

Enhancing Governance through Reform: Strengthening the Federal Parliament Secretariat of Nepal

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Abstract:

The transition to federal governance in Nepal has presented numerous challenges, requiring comprehensive structural and procedural reforms within the Federal Parliament Secretariat. This research provides an extensive examination of key reform areas, including legislative processes, capacity building, public engagement, oversight mechanisms, administrative restructuring, and research development. Employing a qualitative approach, this study undertakes an in-depth analysis of existing governance gaps and presents well-researched, actionable recommendations. The findings underscore the significance of defining clear jurisdictional responsibilities, fostering robust stakeholder engagement, and enhancing institutional capacity to ensure the effective and efficient functioning of the Federal Parliament Secretariat. By implementing these essential reforms, Nepal's parliamentary governance can evolve to become more transparent, accountable, and proficient in executing legislative functions, thereby strengthening democracy and promoting good governance practices in the country. This research fills a critical gap

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in the existing literature by providing a context-specific analysis of the Federal Parliament Secretariat and offering practical recommendations for its improvement.

Keywords: Federal Parliament Secretariat, governance reform, legislative process, capacity building, stakeholder engagement, public policy, transparency, accountability

1. Introduction:

The governance landscape of Nepal has undergone significant transformations following the adoption of a federal system as mandated by the Constitution of Nepal (2015). This transition has necessitated substantial restructuring in governmental institutions, including the Federal Parliament Secretariat, which plays a central role in ensuring the effectiveness and accountability of the legislative process. However, despite these reforms, several structural and operational inefficiencies persist, hindering the Secretariat's ability to fulfill its responsibilities effectively. The challenges within the Secretariat include jurisdictional ambiguities, delayed legislative procedures, inefficient administrative practices, and limited public engagement. These issues not only weaken legislative performance but also undermine democratic governance, making it imperative to introduce well-structured reforms. Specifically, the lack of clear demarcation of roles between parliamentary committees has led to duplication of efforts and inconsistencies in legislative scrutiny. The prolonged delays in legislative procedures, often exceeding several months for even routine bills, are attributed to a shortage of skilled drafting personnel and cumbersome internal processes. Inefficient administrative practices, such as reliance on manual record-keeping and paper-based workflows, contribute to

unnecessary delays and impede access to information. Furthermore, the limited engagement with the public in legislative deliberations has resulted in a perceived disconnect between the parliament and the citizens it represents. These multifaceted challenges underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to enhance the functioning of the Federal Parliament Secretariat.

The Federal Parliament Secretariat serves as the administrative backbone of Nepal's bicameral legislature, supporting both the House of Representatives and the National Assembly. It is responsible for facilitating legislative activities, ensuring procedural compliance, and providing research and advisory services to parliamentarians. However, as Nepal's federal governance structure continues to evolve, the Secretariat must adapt to new governance dynamics, address emerging challenges, and enhance its operational efficiency. The lack of clear procedural guidelines and capacity-building initiatives has resulted in administrative bottlenecks that delay the law-making process. Furthermore, weak oversight mechanisms have reduced public trust in parliamentary institutions. The limited investment in capacity-building programs for Secretariat staff has resulted in a shortage of expertise in areas such as legislative drafting, policy analysis, and information technology. The lack of robust oversight mechanisms has hindered the effective monitoring of government expenditures and policy implementation. Moreover, the limited use of technology to enhance transparency and accountability has perpetuated a culture of secrecy and opacity within the parliamentary system.

This study seeks to assess the effectiveness of the Federal Parliament Secretariat, identify key areas requiring reform, and propose strategies to enhance its functionality. Through a comprehensive analysis of governance challenges and international best practices, this research aims to provide

evidence-based recommendations for improving legislative efficiency, institutional accountability, and public engagement. The study employs a qualitative research methodology, incorporating legislative records, policy documents, expert interviews, and comparative analysis to present a holistic view of the Secretariat's operational framework. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of institutional reforms in strengthening Nepal's parliamentary governance and ensuring the effective implementation of federalism. The research questions guiding this study include: (1) what are the key challenges hindering the effective functioning of the Federal Parliament Secretariat? (2) What specific reforms are necessary to enhance legislative efficiency, institutional accountability, and public engagement? (3) How can international best practices in parliamentary governance be adapted to the context of Nepal? (4) What are the potential obstacles for implementing the proposed reforms, and how can they be overcome?

