

Context and Challenges of Service Delivery in Local Government: Insights of the Service Providers from Pokhara, Nepal

Prakash Wagle

School of Development and Social Engineering
Pokhara University, Nepal
Email: waglepks@gmail.com

Abstract

The People's Movements in 1990 and 2006 have brought significant changes in the political system in Nepal. Among the various spheres of change, the autonomous approach in local government has unlocked innovative prospects for service delivery to the general public. Nevertheless, local service delivery is still questionable in addressing the intensified expectations of the people. In this regard, this study explores the insights of service providers regarding the context and limitations on local service delivery at Pokhara Metropolitan City, Nepal. The study adopts an exploratory research design and a qualitative research approach to obtain research aims and objectives. The study utilises qualitative data through in-depth interviews from 12 service providers from different Wards in Pokhara Metropolitan City. The findings reveal that the effectiveness of local government is significantly constrained by several factors. The most prominent challenge identified is the lack of adequate cooperation and coordination among the three tiers of government, which restricts local autonomy and governance. Furthermore, the study identifies a lack of sufficient and efficient human resources, budget and infrastructure limitations, and limited public awareness and participation as other challenges in service delivery at the local level. Despite the complexity of these obstacles, the study concludes with an optimistic outlook, observing the progress in service delivery mechanisms following the implementation of federalism in Nepal.

Keywords: Context and Challenges, Federalism, Local government, Service delivery, Service providers

Introduction

The term local government refers to a public institution in a small geographic area, such as a city, town, or county, which is the most intimate and reliable institution for the local people (Acharya, 2018). The primary objective of local government is to encourage effective and transparent administration, while also building cooperation with the private sector, civil society, and other government units. (His Majesty's Government, 1999). On top, local governments are essential in creating a supportive environment that allows local stakeholders to participate in democratic processes. Local governments seem responsible for supporting local development that is both market-driven and sustainable, leading to an improved quality of life for their citizens (Shah & Shah, 2006).

In modern times, the main concern of local government is the reliable, faster, and more efficient provision of fundamental goods and services to local communities. Furthermore, this responsibility includes

ensuring the equitable distribution of public services throughout the locality (Kharel, 2019). Therefore, Local government is often called the grassroots government as it deals directly with the issues affecting everyday citizens. Hence, the main purpose of local government is to improve the living standards of the people by ensuring smooth service delivery at the local level.

In economics, the word "service" refers to an intangible good that relies on consumers' willingness to pay. Public services are products that society pays for either directly through taxes or via other methods, in exchange for the services they consume (Pokharel, 2013). In simple terms, service delivery is a collection of institutional arrangements that the government has managed to offer its public goods and services to the residents. Public service delivery is usually a complicated process that involves numerous interactions between service providers and recipients. (United Nations Development Program, 2016). Service delivery is considered the primary responsibility of the

state in the welfare model of government. One of the main duties of the federal, provincial, and local governments is to provide citizens with essential services. The well-being of the people depends on effective service delivery, which over time strengthens the virtue of democracy.

There are several studies on the quality of services offered by public institutions and the government all around the world. Ara and Khan (2006) claim that a lack of proper management and responsibility in public employees is the cause of poor public customer service in Bangladesh. Rashid (2008) claims that service delivery in Malaysia is of a low standard due to the inefficiency of government staff. According to Timothy (2005), public service delivery is hampered with bureaucracy, corruption, and favouritism in African countries that tend to favour the wealthy few at the expense of the many who live in poverty. In the same way, Makara (2018) argues that decentralisation yields impressive results when it is implemented with strong commitment. However, in locations where implementation has failed, the goal of achieving good local governance remains subject to doubt.

The April II movement in 2006 established a federal government structure in Nepal ending two hundred and forty years long monarchical system. This new framework aims to build strong local governments providing improved authority (The Asia Foundation, 2017). Nepal now has its new state and municipal governments, along with a complete set of laws that visibly describe their responsibilities and functions. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) has granted legislative, judicial, and executive powers to local governments so that they can foster development within their authorities. Evidence suggests that while these local bodies have shown some success in achieving good governance through local service delivery, they have generally failed to significantly enhance the overall well-being and livelihoods of their people and communities. Consequently, the current performance of local government seems insufficient to meet the high and intensified expectations of the Nepali people.

