Factors Influencing Public Participation in the Planning Process of Damak-Jhapa

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Abstract

By extending the regime's political base and propagating its "Party less" character all the way down to the local settlement level, Nepal's absolute monarchy system, which ended in the 1990s, was used to build a monolithic, impenetrable political power structure throughout the country. Following that, the Local Self-governance Act (LSGA) of 1999 accelerated the process of decentralization, with increased authority and responsibility flowing to local governments, which has the potential to enhance urban productivity and provide conditions for more public participation.

This research aims to examine the factors that influence the planning process. It discusses the positive and negative aspects that influence the pace of public participation in Damak's local planning process. It tries to identify the elements that function as a barrier to participation as well as the factors that encourage involvement. The empirical research is structured as a qualitative case study, concentrating on the Damak municipality in Nepal. The research's issue is concerned with the relative responsibilities of sets of factors in accounting for the efficacy of people's participation in Damak's planning process, as well as the interactions between those sets of factors. The positive factors for the public participation are: 1) Awareness- the high level of local leadership, along with vision or idea quality, the capacity to communicate such ideas and have them widely accepted. 2) Social and political influence- the allocation of power and authority legally and 3) Accessibility to available resources (both financial and linked to the nature of the area). Likewise, the negative factors for demotivating public participation are: 1) Lack of awareness and miscommunications. 2) Huge gap in gender equality- still a male dominated society. 3) Ethnically influences- marginalized community being dominated by elite group. 4) Lack of a sense of ownership- due to the Nepal government's excessive granting of budgets, there is no public labor participation or monetary contribution.

The research is investigated through broad observations of the system and its evolution since 1999, and more precisely through an analysis of Damak municipality. The findings indicate that Municipalities have significant capability (administrative, managerial, and technical), which verifies excellent selection methods for local employees, as well as extensive education and training facilities. Thus, Political parties must concentrate their involvement in municipal governance and take a more strategic role in creating local leaders who are smart players in local development, including the political skills of mobilizing popular support and participation. Participation is critical in today's changing world, and it must be exercised in all areas, including municipal resource mobilization options.

Keywords

Public Participation, Beneficiaries, Ownership, Effectiveness

1. Introduction

Nepal promulgated its first Local Self Governance Act (LSGA) in 1999 where participatory planning was firstly introduced which gave functions like developing local self-growth plans, supplying and maintaining infrastructure and social development, as well as collecting their own income at levels lower than the DDC and VDC.

Public participation refers to all the participation in decision making on specific activities, concerning plans, programs and policies. Public participation is an important method for developing an effective strategy based on the requirements and recommendations of the intended beneficiaries. The 'Bottom up Approach' approach has replaced the previous 'Top-down Model' in terms of public participation. Public participation, in its broadest

sense, refers to the engagement between government and civil society through various mechanisms. The reasons for public participation in policy making can range from enhancing democratic practices to giving citizens a say in policy decisions to establishing institutional links between government and citizens. In each case, public involvement includes citizens in government operations such as agenda setting, decision-making, and policy formulation [1]. Planners and decision makers can be benefited from the public participation by getting the native ideas and knowledge in particular issues. On the other hand, it strengthens transparency and accountability in addition. It increases the work speed, ensure the quality of services and become cost effective and seriously address the need of public. In case of Nepal, public participation approach has supported to strengthen the capacity of marginalized people and make the feeling of community ownership. It has reduce the gap between the project and community people.

The Nepalese Constitution of 2015 outlines a three-tiered federal government structure: Federal, Provincial and Local. Now all these levels of government have been functioning and providing service to public. Rural Municipalities and Municipalities have a variety of tasks and responsibilities. Under the proportional election system, the Constituent Assembly Member Election Act distributes seats to women, Dalits, ethnic groups, Madhesi, and the differently abled, among others. To improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of the civil service, the 2007 amendment to the Civil Service Act reserves 45 percent of vacant posts for excluded groups, as follows: women (33 percent), ethnic groups (27 percent), Madhesis (22 percent), Dalits (9 percent), differently abled (5 percent), and backward regions (4 percent)[2].