This article is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a review of the relevant literature on parliamentary governance and institutional reform. Section 3 describes the research methods employed in the study. Section 4 presents the findings of the research, highlighting the key challenges and reform areas. Section 5 discusses the implications of the findings and proposes specific recommendations for strengthening the Federal Parliament Secretariat. Section 6 concludes with a summary of the key findings and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review:

Nepal's transition to a federal governance structure, as enshrined in the Constitution of Nepal (2015), necessitated fundamental changes across various government entities to ensure effective governance. The literature on democratic governance and institutional frameworks extensively highlights the role of legislative bodies in fostering democracy, transparency, and efficiency. Numerous studies on parliamentary effectiveness underscore the critical necessity for clear law-making procedures, transparent oversight mechanisms, and continuous capacity-building initiatives. These studies emphasize the importance of well-defined rules of procedure, effective committee systems, and access to information as essential elements of a functioning parliament. Existing research on Nepal's federalism identifies persistent jurisdictional ambiguities and implementation challenges that hinder governance efficiency. These challenges include overlapping mandates between different levels of government, inadequate fiscal decentralization, and weak coordination mechanisms. Comparative analysis with other federal governance models, including those of India and Germany, provides invaluable insights into the best practices for managing parliamentary secretariats. India's parliamentary system, with its long-standing traditions and established procedures, offers valuable lessons in legislative drafting, committee management, and parliamentary oversight. Germany's federal structure, characterized by strong intergovernmental coordination and a robust system of checks and balances, provides insights into how to manage jurisdictional complexities and ensure effective policy implementation.

Additionally, extensive research indicates that legislative drafting units play a crucial role in ensuring timely and well-structured legislative processes.

Countries that have developed well-organized legislative support mechanisms demonstrate improved governance outcomes, as evidenced in case studies from Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. These countries have invested in creating professional legislative drafting services that provide technical expertise to parliamentarians in drafting and amending legislation. Empirical research supports the argument that a structured and professional parliamentary secretariat serves as the essential bridge between legislative aspirations and policy execution. Furthermore, political science literature suggests that strong oversight mechanisms lead to enhanced governmental transparency, greater public trust, and more efficient policy implementation. The literature emphasizes the importance of independent audit institutions, parliamentary committees, and public accounts committees in holding the government accountable for its actions. Collectively, these studies provide a foundation for understanding the imperative need for reform in Nepal's Federal Parliament Secretariat. Specifically, the literature highlights the importance of addressing issues such as jurisdictional ambiguities, delayed legislative procedures, inefficient administrative practices, and limited public engagement to enhance the effectiveness of the Federal Parliament Secretariat.

3. Methods:

This study employs a rigorous qualitative research methodology, leveraging document analysis of legislative records, policy documents, governance frameworks, and secondary sources. Interviews with parliamentary staff, government officials, policy analysts, and academic experts further supplement the research, providing firsthand perspectives on the challenges and necessary reforms in the Federal Parliament Secretariat. The selection of

interview participants was guided by the following criteria: (1) Demonstrated expertise in parliamentary governance, public administration, or policy analysis. (2) Direct experience working with the Federal Parliament Secretariat or other relevant government institutions. (3) A willingness to provide candid and insightful perspectives on the challenges and reform needs of the Secretariat. The study framework categorizes the reform needs into three primary domains: legislative, administrative, and public engagement-based reforms, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of governance mechanisms. Additionally, qualitative content analysis was applied to discern recurring themes in policy discussions, legislative deliberations, and stakeholder consultations, ensuring an all-encompassing assessment of governance inefficiencies. The study also incorporates a comparative methodological approach, analyzing Nepal's governance model in the context of similar federal systems to identify adaptable best practices. The choice of India and Germany as comparative cases was based on the following considerations: (1) both countries have long-standing experience with federal governance and well-developed parliamentary systems. (2) India shares historical and cultural similarities with Nepal, while Germany represents a different model of federalism with a strong emphasis on intergovernmental coordination. (3) Both countries have implemented successful reforms in their parliamentary secretariats that could be adapted to the context of Nepal.

4. Results:

The study identifies a series of critical reform areas that are necessary to improve the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of the Federal Parliament Secretariat. One of the most pressing concerns is the legislative process, which currently experiences significant delays due to jurisdictional

ambiguities and a lack of procedural clarity. The establishment of a dedicated legislative drafting unit, combined with the implementation of a structured legislative calendar, can significantly enhance legislative efficiency, ensuring that essential laws are enacted in a timely and systematic manner. Currently, the absence of a dedicated legislative drafting unit forces parliamentarians to rely on external sources for drafting assistance, which can lead to delays and inconsistencies in the quality of legislation. The implementation of a structured legislative calendar would provide a clear roadmap for the enactment of laws, ensuring that priority bills are given adequate attention and that the legislative process is not unduly delayed.