There is a relatively small body of literature regarding the processes and evaluation of service delivery of local government in Nepal. Existing studies, such

as those by Kharel (2018) and others, tend to focus on the service recipients' viewpoints. In this regard, this study investigates the reasons why the performance of local government falls below public expectations and why the quality of service delivery is not as expected, examining the perspectives of the service providers, i.e. public representatives and other municipal officials. The specific objectives of this study are:

- a) To identify the context of public service delivery in Pokhara Metropolitan City.
- b) To explore the major issues and challenges of public service delivery in Pokhara Metropolitan City
- c) To suggest ways for the improvement of quality service delivery in Pokhara Metropolitan City.

Local Government and Service Delivery in Nepal: An Outline

This section attempts to explore the rise of local government in Nepal across three main periods: ancient, middle, and contemporary periods.

Ancient Period: Kirat, Lichhavi and Malla

The evidence of local government can be traced back to the ancient Kirat and Malla periods. They established a unique framework of local government for "administrative and judicial purpose" (Pradhan, 2019, p. 116). During the Kirat and Malla periods, Nepal was a welfare state under a monarchy (Regmi, 1960).

During the Kirat period, there was a Council of State called *Chumlung* that played an important role in the dispersal of power. It was composed of the king, ministers, high-level army officers, and two others who were elected by the people (Chemjong, 1961/2003). They adopted *Thum* and *Panchali* as their exclusive forms of local government in which *Thum* served as an "Ilaka-level local body", and *Panchali* served as the "lowest local body". The chairperson was called *Paantimyanga*, who was an elected person from the general public (Kharel and Tharu, 2019, p. 84).

According to Shah (1992), "The Lichhavi era was followed by a dark period" in Nepal's history, which lasted for about

two centuries (p. 166). The Lichhavi period included a systematic local government consisting of three layers: Center, *Gram*, and *Tal* (Regmi, 1996). In the Malla period, there were “three categorised local units: *Bhukti*, *Bishaya*, and *Gramkeshtra*”. “Provisions for local development” and justice included “*Panchali* and *Panchaasamuchchaa*”. “The members for these bodies were appointed from the Centre” (Kharel and Tharu, 2019, p. 84).

Middle Period: Unification of Nepal, Rana Regime and Panchayat Era

Prithvi Narayan Shah started the unification of Nepal, which ultimately led to a centralised form of government. However, “the center did not interfere in some local socio-cultural practices, such as the “*Kipat* system for the Limbu community” (Chaudhary, 2019b, p. 50). During the one hundred and four years of the autocratic Rana regime, public services were hampered, and local government did not get enough authority. Jang Bahadur Rana fused “absolute power and seized sweeping powers”, who tried to make new laws and repeal old ones (Landon, 1928, as cited in Malhotra, 1958, p. 451)). People other than Ranas were prohibited to participate in public affairs (Smith, 1967). While Jang Bahadur Rana commissioned *Muluki Ain*, the formal framework of the governance and land revenue policy, he promoted the “stabilisation of political structure and central government” (Whelpton, 1987) and contributed less to local governance.

The Panchayat era made substantial progress in local service delivery. During 1950–1960, innovative governing structures like *Panchayat*, *Gram Panchayat Block*, and *Tribhuvan Gram Bikas Samiti* were formed (Kharel & Tharu, 2019). King Mahendra introduced a “monolithic authoritarian system of government called partyless panchayat”, dissolving the multiparty parliament (Khadka, 1993, p. 44). “The partyless system was originally based on a four-tier structure” (p. 45). King Mahendra replaced the previous *Gadi*, *Gauda*, and *Goshwara* system with District,

City, and Village Panchayat (Kharel & Tharu, 2019). During this era, development planning was introduced with priority in rural areas and agriculture. The Decentralisation Act 1960 was endorsed for the development of the lower level. Despite all these, the Panchayat was “a centralised approach, putting the King at the centre and people in the periphery” (Acharya, 2018: 37).

