionalized accountability mechanisms, such as public hearings, strengthen state responsiveness and move beyond mere transparency toward more meaningful citizen state interaction (Fox, 2015). However, (Grindle, 2007) concluded that the presence of occasional or rare hearings reflects uneven implementation across municipalities, which may be influenced by variations in administrative capacity, political commitment and resource availability, consistent with the notion of “good enough governance” in developing contexts.

4. Discussion

The results obtained through this study have helped to gain extensive knowledge on the practice of participatory, open and accountable governance in the local governments of Kaski district in Nepal, while further affirming and building upon past research. Perceptions held by government officials indicated that the system of local governance in Nepal is slowly shifting towards a more cooperative, participative and relationship-based governance approach. These shifts corresponded with existing theories that placed emphasis on social engagement and social capital in the formation of governance processes (Putnam, 1993). It was indicative of the deepening process of decentralization envisioned in Nepal’s federal system (Sharma & Khadka, 2021; Smoke, 2015). This growth in participation activities, such as political participation, complaint reporting and public hearing processes.

The active role of elected representatives in decision-making is high. The majority of respondents indicated that a significant shift from administrative dominance toward a more collaborative governance model. This finding supported the argument that decentralization enhanced local accountability and responsiveness, when political and administrative actors worked in coordination (Smoke, 2015). It also resonated with Pandeya (2015), who emphasized that governance effectiveness depended on the everyday relational dynamics between elected representatives and bureaucratic actors. The growing engagement of elected officials in Kaski District. It is reflected a maturing democratic culture, where local representatives increasingly exercised ownership over development processes, thereby enhancing legitimacy and accountability. At the same time, the limited participation of some representatives highlighted

persistent challenges related to leadership capacity and institutional coordination, echoing concerns raised by Dahal (2024). He found that participatory practices were often shaped by individual motivation rather than systematic institutionalization.

The accessibility of civic complaint mechanisms further illustrated the strengthening of accountability structures within local governance. The finding that most authorities perceived grievance handling systems as accessible and functional supported Fox's (2007), assertion that citizen participation enhanced transparency and enabled communities to monitor public officials. Similarly, KC and Paudel (2023) noted that formal mechanisms, complaint systems and citizen charters were critical for ensuring accountability. Although, their effectiveness depended on consistent implementation. In Kaski District, the relatively high accessibility of such mechanisms suggested progress in institutionalizing citizen centered governance. However, the reported limitations in rural areas reflected disparities consistent with Dhakal (2022). He identified infrastructural and awareness-related barriers to participation in less developed regions. These findings indicated that while formal structures existed, their equitable reach remained uneven, necessitating targeted interventions to ensure inclusivity.

Public hearings, as a key participatory mechanism, were widely practiced and were perceived as regular governance activities. This aligned with the broader literature emphasizing participatory forums as essential platforms for deliberation and accountability (Fox, 2007; Pandeya et al., 2022). The frequent organization of public hearings in Kaski District demonstrated that participatory governance was becoming embedded within institutional routines, supporting Han et al. (2024), who argued that sustained citizen engagement enhanced both trust and policy effectiveness. Moreover, the relatively consistent practice of hearings in rural municipalities challenged the assumption that participatory governance was predominantly an urban phenomenon, suggesting that decentralization had created opportunities for broader civic engagement across diverse contexts (Acharya, 2018). However, variations in frequency across local units indicated the absence of standardized implementation, reinforcing Shahi, Kharel and Pradhan's (2023) argument that participatory mechanisms often remained inconsistent and required stronger institutionalization.

These findings highlighted that the interconnected nature of participation, accountability and transparency in shaping local governance outcomes. This pattern supported Putnam's (1993) proposition that strong civic engagement enhanced institutional performance, as well as Pandeya et al. (2022), who demonstrated that community mobilization improved service delivery and governance effectiveness. At the same time, the persistence of uneven participation, capacity constraints and partial inclusivity underscored the limitations of formal institutional arrangements alone, echoing Dhungana's (2019) observation that accountability was often perceived procedurally rather than substantively. The triangulation of active political engagement, accessible grievance mechanisms and regular public hearings reflected a governance system that was increasingly responsive and inclusive.

The findings extended existing literature by highlighting the perspectives of government authorities, an area that had received relatively limited attention in prior studies. While earlier research had primarily focused on citizen experiences or structural dimensions of decentralization (Adhikari, 2010 & Acharya, 2018). This study revealed how local officials themselves perceived and operationalized participatory governance. They have generally positive perceptions indicated an emerging alignment between policy frameworks and administrative practices. This study suggested that federal governance reforms were gradually being internalized at the local level. However, the influence of leadership capacity and institutional resources on governance outcomes reaffirmed the argument of Smoke (2015). The decentralization is required not only formal authority but also adequate capacity and support systems.

The discussion demonstrated that local governance in Kaski District was progressing toward a participatory and accountable model. It is consistent with both national policy objectives and global governance theories. Nevertheless, sustaining this progress required addressing persistent gaps in implementation, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized populations. Strengthening institutional capacity, standardizing participatory mechanisms and enhancing awareness among citizens and officials were essential steps for deepening democratic governance. In this regard, the study reinforced the broader conclusion of the literature that meaningful decentralization was not achieved solely through structural reforms but through the continuous development of participatory practices, accountability mechanisms and trust-based relationships between citizens and the state.

5. Conclusion

The governance audit practice in Kaski District, Nepal, has been evolving steadily. Social therapy is a more inclusive, transparent and collaborative system. It pointed out that the effectiveness of governance audit combined with social therapy in the district is not shaped just by formal institutional frameworks. It is also influenced by relational factors like trust, civic engagement and accountability between citizens and state actors. The findings showed that elected representatives tend to be quite active in decision-making processes, helping create a more cooperative political environment and boosting responsiveness and accountability within local governments. However, differences in their engagement levels across municipalities suggest that governance performance is unevenly affected by variations in leadership skills, institutional coordination and local political situations. The study also highlighted that civic complaint mechanisms are mostly institutionalized and accessible, marking progress in enhancing accountability and interaction between citizens and the state. Still, disparities linger in accessibility, especially in rural or remote areas, where structural limitations, low awareness and resource constraints cut down effectiveness. Likewise, public hearings have become common practice, increasingly woven into local governance systems and serving as important platforms for citizen engagement and discussion. Yet, inconsistencies in how often they happen and their quality, along with issues of procedural use and elite influence, suggest that participatory practices aren't always fully inclusive or transformative in reality. Therefore, the study concluded that governance in Kaski District shows a mixed system where participatory institutions are formally set up and functionally expanding but still uneven in depth and implementation. While tools like elected participation, grievance handling and public hearings work together to boost transparency and responsiveness, ongoing disparities across municipalities signal a need for stronger institutional capacity, standardized practices and more inclusive governance methods. It further stressed that decentralization by itself isn't enough for effective governance unless backed by solid relational foundations like trust, civic engagement and collaborative interaction between citizens and government bodies. This study underscored the importance of both solid institutional frameworks and strong social connections to achieve sustainable, fair and responsive local governance in Nepal. As this study was primarily focused and limited in government officials' perceptions regarding elected representatives' engagement in the decision-making process, facilities of complaint registration and public hearings; similar studies with service recipients and elected representatives are strongly recommended.

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