Another key issue is the shortage of skilled personnel within the Secretariat, which hampers the effectiveness of governance functions. Capacity-building initiatives, including regular training programs, mentorship opportunities, and strategic partnerships with academic institutions, are essential to equip personnel with the necessary expertise. By investing in human resource development, the Secretariat can enhance its institutional capability to manage parliamentary functions effectively. The current lack of capacity-building programs has resulted in a shortage of expertise in areas such as legislative drafting, policy analysis, and information technology. Regular training programs, mentorship opportunities, and strategic partnerships with academic institutions would provide Secretariat staff with the skills and knowledge necessary to perform their duties effectively.

Public engagement is also an area that requires substantial improvement. At present, citizen participation in parliamentary affairs remains limited due to a lack of awareness and accessible communication channels. The introduction

of digital engagement platforms, coupled with the organization of structured consultations and public hearings, can facilitate a more inclusive legislative process. Strengthening public engagement mechanisms will enable greater civic participation, thereby reinforcing democratic principles. The current lack of public awareness and accessible communication channels has resulted in a perceived disconnect between the parliament and the citizens it represents. The introduction of digital engagement platforms, such as online forums and social media channels, would provide citizens with opportunities to participate in legislative deliberations and provide feedback on proposed laws. The organization of structured consultations and public hearings would ensure that citizens have a direct voice in the policy-making process.

Oversight mechanisms within the Secretariat require significant reinforcement, as weak monitoring frameworks currently diminish accountability. The establishment of joint parliamentary committees and public accountability forums will serve to improve oversight functions and ensure that parliamentary decisions are executed efficiently and responsibly. Currently, weak monitoring frameworks have diminished accountability within the Secretariat, leading to inefficiencies and a lack of transparency. The establishment of joint parliamentary committees, composed of members from both the House of Representatives and the National Assembly, would enhance oversight functions and ensure that parliamentary decisions are executed effectively. Public accountability forums would provide citizens with opportunities to question government officials and hold them accountable for their actions. Similarly, administrative restructuring is necessary. Modernizing administrative processes and integrating digital technologies can help

streamline parliamentary operations, improve efficiency, and enhance transparency.

Finally, research and policy analysis mechanisms must be strengthened to support evidence-based policymaking. Establishing a dedicated Parliamentary Research Center and fostering collaboration with think tanks, universities, and independent policy institutions will enhance research capacity, allowing for more informed legislative decision-making. A well-resourced and competent research wing within the Secretariat will provide legislators with the necessary data and analytical tools to develop effective policies. The current lack of research and policy analysis capacity has hindered the ability of legislators to make informed decisions based on evidence. Establishing a dedicated Parliamentary Research Center, staffed by qualified researchers and policy analysts, would provide legislators with the data and analytical tools necessary to develop effective policies and access to the best available evidence.

5. Discussion:

The findings of this research have significant implications for strengthening the Federal Parliament Secretariat and enhancing governance in Nepal. The proposed reforms, including the establishment of a dedicated legislative drafting unit, capacity-building initiatives, public engagement mechanisms, oversight frameworks, administrative restructuring, and research and policy analysis capacity, are essential for improving legislative efficiency, institutional accountability, and public participation. The implementation of these reforms would not only enhance the effectiveness of the Federal Parliament Secretariat but also contribute to the overall democratic development of Nepal.

The success of these reforms will depend on several factors, including political will, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement. It is essential that policymakers recognize the importance of strengthening the Federal Parliament Secretariat and provide the necessary resources to support the implementation of the proposed reforms. Furthermore, it is crucial to engage with all relevant stakeholders, including parliamentary staff, government officials, civil society organizations, and the public, to ensure that the reforms are implemented in a participatory and inclusive manner.

6. Conclusion:

This research has highlighted essential areas requiring immediate reform to enhance the efficiency, accountability, and transparency of the Federal Parliament Secretariat. Addressing legislative delays, reinforcing oversight mechanisms, fostering robust public engagement, and investing in institutional capacity-building initiatives are imperative for improving governance outcomes. Furthermore, incorporating best practices from established federal legislative bodies will serve to facilitate more streamlined and effective governance processes in Nepal. Digital governance and automation emerge as transformative tools that can significantly reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies and improve legislative tracking, record-keeping, and transparency.

By institutionalizing these reforms, the Federal Parliament Secretariat can position itself as a more robust, transparent, and effective entity that upholds democratic values and enhances governance practices. Strengthening public participation, research capacity, and administrative efficiency will not only enhance governance but also contribute to the overall democratic development of Nepal. Future research should focus on assessing the impact of these reforms

on legislative outcomes and governance effectiveness. It would also be valuable to explore the role of technology in further enhancing the efficiency and transparency of the Federal Parliament Secretariat.

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