Contemporary Period: Rise of Democracy in 1990 to the Present

The People's Movement I in 1990 ended the partyless panchayat system and re-established multiparty democracy. During post 1990 democracy, Local Panchayats were replaced by the District Development Committee (DDC), Municipality, and Village Development Committee (VDC). The Local Self-Governance Act 1999 provided for a broad organisational structure and distinct provisions to include disadvantaged groups (Kharel, 2019). However, service delivery was severely affected by the 10-year Maoist insurgency (1996-2006), and decentralisation failed to materialise effectively (Sharma, 2014). “A political vacuum prevailed for more than 15 years, and the violent conflict seriously affected the local governance system, resulting in the withdrawal of most of the government institutions” (The Asia Foundation, 2017, p. 2).

After the People's Movement II in 2006, the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 was promulgated. It ended the monarchy and promised to restructure the state into a “progressive, femocratic Federal system” to end every forms of discrimination (Government of Nepal, 2007, p. 61). It promised arrangements for “local self-governance” based on “decentralisation and devolution of power” (Government of Nepal, 2007, p 61). The Constitution of Nepal 2015 structured Nepal into a Federal Democratic Republic with three autonomous levels: the Federation, the State, and the Local level. The country is arranged into seven provinces, 77 districts,

and 753 Local Governments. In 2017, phase one of the elections for the local level was held, and the Local Government Operation Act, 2018, now directs the functions and responsibilities of the local bodies.

Methodology

This study has adopted an exploratory research design utilising a qualitative method to achieve the research aims and objectives. Data collection involved in-depth interviews with service providers in Pokhara Metropolitan City (PMC) between June 10 to October 5, 2021. This period corresponded to the term of the latter half of the first elected local government (2017–2022) following the establishment of the Federal Republic of Nepal and the restructuring of the local level.

A list of the semi-structured questions was prepared and sent to all 33 wards of Pokhara Metropolitan City along with a formal letter of request for the interview. Since the period was marked by the pandemic of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), the study included a total of 12 service providers who provided consent for an interview with persistent follow-up. The interview comprised the PMC Spokesperson, seven locally elected representatives (Chair/Vice-chair/Member) and four municipal officials, who consisted of two Ward Secretaries and two technical staff (engineers).

Informed consent was secured from all respondents before the commencement of the interview session. The interview process and all information shared were meticulously recorded using an audio recorder. The collected audio files were subsequently transcribed to convert the oral data into a textual format. Each informant was assigned a unique code to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, and the transcribed text was then analysed to identify themes, patterns, and insights.

Rationale for the Selection of the Study Area

This study is focused on Pokhara Metropolitan City (PMC), which holds the administrative significance of being the headquarters of Gandaki Province. PMC is notable for its substantial geographical and demographic size within Nepal. The city is administratively structured into 33 divisions known as wards. It is the largest metropolitan city in terms of area in Nepal, and it is the second largest city in terms of population in Nepal. In terms of area comparison with other major metropolitan cities, Pokhara is significantly larger. It is 9 times larger than Kathmandu Metropolitan City, 18 times larger than Lalitpur Metropolitan City, 2.5 times larger than Bharatpur Metropolitan City. The city is characterised by a garland of huge socio-cultural diversities. Its population is a melting pot of various ethnic groups with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Upreti & Upadhyaya, 2013).

Results

Based on interviews with service providers, this part of the study explores the current state and the challenges in service delivery within Pokhara Metropolitan City. Crucially, it includes the service providers' recommendations for addressing these obstacles and advancing the service provision.

Context of Service Delivery

Diverse perspectives on the state of service delivery in Pokhara Metropolitan City were gathered from interviews with municipal representatives and staff. Regarding the enthusiasm brought to the people through the local election, WC-003 stated, "After I was elected as the chair of my ward, I came to know the different types of problems the residents had been facing for long years due to the absence of their representatives at the local level. Many people, being optimistic, came to my office to congratulate us after we were elected". Furthermore, giving a reference to one of the ward services, WC-003 added, "The people who needed to visit the ward office several times just to renew their social

security allowance in the past are now completed in a few minutes”.