Looking through various urban planning projects, it is known that very few members of the public wish to participate in urban planning projects [3]. This is in spite of the many advantages associated with public participation in planning. For example, the greater the number of public participants: the more likely it is that the plan will reflect their needs and concerns accurately, the higher the chances that the plan will be implemented, and the harder it becomes for public officials to ignore the plan [4].

In the community, participation process is mostly taken as a passive element. Every levels of community are not incorporated; marginalized groups are still not aware. For a successful project it is important to interact in a bottom-up formation as well as the professionals being involved in a top-down structure. The adoption of the public engagement process is critical for the democratization of democratic values, as well as for better planning and meeting public needs. The public participation method, on the other hand, is sometimes threatened by bureaucratic limitations resulting from a lack of a systemic solution and an insufficient public administration structure, both of which lead to public exclusion from the process [5]. Exclusion is often exacerbated by a lack of public involvement awareness and low levels of education in the general public.

As per retired engineer, Er. Tirtha Shrestha; Participatory planning had been practiced from last two decades in Damak municipality. Public engagement existed even in the Panchayat system, but it was only through IAP that an effective public participation emerged, where monetary and labor donations were both highly favored, with beneficiaries providing 50 percent and the municipality providing the remaining 50 percent. Sixty percent of the planning was done by the locals themselves. It was not only a wonderful model for Damak, but it was also the finest example for Nepal. Sometimes beneficiaries used to give around 60 percent of their costs, while municipalities were only required to serve approximately 40 percent. Damak was developing at a rapid speed due to high grooming public participation. Damak was able to build its roads quickly and well, its infrastructure was well-built, and growth was accelerated as a result of public participation. Even the general public assisted by building the road themselves; the municipality did not need to conduct a tender for over sixty percent of the construction, making it easier for the town to manage. There was no money leakage by the citizens. Even now, participation is taking place, although it is quite low, with just 10 percent of the population taking part. Currently, the Nepalese government provides all funds; they claim to collect taxes and are hence uninterested. However, in certain wards, when the budget does not arrive on time and they need to do the task on time, they participate in and complete the work from the consumers committee.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Planning

The most basic management aspect is planning, which comprises defining what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, how it should be done, and who will do it ahead of time. It is an analytical process that establishes an organization's goals and develops different courses of action for achieving those objectives. It lays out step-by-step instructions for achieving a particular target. Planning is nothing more than looking ahead of time before taking action. It allows us to look into the future and plan ahead of time how we can deal with the situations we will face in the future. It entails deductive reasoning and sound decision-making.

2.2 Participation

The term "participation" has a wide range of meanings. It's not only a public information campaigns, which aim to get the message out to the wider population but also a word that refers to public can express their views on what an agency is proposing to accomplish. It's also been used to indicate that an agreement has been reached with those who will be affected.

2.3 Public Participation in Planning

In general, public participation refers to the process of advising and including members of the public in policy formulation decisions made by organizations or institutions. The idea of public participation is seen as having the potential to blur the distinction between urban administrators and the general public, fostering mutual responsibilities between the government and those who are governed, as well as transferring responsibility for urban decisions to the general public. To begin with, it is widely assumed that participation practices aid in the promotion of improved partnerships between local governments and the general public in terms of mutual understanding. The disputes between the public and the local authorities may be reduced and avoided if only the public knows what is happening in the planning department. Public oppositions towards planning decisions is filled by the fact that the public is always kept in the dark about what is happening in their neighborhoods[6].

2.4 Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is more actions and results oriented, in other words more relevant to decision making. It

broadens the scope of planning participation. Environmental scanning enables the organization to plan more intelligently and precisely, as well as to better understand the relative risks associated with various options. It encourages a community to participate in competitive activities. Strengths and weaknesses of the community in relation to an environmental scan of opportunities and threats aids in the development of a community's capacity to act, aiming to maximize strengths while minimizing weaknesses[7].

