



Munich Personal RePEc Archive

Civic Engagement Practice at Planning and Monitoring System by Local Government (s) of Nepal

Thapa, Manish

Kathmandu University

18 January 2022

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/111667/>
MPRA Paper No. 111667, posted 27 Jan 2022 03:02 UTC

Civic Engagement Practice at Planning and Monitoring System by Local Government (s) of Nepal

Abstract

Civic engagement stays an integral part of democracy, where citizen participates in government-led planning and monitoring process. This paper explored the current practices and underlying barriers of civic engagement at local government's planning and monitoring set-up adopting Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation. Paper is based on responses from Local Government (s) on open-ended questionnaire. Considering the mandate of planning process, civic engagement at community level planning is high. The engagement level at ward level and municipal level remained from non-participation to tokenism level, where the partnerships and delegation of power to citizen, is yet to be effectively exercised. Paper emphasizes on need of civic engagement to build ownership and trust towards government mechanism.

Keywords: Accountability, Civic, Engagement, Government, Monitoring, Planning, Trust

Introduction

Historically, engagement of private, non-governmental and citizen is considered as an asset for any government agencies to have an effective planning, implementing, and monitoring system. Engagement of citizen in government-led planning and programming is often discussed as the civic engagement. Adler and Goggin (2005) described civic engagement as the interaction and participation of public or citizen with community and government institutions. Civic engagement is taken as the beauty of democracy, which ensures the civic right to participate and engage in government-led planning and monitoring process (Amnda 2012; Arnstein 2019; & Zaff et al., 2010). Civic engagement contributes towards building social capital, which enhances the trust and cooperative mechanism between citizen and government (Arvanitidis 2017; Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2003). Civic engagement benefits to both citizen as well as government agencies. At one hand, citizen exercises their fundamental right of engaging at government-led programs. While at other, government process becomes transparent and accountable that leads to trust and ownership among citizen (Van & Bekkers, 2015).

Civic engagement in Nepali context is one of the proven approaches in having an effective government-led programming. Community Forestry model adopted in Nepal is counted among one of the successful programs that engaged citizen at different level of planning and programming (Acharya & Gentle, 2006). Considering the significance of civic engagement, Constitution of Nepal 2015, Planning and Budgeting guideline of Local Government 2016 and Local Government Operation Act 2017 envisioned the civic engagement at varied level (Bhushal & Pandeya 2021; Government of Nepal 2017; Secretariat 2015). With the mandatory clause at budgeting and planning guideline, civic engagement is prioritized during planning and policy making level by Local Government (s) but is often neglected during implementing and monitoring level.

An effective civic engagement helps local government for better decision making, maintaining social stability, increasing transparency and social accountability and creating the trustworthy environment for further government-community collaborations (Callahan, 2007). However, with limited human resources alongside political as well as bureaucratic influence, LG's monitoring system has hardly utilized the opportunities to be provided with civic engagement. The act of not prioritizing civic engagement at execution and monitoring level not only increased dis-trust

towards government agencies but also weakened LG's planning and monitoring mechanism. The civic engagement at varying level of government-led planning and programming is theorized into ladder of citizen participation or civic engagement (Arnstein 2019; Connor 1988).

Ladder of Citizen Participation

The concept of civic engagement/participation as elaborated by Arnstein's ranges from non-participation to degree of tokenism and degree of citizen power (Arnstein, 2019). The scenario where the citizens only attend the government-led programs but cannot even put their concerns characterized as the non-participation. If the citizens are considered for consultations where they could receive detailed information about government-led plans and could provide feedbacks and concerns based on their understanding, such scenario is characterized under tokenism i.e., upgrade to non-participatory stage. Meanwhile the stage of participation where, citizen not only is considered as participant for consultation but are counted as the stakeholders to participate, collaborate and get involved in decision making process is the higher level of civic engagement.

Methodology

As civic engagement serves multiple benefit to all engaged parties (individuals, government agencies and community), this paper set an objective of exploring the current practices of promoting civic engagement at planning and monitoring mechanism of Local Government (s). With the purpose of having evidence based and empirical paper, an open-ended questionnaire was designed and shared with Local Government (s) through google form to provide response on self-administered data collection approach. All the interpretation and discussion of this paper is based on responses from 22 Local Government (s).