The absence of proper legal frameworks and regulations has been reported as a major hindrance to public service delivery in the first two years after the local bodies were formed. This difficulty was highlighted by WC-001, who commented:

It was a new experience for us to work as local representatives after the country had been turned into a federal state. In the initial stage, we were filled with confusion as everything was insufficient, including rules and regulations, but slowly we formulated laws, rules and regulations. We have been providing services under rules and regulations to the service seekers as per the citizen charter now. However, we have many challenges and a long distance to walk.

Both public representatives and municipal officials expressed optimism for local development, attributing their positive viewpoint to the new, three-tiered structure of autonomous government. In this context, WC-004 narrated, “We are heading forward according to the vision of the constitution and locally formulated acts and laws. We have enormous potentialities to go further within this system of government, and there are lots of probabilities for national development if the system is well institutionalised”. According to the respondents, Pokhara Metropolitan City completed a large volume of developmental projects following the 2017 local election. In this regard, WC-005 aforementioned, “We did a lot within these four years, and we still have to do many”.

Because local governments operate close to citizens, there was a consensus among all respondents that local representatives possess the most accurate knowledge of public issues. For instance, WC-004 remarked, “Without deep information about the problems of the local level, no effective policies can be formulated and implemented well. The taste of soil is known to roots and local governments are

in the form of roots now.” Regarding the necessity of multiple factors working together for local development, WC-004 added, “how a country lead to the path of prosperity is connected with education, sports, culture, basic rights of the citizens, health and longevity, and ways how a government cater its responsibilities. Therefore, we need to pay attention to the maximum use of resources.”

The observation suggested that PMC was gradually upgrading the physical facilities for its service delivery. Most ward offices have already moved into their own permanent facilities, though a few continue to operate in rented houses. Regarding the infrastructure facilities in the office, a respondent commented:

When I entered as a Ward Chair to this office for the first time, the infrastructural facilities were very pathetic. We renovated the building and installed appropriate physical mechanisms to ease service delivery to our citizens. We have old-aged people-friendly, disabled people-friendly, and child-friendly physical arrangement of the service delivery mechanism at present. (WC-002)

However, the arrangements for service delivery lacked uniformity across the different wards, particularly regarding available facilities. Concerning the resources provided within the respective ward, WC-002 stated, “We have one door mechanism for service delivery. After the submission of documents from a window, service seekers need not visit different rooms. Instead, we have managed an internal circular of documents for the convenience of our service seekers.” Though a similar mechanism was not found in every ward in Pokhara Metropolitan City.

Service delivery in Pokhara Metropolitan City has been observed to be digitized, with almost all units upgrading their systems from manual processes to computerized record-keeping. A respondent provided this commentary on the new digital system installed in their ward office:

For the first time in Nepal, we have created a citizen profile at the ward level. We have our own website, social media platforms to disseminate information, software to run activities, and we are planning to create a mobile and desktop app soon. The annual results of public schools in our ward are disseminated from the Ward Website, too. (WC-005)

In connection with the initial experience of poor infrastructure, WC-005 further mentioned, "When I entered into my Ward office after I had been elected as a Chair, there was not a single computer, and there were no human resources with a computer-literate background. However, the situation has been changed considerably now. We offer every service with computer technology at present, and all our staff are at least computer literate too."

The efficiency within human resources in the Pokhara Metropolitan City was reported to be improving, with officials receiving professional development opportunities. According to WC-005, "Long-held political vacuum in a country had generated a sense of boastfulness within municipal staff. When I experienced their ego towards public representatives, I tried to motivate them by being familiar with them and their problems." In connection with the new strategic move and its outcomes, WC-005 further added, "We inspired them for professional development. We initiated the provision of the 'Best Employee Award' to draw the motivation of the officials. It took time, but we don't have any officials without a basic knowledge of computers now."

Many of the professional development programs were reported to be accessible only to the staff working in the main metropolitan office. Ward-level staff rarely benefited from these facilities. In terms of this discrimination, a Ward Secretary said, "The professional development programs, including other opportunities, are mostly available to staff working in the centre office and those

nearer to the authorities. The staff working in ward offices rarely obtain such chances. This is the major reason why staff get humiliated when transferred to ward offices from center (WS-009).