2.5 Directions in planning

The communicative model: General planning Role of planner is central element of discussion. All stakeholders interested are participating, yet no one has absolute authority. It is a participatory planning technique which takes objectives and ends of achievement. In the past, it was a widespread communication model. This planning style is not in use now as it could not integrate various groups of individuals into society.

New Urbanism: It is a planning and development method based on the ideas that have guided the development of cities and towns for centuries: walking blocks and streets, close proximity of housing and shops, and accessible public spaces. To put it another way, New Urbanism emphasizes human-scaled urban architecture. The new urbanism was widely practiced and it was a successful style of planning environmental, aesthetic and the built spaces but it lacked an approach and attention for humanly needs.

Post-modern style: It incorporates what is in the communicative model and the new urbanism, and the unresolved issues. The just city helps to develop a city as the people, stakeholders and politicians demand [8].

2.6 Participation Ladder

Citizen participation, according to Arnstein, is a categorical phrase for citizen power. As a result, she proposed a citizen participation typology. Eight different rungs of citizen participation were claimed in this "ladder." Each step represents the amount to which citizen power influences the outcomes of decision-making . Non participation, which includes "manipulation" and "therapy," Tokenism, which includes "informing," "consultation," and "placation,"

and Citizen Power, which includes "partnership," "delegated power," and "citizen control," can be loosely classified.

Manipulation is a situation in which no one is willing to participate. Citizens are placed in advisory committees or advisory boards in this situation in order to foster public participation for "information gathering", "public relation" and "public support" for legitimatizing the political decision making. Therapy, the second stage of public engagement, was also labeled as a non participation condition (similar to manipulation), which is dishonest and arrogant. The most important first step toward legitimate citizen participation, according to Arnstein (1969), is "informing." Citizens would be informed about their rights, responsibilities, and options as a result of such public participation. Information access, on the other hand, is a one-way street from officials to citizens. Furthermore, the public group is unable to provide feedback on decisions and lacks the power to negotiate.Consultation, At the level of "consultation," citizens' input is sought through methods such as attitude surveys, neighborhood meetings, and public hearings. However, simply consulting people does not guarantee that the public's worries or opinions will be taken into account, if at all. In Placation, public groups begin to exert some influence over decision-making. The panel has the authority to make recommendations on the plans. Officials (power holders) continue to make decisions about the validity and practicality of the recommendations [9]. The powerful and the powerless collaborate on a partnership level in Partnership, which indicates that power is transferred via negotiation between citizens and power holders [9]. According to Arnstein, 1969, Delegated Power: At this level, public engagement allows a citizen group to gain dominant decision-making authority over a certain plan or program. Citizens groups have a "majority of seats" on delegated agencies and wield a specific power in order to deal with traditional power holders and ensure "accountability of the program" (e.g. Model Cities program) to them. Citizen Control: At the top of the ladder, citizen engagement is in high demand in today's society, yet it is unrealistic to expect anyone to have ultimate control over any issue in society. This is a dynamic environment in which space, influence, authority, and functions of either government officials or citizens groups are interacting[9].

3. Objectives

The study's major goal is to compile a list of the driving elements that influence the implementation of Public Participation, such as (1) socio-economic and political elements that influence people's participation in planning process. (2) To find out people's level of awareness that influence their willingness to participate in planning processes and (3) To understand how the level of accessibility affect public participation in planning process.