Legal Instruments on Planning and Monitoring at Local Government level

Constitution of Nepal 2015 provisioned multiple clauses supporting the civic engagement at local level planning and monitoring (Constituent Assembly Secretariat, 2015). Clauses focused on the need of policies at local level to inform citizen about government plans, and to promotes civic engagement in social, and charitable works. Exercising the power given by Constitution of Nepal 2015, local government (s) promulgated policies, guidelines and directives for their respective level. Local Government Operation Act (LGOA) 2017 mandated the requirement of civic engagement at varied level (community level and ward level) during annual planning and budgeting process (Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MOFAGA) 2017). Though LGOA envisioned the monitoring and evaluation activities at community level, the personnel to be engaged is limited to government representative (elected and bureaucratic officials) only.

Current Practices of Civic Engagement on Planning and Monitoring

Planning and Monitoring is incorporated at majority of the official documents (plans, policies, guidelines and directives) developed by Local Government. Annual planning and budgeting activities are carried out at community level, ward level and municipal level as per planning criteria as guided by Local Government Operation Act 2017. Civic engagement is prioritized during annual planning and budgeting process at all Local Government. During community level planning process, Local Government (s) ensures the participation of individuals from all age group, ethnic groups, gender and geographical context. The level of engagement falls into the category "power to citizen", where citizen have power to discuss and prioritize the planning as per their need. In case of ward level and municipal level planning process, the civic engagement level is close to non-existent as such activities are carried out among the selected group of individuals representing elected bodies and bureaucratic officials.

Local Government (s) developed the monitoring and evaluation guideline to monitor and supervise the activities under their investment. LG level and ward level monitoring and supervision committee is formed representing the elected heads, bureaucratic heads and representative from planning and other departments or units. LG (s) have the provision of civic engagement at monitoring depending on the involved financial resources. Especially for construction related works and plans with LG's partial investment, civic engagement is prioritized by LGs under consumer committee formation, program implementation and management guideline (Budhanilkantha Municipality, 2018). The level of civic engagement is promoted through mobilization of citizen under Toile Development Committee envisioned by Local Government to plan and monitor the LG-led activities at community level (Budhanilkantha Municipality 2018; Butwal Sub Metropolitan City, 2017).

Barriers for Civic Engagement

Aligning existing practices of civic engagement at Local Government with the Arnstein's ladder of citizen engagement, engagement level is various from community level to LG level planning and monitoring activities. There lies the wider level civic engagement at community level planning and monitoring and mostly fall under the category of "degrees of tokenism." Whereas the civic engagement level is almost non-existent at ward level and LG level planning and monitoring activities making it fall under "non-participation" category. One of the significant issues faced by Local Government (s) is about the reduced interest among citizen to engage even at community level planning and monitoring process due to the uncertainty of their voices and concerns being addressed through LG level committee, which holds the decision-making power.

Equally important aspect that limits the civic engagement on LG's planning and monitoring mechanism is about the awareness level among citizens about their rights and responsibility to engage at government-led events (Ianniello et al. 2019). Considering the diverse geographical context and scattered settlements (especially among LGs from hilly areas), government officials could not manage time to educate citizen on LG's planning and monitoring process. Meanwhile, educated adults migrates to other LGs/Districts/Countries for income sources (Sijapati, Bhattarai & Pathak 2015). This has resulted the less-educated adults to get engaged and contribute towards LG's planning and monitoring system, which remains the non-participatory due to their planning and monitoring related literacy status. The literacy status among adults at rural areas is considerably low (Dhakal, 2018). As LG's planning and monitoring tools requires the section to be filled, literacy status becomes the barrier for meaningful contribution. Majority of the time, LG seeks civic engagement to implement and monitor the construction related plans as a part of consumer-based committee. Due to lack of human resources having know-how of technical arrangements for such works, civic engagement level remains low or ineffective.