The strict execution of rewards and punishments seemed to be lacking in the ward offices. Moreover, Pokhara Metropolitan City had not pursued any strategy to retire computer-illiterate staff with attractive packages, opting instead to utilise them for paper-based tasks. In this context, WC-006 said, "We have no authority to give retirement options to the government officials who are not efficient in their work. Therefore, we have assigned computer-illiterate staff to other manual tasks. The new generations of staff are almost efficient in computer practices".

Almost all the respondents indicated the improved service delivery in terms of accountability, responsiveness, and transparency in recent years, primarily due to the introduction of technology in the workplace. In this context, WS-010 specified, "The use of computers has minimized service delivery time. We are now able to provide services as per the citizen charter if the required documents are well fulfilled from the sides of service seekers". Similarly, the public-private partnership was reported to be expanding in recent years. The Pokhara Metropolitan City and ward offices are found to be actively involving various stakeholders, such as community groups (*Aama Samuha, Tol Bikash Sastha, Upavokta Samiti*), NGOs, INGOs, the private sectors, and youth clubs, in both service delivery and developmental projects. In connection with this, a Ward Secretary noted:

We have the satisfactory participation of public and private organisations in our actions. We had enough participation from such organisations to collect and distribute *rahat* (assistance) for COVID-19 victims. Likewise, the COVID-19 vaccination has been organized in our Ward with the assistance of youth clubs. We also have

satisfactory public participation in other developmental works. (WS-010)

Overall, the relationship between the public, their representatives, and municipal officials was found to be mostly cooperative, with only a few exceptions. According to a Ward Secretary, "Since the representatives are elected from different areas of this Ward, they are close and familiar with the people, which has created a comfortable environment to provide services effectively" (WS-009). According to the next official, "The relationship between public and Ward officials in our area is good. But sometimes, service seekers come for services without the appropriate documents. If we suggest them collect such documents first, they blame officials for not being responsive and accountable for their work. We need to spend time unnecessarily to convince service seekers in such situations" (WE-011).

According to a Ward Chair, achieving significant progress within the current bureaucratic structure is extremely challenging or a nightmare. WC-005 signified this thought by saying: "Even the decisions made by public representatives are twisted by municipal officials. We need to change the entire bureaucratic mindset for smooth delivery of services from the local level." A Ward Secretary noted the existence of a significant ego dynamic operating between the public representatives and municipal officials. In this regard, WS-010 said:

Sometimes, public representatives force officials to perform certain work that the existing law prohibits. The representatives consider themselves superior to officials for being locally elected and think that the officials should do any work given to them. In contrast, some officials are found with an ego who refuse to listen to the representatives elected for only a certain tenure. The superiority ego has also created problems among public representatives and ward employees sometimes.

Despite a few complaints against others, the respondents acknowledged the need of triangular relationship among the public, public representatives, and municipal officials. Regarding the required consensus among all parties, a respondent said, "We need to rise up from our present level, settling misunderstandings and egos so that service delivery can be strengthened in the future" (WE-012)

Nepal adopted a federal republic system, leaving its unitary structure, with high aspirations for service delivery. This newly established structure promised to bring services at local level, previously centralized in *Singhadurbar*. However, this study uniformly revealed that the promised services of federalism have not yet materialized at the local level. In this context, WC-006 commented, "We reached to the doorsteps and distributed *rahat* (assistance) packages to the victims during the peak time of COVID-19 in our Ward, but just citing a few examples, we cannot state that the services of *Singhadurbar* have arrived at the doorsteps of the citizens." Considering the lack of devolution of power as one of the hindrances for the present service delivery context, WM-007 said, "Services of *Singhadurbar* at doorsteps has been a myth due to the unwillingness of the federal government to impart rights and power to the other governments" For WC-006, "The rights of *Singhadurbar* came only in papers and slogans, but it didn't come in reality." Similarly, for WS-010, "The promises envisioned by federalism have not been acquired yet. Yet progress has been made. Many local problems have been resolved at the local level."