4. Methodology

The research was carried out using both quantitative and qualitative methodology within the post positivist paradigm. Perception survey based on interviews with local people, people with special ability, females and various deprived ethnic groups was carried out at site for quantitative method. For the qualitative method, interviews were taken from the respective representatives of Damak municipality to understand the change in public participation over time. The social survey for their belief towards public participation were understood. Their way of life was accessed, which included their social practice, activities in participation. Data were generated through a total of 10 semi-structured interviews from the municipality and 15 representatives and random local people around there. The methodology and approaches followed for the execution of this work includes primary data collection like questionnaire surveys and key informants' surveys. Secondary data collection included published articles, reports and relevant documents along with literature review of MTMP, DCIP, and comprehensive master plan of Damak 2077. Data Interpretation and Analysis were done after that and finally expected output were found.

5. Study area and Data

Damak entitled with a beautiful slogan, "Green city, prosperous Damak" is one of the urban bodies of Jhapa located in Province No. 1 of Nepal which is also a also a hometown of previous prime minister KP Sharma Oli. It was established in 2039 B.S in the name of "Tatkalin Nagar Panchayat with total area of 7513 hector. It is located between the Ratuwa and Maawa rivers in the east and west, respectively. It begins in the north with the Sivalik Hills and finishes

in the south with the Ratuwa River and Mawa River confluence. This municipality is virtually bisected by the Mahendra Roadway (Nepal's longest highway). It is the most populous city in both the Jhapa District and the Mechi Zone. It has Chulachuli village of Illam in the north, Urlabari municipality of Morang district in the south, bordering Gauradaha municipality of Jhapa in the south and Kamal village of Jhapa in the east. Damak is also a city connected to the international community. As per Household data collection of Damak, 2075, it has a total population of 86890 where 46600 are females and 40290 are males Out of 25 surveyed participants, 10 of them were the municipal officers and the remaining were the representative of the committee and the few local people.

Figure 1: Map of Damak

Figure 2: Main Chowk of Damak

5.1 Social-Economic-Political influence

Gender is an important factor in determining participation. However, there is still a considerable difference in planning processes between men and women. Damak is still a male dominated society.

Though Damak has a policy to involve at least 33.3 percent of the female, still gender involvement is quite less. Women continue to be underrepresented at the local level, owing to the timing of meetings due to household responsibilities, which the municipality is attempting to address by rearranging the timetable for future projects.

Table 1: Sample distribution of interviewees

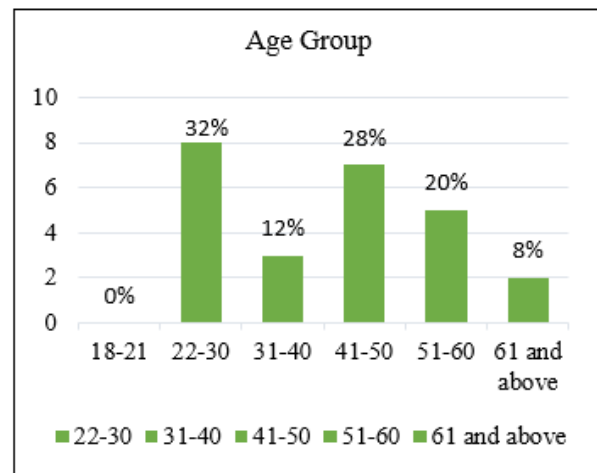| Types	Males	Females
Locals	11	4
representatives	9	1