Conclusion

Planning and monitoring itself is the complex area which can never be effective with the efforts of single individual or institution. Effectiveness relies on the level of civic engagement i.e., collective efforts from all levels of stakeholders i.e., government authorities, non-government agencies, political affiliations and citizen. It is an undeniable aspect, increased civic engagement in government-led planning and monitoring process makes the public administration competent, transparent, and accountable. Delegation of decision-making power to Toile Development Committee or consumer-based committee or community level monitoring committee can enhance the civic engagement level as identified concerns could be addressed at community level itself with the delegated power. Intensive investment to educate citizen on LG's planning and monitoring mechanism can motivate adult and children to engage and contribute in more meaningful manner.

Meanwhile, investment on adults at community level on technical knowledge could not only enhances civic engagement but also possibly supports in upgrading livelihoods. Simplification of planning and monitoring tools, which could readily be applied by individual with formal literacy, or no literacy can contribute significantly to enhancing civic engagement.

Concludingly, the engagement at the upper layer of civic engagement i.e., “citizen holds power” creates the scenario of trust and ownership towards government-led works. As planning and monitoring remains the areas where citizen could remain informed and engaged and could share the community-based concerns and issues, promotion of civic engagement directs towards ensuring citizen’s trust and ownership alongside making LG accountable and transparent.

References

- Acharya, K. P., & Gentle, P. (2006). *Improving the effectiveness of collective action: Sharing experiences from community forestry in Nepal* (No. 577-2016-39227).
- Adler, R. P., & Goggin, J. (2005). What do we mean by “civic engagement”? *Journal of transformative education*, 3(3), 236-253.
- Amnå, E. (2012). How is civic engagement developed over time? Emerging answers from a multidisciplinary field. *Journal of adolescence*, 35(3), 611-627.
- Arnstein, S. R. (2019). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 85(1), 24-34.
- Arvanitidis, P. A. (2017). The concept and determinants of civic engagement. *Human Affairs*, 27(3), 252-272.
- Bhusal, T., & Pandeya, G. P. (2021). Ordinary people's participation in local development planning in Nepal. *Development in Practice*, 1-12.
- Budhanilkantha Municipality (2018). *Consumer Committee Formation, Program Implementation and Management related Guideline, 2018*. Budhanilkantha Municipality Office.
- Budhanilkantha Municipality (2018). *Tole Development Committee Formation and Implementation Directive, 2018*. Budhanilkantha Municipality Office.
- Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City (2017). *Tole Development Committee Coordination Committee Formation and Mobilization Guideline, 2017*. Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City Office.
- Connor, D. M. (1988). A new ladder of citizen participation. *National Civic Review*, 77(3), 249-257.
- Dhakal, B. (2018). Statistical trends in literacy rates in Nepal. *J Appl Chem*, 11(11), 71-7.
- Government of Nepal. (2017). *Local Government Operation Act, 2017*.
- Ianniello, M., Iacuzzi, S., Fedele, P., & Brusati, L. (2019). Obstacles and solutions on the ladder of citizen participation: a systematic review. *Public Management Review*, 21(1), 21-46.
- Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration [MOFAGA, 2017], *Annual Planning and Budgeting Process Directive for Local Government. Kathmandu: Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, Government of Nepal*.
- Patten, M. (2016). *Proposing empirical research: A guide to the fundamentals*. Routledge.
- Pattie, C., Seyd, P., & Whiteley, P. (2003). Citizenship and civic engagement: Attitudes and behaviour in Britain. *Political studies*, 51(3), 443-468.
- Secretariat, C. A., & Durbar, S. (2015). *Constitution of Nepal 2015. Kathmandu: Constituent Assembly Secretariat*.
- Sijapati, B., Bhattarai, A., & Pathak, D. (2015). *Analysis of labour market and migration trends in Nepal*. Kathmandu, Nepal: GDC Country Office Nepal, GIZ.
- Van Ingen, E., & Bekkers, R. (2015). Generalized trust through civic engagement? Evidence from five national panel studies. *Political Psychology*, 36(3), 277-294.
- Zaff, J. F., Hart, D., Flanagan, C. A., Youniss, J., & Levine, P. (2010). Developing civic engagement within a civic context. *The handbook of life-span development*.