The data indicate that the post-federalism autonomy in local governance has significantly impacted local development by enhancing local governance and improving service delivery through power sharing among the three tiers of government. Despite these advances, the implementation of existing laws, infrastructure, and efficiency of human resources is not yet sufficient for

optimal service delivery to the general public.

Challenges of Service Delivery

As per the respondents, there are some significant challenges which have brought adverse situations in service delivery mechanisms in Pokhara Metropolitan City. The first challenge of service delivery, agreed by almost all the respondents, is concerned with the implications of laws. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 has made the provision of 22 rights and other concurrent rights to the local governments. Moreover, the Constitution has bestowed clearly defined legislative, executive and judicial powers on the local government. However, many powers and rights of local government have not been initiated even within three years of time due to the lack of proper coordination and cooperation between the three tiers of government. In this regard, a Ward Chair stated:

The ego has been seen regarding power sharing between the federal government to provincial and local governments. The federal government is still reluctant to share its long-existing power with the other bodies. In the same way, Pokhara Metropolitan City Office has centralized its power within itself. It seems unwilling to share power at the Ward level. Whenever the laws regarding power sharing is not executed well, until then, no significant progress in service delivery can be achieved. (WC-002)

Similar views were also posed by other respondents in the interview. According to WC-001, "Many laws and rights were formulated, but they became limited only to papers; in practice, the powers were still unified in the Federal government and in the central Metropolitan Office." Regarding some defects in existing laws, WC-005 remarked, "The citizens have been victimized with double tax for the same case due to the lack of appropriate law and coordination among governments and local bodies". For WE-011, "There are many drawbacks in current laws which can't

prevent the leakage of public revenue". Similarly, WM-007 said, "Many service delivery mechanisms like *malpot* and other services have not been initiated yet due to the lack of coordination and cooperation among the levels of government. The federal government seems unwilling to share power among other bodies. They form the laws but do not follow the laws themselves. The problem has come from upper levels".

The next challenge prevalent in Pokhara Metropolitan City and ward offices was a lack of adequate budget and infrastructure. Though many of the Ward offices were found to be established in their own building, some were found to be very old, and some were found not spacious enough for effective service delivery to the citizens. Except in a few, ward offices were not found with eco-friendly policies. In this regard, one of the ward chairs stated, "The building where we are operating our services is very old. After we arrived at the ward office, we renovated it and managed some rooms for service delivery. There are no separate rooms for the members. We are conducting a meeting in the narrow spaces in the ward chair's cabin". In many of the ward offices, the furniture and other office equipment were not found to sustain the need for service delivery. In this connection, a Ward Secretary stated:

We are obliged to provide some of the services on the second floor of our building, which is not friendly to older people and disabled people. Moreover, we do not have enough computers and an electricity backup system, due to which citizens need to wait for electricity during load shedding. Sometimes citizens need to wait for hours due to this problem. (WS-009)

Due to the lack of an appropriate budget for the infrastructural development of municipal units, service delivery was found to be adversely affected. Service delivery in Pokhara Metropolitan City was found to be unable to enter into some long-term goals due to inadequate budget and national policy. In this regard, WC-004 said,

“We are unable to address the issues concerned with rivers, lakes, *sukumbasi* (landless people) living in Pokhara just with our own effort. We need enough budget and an appropriate national policy to address such long-run issues.”

The next challenge for service delivery in PMC was reported as the availability of efficient human resources. On one hand, the number of required human resources was found insufficient, and on the other hand, the efficiency of human resources was found still not strong for the delivery of services according to the demand of time. According to WS-010, “There are just 3-4 accountants in Pokhara Metropolitan City who are looking after all the ward offices. Moreover, engineers and sub-engineers have to look at two wards simultaneously”. A similar view was also placed by WS-009, who stated, “Engineers and sub engineers are available only 3 days a week, but the service seekers come on any day seeking engineering services, which has created problems in service delivery”. The similar problem was highlighted by WC-001, who said, “The problem of technology friendly staff is a national problem, which is still prevalent in our ward. We are trying to reduce the problem through professional development programs to our staff.” Regarding the efficiency of municipal employees, respondent WE-011 said, “Old generations of officials are less efficient in computer technology whereas new appointed officials are up-to-date.”