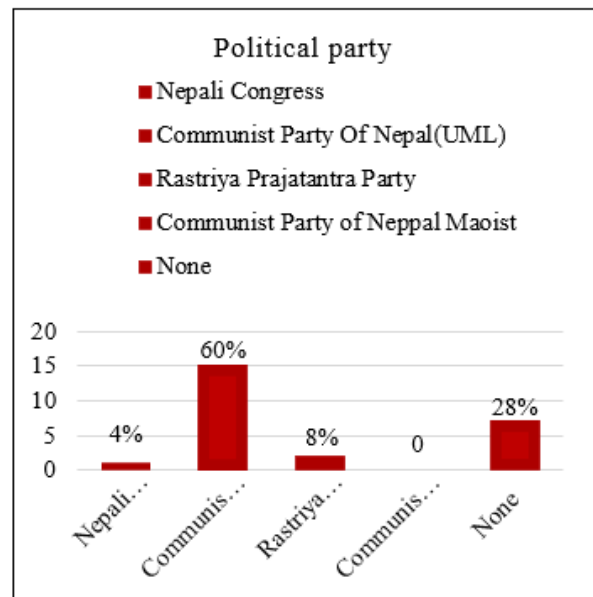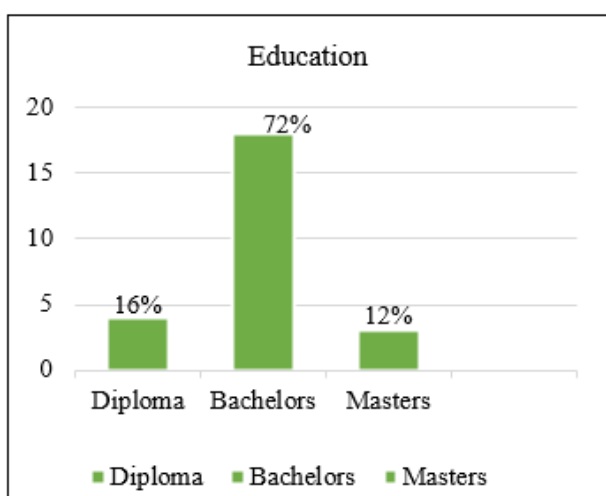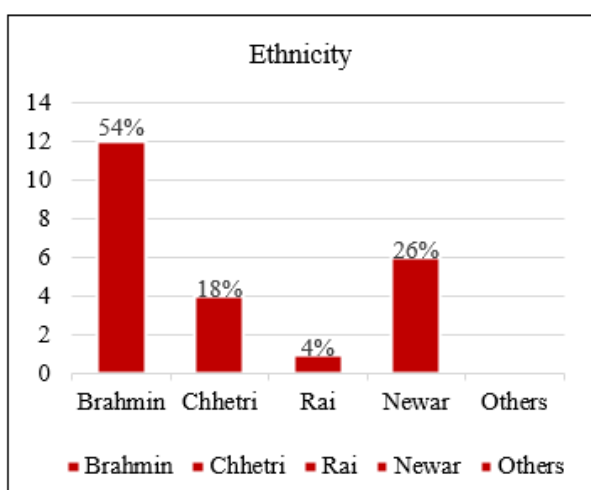**Figure 3:** Bar chart showing public participation by age group

Figure 4: Bar chart showing the political party they support

Among the 32 percent of 22-30 age group, majority of the people were found not participating in any planning process. 41-50 aged group were actively participating, thus awareness in the young generation seems to be must.Young people were found to be uninterested in the participation due to lack of ownership and awareness about the responsibilities of citizen towards the society. It is highly influenced by the party system, yet public participation is equally accessible by all the political parties. Influences can be visible not only through political parties, but also through the politics of local community organizations or any kind of sectoral group formations that aid in the smooth operation of development programs.

Figure 5: Bar chart showing respondent's educational level

Figure 6: Bar chart showing respondent's ethnicity

Since the representatives are well educated, they properly convey the messages to the local people and have the capability to convince for any of the situation.

Local people are also well cooperating with the representatives and the Damak municipal.High class ethnic group are leading in government sectors. No distinguishing caste cases in any of the development projects, as stated by representatives of respective wards. However, Brahmins appear to be more interested in political work and hence participate more actively.

5.2 Influences due to awareness

Majority of people were aware about the municipal duties and the kinds of development works being carried out. Likewise, the extent of public participation in the planning process is determined by the level of public knowledge. In order to raise public knowledge and and engagement in the Damak planning process, majority of the wards agreed to utilize local radio stations, use, use local TV stations, and use posters.