Low public awareness was found to be one of the severe problems in service delivery. In this regard, WS-010 opined, “It has been very difficult to aware citizens about the delivery of services in our ward. We have placed the Citizen Charter on our website as well as on our ward office. But even the educated people come for services without the required documents. People hardly have a look at public notices.” A similar view was also stated by WE-012, who said, “Citizens hardly come for the Ward services, reading the Citizen’s Charter on the website and on the board placed in

ward premises. We have also installed a complaint box and try to address their grievances, but no constructive suggestions are provided by the citizens.”

As a solution to the low public awareness, Pokhara Metropolitan City was found to be planning some awareness programs in the wards. In this connection, WS-010 said, “We are planning to conduct an awareness program to *Aama samuha* (Mothers group), *Upvokta samuha* (Consumers group), *Tol Bikas Sanstha* (Community Development Organisations) and *Yuva club* (Youth club) on service delivery from ward level soon.”

In a nutshell, there lie several challenges in Pokhara Metropolitan City, which have prohibited the smooth delivery of services at the local level. The study noted the lack of several factors, like cooperation and coordination among the three tiers of governments, financial and human resources, infrastructural facilities, public awareness, etc., as significant challenges for service delivery.

Expectations and Suggestions of Local Service Providers

The most crucial demand reported by almost every respondent was the immediate application and implementation of the existing laws and rules across the federal, provincial, and local spheres. A Ward Chair commented on this priority, saying:

The Local Government Operation Act 2017 has not been implemented on a full scale. We have made many laws, directives, and operational acts, but they have been limited to paper. We need to bring these written policies into action to bring the services of *Singhadurbar* to the doorsteps of the citizens. All levels of government should be ready to confer power on each other to execute policies and promote cooperation and coordination with each other. (WC-001)

Similarly, the next Ward Chair also focused on cooperation and coordination between the three tiers of government for

the clarity of effective service delivery at the local level. According to WC-004, "There is a lack of required cooperation and coordination among the three tiers of government in Nepal. We can see unnecessary allocation of budget to the same work from all levels of government. Contrarily, we can find some genuine development works being prohibited due to the inadequate budget and lack of coordination among the governments." Likewise, WE-011 highlighted the importance of accountability among public representatives, who said, "Political parties and representatives need to be responsible to institutionalize federalism to promote service delivery from the local level". Focusing on interconnection among local bodies themselves, WM-008 stated, "We have to establish a strong professional network among local bodies to cater service delivery well." Expecting more powers and rights in favour of public representatives to provide a higher level of service delivery, WM-008 further stated, "We have just 66 rights of recommendation. How a ward chair and representatives can fulfil unlimited expectations of citizens from the local level within such limitations."

One of the ward officers stressed the behavioural transformation among public representatives, bureaucrats, and the general public to institutionalise democracy and federalism in the country and promote service delivery at the local level. According to WS-010, "The General public is responsible for turning a leader into a corrupt politician. Unless the citizens stop visiting the doorsteps of public representatives to influence illegal work, we are going to reach nowhere." For WC-005, "Bureaucracy needs to be changed and transformed a lot". According to a Ward Secretary, "There is an unseen ego in Metropolitan City Official which has created the sense of superiority and inferiority among employees in the Metropolitan City office. The ego has disturbed the smooth functioning of service delivery at the local level" (WS-009).

In essence, federalism in Nepal has envisioned the local level as a separate government operated at the grassroots level. Significant progress has been noted within a short frame of time. However, the country was found to be facing the hangover of a unitary form of government of the past. It was suggested to follow rules and laws from all levels of government, and to have higher public participation and awareness in the service delivery systems.

Discussion

The key findings concerning the context and challenges of public service delivery in Pokhara Metropolitan City are interpreted in this section. The overall results in the earlier section reflect the noteworthy but inadequate change in local government resulting from federalism in Nepal. Although the initial years following the Local Election 2017 were challenging, they proved to be ultimately progressive. Due to the inadequacy of appropriate laws and regulations, service providers faced multiple difficulties in public service delivery. However, the enthusiasm for development encouraged the provision of services as per the citizen charter through locally formulated regulations. The federal structure seems to have potential for national development if the system is well-institutionalised. The local government is now at the doorstep of citizens, due to which local representatives are well aware of grassroots problems, which may contribute to the effective formulation and implementation of national policies.