Table 2: People participation in planning process

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	15	60
No	10	40
Total	25	100

Table 3: People awareness towards municipal duties

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	21	84
Partly	2	8
No	2	8
Total	25	100

Table 4: People awareness about the development works carried out

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	19	76
Partly	3	12
No	3	12
Total	25	100

5.3 Influences due to accessibility in participation

More than half of the respondents were found to have actively participated in the planning process as individuals, with the remainder acting as representatives, indicating that ward level committees are properly managing local people's participation

Figure 7: Reasons for getting involved in the planning process

and, as a result, issues are properly managed at the municipal level. Local people are easily accessible to communicate with the representatives. The majority of the respondents were found to have responded to an invitation because they were aware of their responsibilities to the municipality, were concerned about community issues, had the opportunity to present their viewpoint, and some indicated that it was more convenient in terms of time. The municipality is looking forward for more active participation and managing the appropriate time of gathering.

6. Findings and Discussions

Age, gender, ethnicity, degree of education, economic status, political stability, awareness, and accessibility to participate were among the elements that influenced public participation in the planning process, according to the study.

Social, Economic and political Characteristics

The initial goal was to determine whether social, economic, or political factors influence public participation in the Damak planning process. The findings reveal that all demographic, social, economic, and political factors have an impact on public participation in the planning process. The study also found that people's high levels of education motivate their participation, while young men and women feel excluded in their societies and thus are discouraged

from participating in the planning process, demonstrating that age is a major barrier to public participation. Young people's participation in formal, institutional political processes is low.

Despite the fact that all political parties are equally accessible, the diminishing degree of community trust in politicians has discouraged community engagement, and that participation is carried out from a high-level source of political influences. For the goal of enriching discussions and planning processes, young people's participation is relatively low compared to elder citizens across the town, despite the fact that a high degree of community trust in political institutions can boost community participation.

Influence through People's Awareness

In keeping with the second goal, which was to see if community knowledge had an impact on public participation in Damak's planning process. The extent of public participation in the planning process is determined by the level of community awareness, according to the study. The findings support the notion that community knowledge and involvement are beneficial in terms of enhancing community welfare, training individuals, and increasing public awareness and engagement in the planning process. Local radio stations, posters, and local use door to door campaigns, as well as social media, are extensively used for the communication procedure in order to promote public awareness and participation in the planning process. According to the study, community people are also well involved in the numerous phases of municipality development initiatives, choices, and resources that influence their lives and livelihoods.

Influence through accessibility

The third goal was to explore if accessibility characteristics had an impact on public participation in the planning process. According to the study, trust, fairness, clarity and openness in the procedures, degree of coordination and involvement, and perceived community value in the overall process all affected public participation in the planning process.

7. Conclusion

Before participation was done through financial donation along with the labor donation, 50 percent was done by the municipality where as 50 percent were done by the consumers, but after the federalism,

40 percent participation is done by public where as 60 percent is contributed by the municipality itself. The pace of participation is quite decreasing because slowly the people are neglecting their duties towards the municipality. Since they pay tax, they are not willing to participate in any case and are fully dependent on the municipality. But yet, Damak municipality have amended various policies which assembles the thoughts of local people, and are willing to do the development and planning works with the interest of common people. Since the respective representatives are been assigned, they cooperate with the local people and make them equally participate, not necessarily by financial donation but also by contributing their ideas and method, it can be said that Peoples participation level is very good in Damak which has been possible through the good awareness, willingness of people to participate for the society, due to feeling of ownership and social service.

The first goal was to see if socioeconomic and political factors influence public engagement in the planning process. The study found that young people's participation in the planning process is lower than that of older citizens across Damak. Gender, amount of education, ethnicity, economic status, and political influences are all important factors in any public involvement. The study's second goal was to see if community knowledge influenced public participation in the planning process, and it found that raising public awareness was crucial to enhancing citizen participation. The success of public participation in the planning process is also contingent on citizen awareness of the program and successful use of various public platforms, according to the study. As a result, the study finds that the amount of public participation has a significant impact on public awareness and vice versa. Furthermore, the degree of

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