Many ward offices are moving into their own buildings with the gradual upgrading of infrastructural facilities. Several efforts have been noted to manage service delivery mechanisms that are age-friendly and disability-friendly. Beyond that, the PMC and its wards have witnessed a significant leap in service delivery from manual work to digital solutions. Some wards are further leading the way through the innovative use of the internet and social media, maintaining a citizen profile and sharing information at the local level.

However, the digital progress is not uniform across all wards. Likewise, the relationship among the public, public representatives, and municipal officials was perceived as gradually strengthening, which has created a comfortable environment for service provision. The results also indicate an evolving trend in public-private partnerships, with active involvement of community groups in service delivery and developmental work. Despite all these notable transformations, the desired level of decentralised services remains an unmet vision.

Challenges for Service Delivery

Despite the noted improvements, there are several challenges that have hindered the smooth and effective delivery of services in PMC. The major issues are:

Laws and Inter-Government Coordination

The primary challenge to reliable service delivery is the implication of laws and coordination among the three tiers of government. Although the Constitution of Nepal 2015 provides extensive rights to local governments, many of these powers have not been initiated due to a lack of proper coordination and cooperation among federal, provincial, and local governments. A significant concern raised by service providers is the reluctance of the federal government to share its long-held power. Similarly, the Pokhara Metropolitan City Office seems unwilling to share powers with the Ward levels. This lack of coordination has led to concrete problems, such as citizens facing double taxation for the same case.

Budget and Infrastructure Limitations

The second major challenge is the lack of adequate budget and infrastructure. While some ward offices have their own buildings, others are old, not spacious enough, or lack basic facilities. Only a few wards have disabled-friendly and elderly-friendly structures. Furthermore, infrastructural limitations like insufficient computers and a lack of computer backup systems adversely affect service delivery

time and convenience. The lack of sufficient budget also prevents the PMC from addressing large-scale and long-term issues, such as the management of rivers, lakes, and landless people, without adequate support from the national level.

Human Resources Quantity and Quality

The availability of required and efficient human resources is another pressing challenge of local government. The cases like accountants looking after several ward offices and engineers covering multiple wards indicate the pressing issue of the required number of staff in PMC. The result section also indicates that newly appointed staff are generally literate with computer technology, whereas the older generation of officials is less competent in technology due to the effect of manually operated work in the past. The efforts have been made to increase the efficiency of the employees through professional development opportunities and influence them through 'Best Employee Award'. However, the lack of a strict reward and punishment system and attractive retirement packages for computer-illiterate staff has complicated the subject.

Public Awareness and Participation

Finally, low public awareness and participation pose a significant hurdle. Although the Citizen Charters are available on websites and in office premises, citizens, including educated people, ask for services without the required documents. The constructive suggestions are hardly available in the suggestion box, which indicates low participation of people in public affairs. PMC is planning to conduct awareness programs to *Aama Samuha*, *Upvokta Samuha*, *Tol Bikas Samitie*, *Yuva Club*, etc., to address these issues soon.

Conclusion

The study comes to the conclusion that the federal structure has encouraged public service delivery and brought optimism for local development in Nepal. The remarkable accomplishments after restructuring of the state include autonomous local government, responsible

public representatives, citizen-friendly infrastructure, a shift to digitalised arrangements from manual systems and improved public-private partnerships. Despite all the notable changes, the promises of transforming the services of the central government to the doorsteps of the citizens through local government have not been fully materialised. The prominent hindrances in service delivery include inadequate laws, poor coordination among the three tiers of government, insufficient resources and infrastructure, low human resources and efficiency, little public awareness, etc. To address all these challenges and improve local service delivery, the study suggests immediate attention to the formulation and execution of necessary laws, enhanced intergovernmental relations, and appropriate management of human and other resources.

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