DECENTRALIZED PLANNING IN NEPAL: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY FROM

SELF-GOVERNANCE PERSPECTIVE

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Kathmandu University Library. My signature below authorizes the release of my thesis to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my grandfather who paved a path for my educational journey and made my childhood cherishable; to my parents who had a keen interest in the progress of this particular work but both passed away before the accomplishment of this work. I wished I had completed my work and made them feel proud.

And beyond my family, I dedicate this work to the grassroots people who are still marginalized in the process of development and governance.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted for candidature for any other degree.

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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of *Thakur Prasad Bhatta* for the *degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education* was presented at Kathmandu University School of Education on 26 February, 2019.

Title: *Decentralized Planning in Nepal: A Qualitative Inquiry From Self-Governance Perspective*

Abstract Approved: _____

Prof. Mahesh Nath Parajuli, PhD

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The decentralized planning intertwined with the decentralization reforms faces many challenges in its implementation. It largely relies on the central level power holders who reluctantly enforce the decentralization reform. Why the implementation of the decentralized policy often fails is a pertinent research issue. This thesis explores the emergent issues of decentralized planning policy and its practice in Nepal from the perspective of local self-governance in a federalized context.

This study is founded in the qualitative research paradigm which follows relativist ontology and interpretive epistemology. It has employed the case study as a methodological strategy. To generate data, this study conducted qualitative interviews, made non-participant observations and carried out document analysis. Considering the multidisciplinary nature of the research problem, this study draws various conceptual and theoretical notions mainly from power theories, institutional analysis, decentralization, governance and planning theories.

Despite various decentralization reforms over the decades, the study found that the local bodies did not get autonomy while practising the decentralized planning

policy. The central level, using multiple forms of power (Lukes, 2005), undermines the virtues of self-governance as it intends to control the mobilization of the resources for local development. The perceptions of local stakeholders of the decentralized planning policy as 'conceptually sound but ineffective in implementation' reflects the disjuncture of policy and practice. Such an ineffective practice makes the decentralized planning policy only a legal ritual that erodes the trust of the local people in the local governments. While there is a low level of planning capacity of the local governments, the central level prefers controlling the local levels rather than enhancing the planning capacity of the local governments. This is viewed as an opportunity for the central level to control and interfere in the local levels and mobilize the development resources of the local levels at its discretion.

Even after the establishment of federal governance, as the study explored its initial practice in Nepal, it reveals the reluctance of the central level in implementing the decentralized policy. This leads to the conclusion that the central level which is entrenched in the deep-rooted centralist mentality undermines the accountability and constrains the autonomy of the local level. In such circumstances, struggles of the local level to overcome the influence of informal institutions (Rothstein & Tannenberg, 2015) become crucial for the effective implementation of a decentralized policy. The implication of the study is to educate people to develop a collaborative planning culture which is essential for designing and implementing the policy and programmes of local development and local self-governance.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADDCN	Association of District Development Committees
APM	All Party Mechanism
CBO	Community Based Organization
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
CDP	Constituency Development Program
CISP	Constituency Infrastructure Special Program
DDC	District Development Committee
DDP	District Development Plan
DIMC	Decentralization Implementation and Monitoring Committee
ESP	Enabling State Program
HLDCC	High Level Decentralization Coordination Committee
HMG	His Majesty's Government
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IPFC	Integrated Planning Formulation Committee
LBs	Local Bodies
LDO	Local Development Officer
LGCDP	Local Governance and Community Development Program
LGOA	Local Government Operation Act
LSGA	Local Self-Governance Act
LSGR	Local Self-Governance Regulation
MLD	Ministry of Local Development
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoFALD	Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development

MP	Member of Parliament
MuAN	Municipality Association of Nepal
NAVIN	National Association of VDC in Nepal
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NPC	National Planning Commission
PAF	Poverty Alleviation Fund
SO	Support Organization
SPFC	Sectoral Planning Formulation Committee
SWC	Social Welfare Council
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
VDC	Village Development Committee

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CHAPTER I

ENTERING THE RESEARCH: DECENTRALIZED PLANNING

Singha Durbar[1] as a metaphor has made inroads into the public discourse while discussing the decentralization reforms in Nepal. During the local level elections 2017, which was held as per the provision of the new constitution under the federal system, "Singha Durbar reaching villages" was a popular slogan of most of the political parties, which also made headlines in most of the newspapers then. The explicit meaning behind such a slogan was an expectation of a meaningful decentralization of authority against the centralized governance practice. Here, the term "Singha Durbar" and its location is of utmost concern as it reflects not only the concentration of governing power hitherto in the central administrative setup – the Singha Durbar, but also the struggle for the transfer of power from the centre to the local level – the villages. Despite more than six decades of efforts for decentralization[2], the issue of power decentralization is still intense and entrenched in the politics of Nepal.

Constitutionally, the local governments have been made powerful by the new Constitution of Nepal promulgated in September 2015. However, in practice, this

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[1]Singha Durbar is a palace where Prime Minister's office including most of the ministries and some other central authorities like National Planning Commission are located. This is taken as symbol of power centre in general public as their access is not possible if there is no linkage with politicians and bureaucrats. In addition, this is also perceived negatively as the symbol of red-tapism, policy corruption and power elite made up by politicians- bureaucrat nexus and other sections of the society of their connections who support the nexus.

[2] When this study was begun, the country was still under the unitary system with legally organized decentralized planning practices. But when the field work for this study was completed, the country adopted the new constitution with the federalized governance system. In this study, efforts are made to contextualize this change.

transfer of power is yet to be seen. The past experience of the transfer of power was not very encouraging. In this context, trying to understand the past experience of the practice of decentralization and decentralization planning policy over the decades can significantly inform the local development planning at present and in coming days. In the changed context of the new federal system, the decentralized planning approach is equally important for the newly elected local governments for the identification of local needs and their prioritized planning and implementation with the participation of local people. Further, there is an essentiality in coordinating and integrating sectoral plans like educational plan into the development plan of the local governments.

The focus of this qualitative study founded in the philosophy of interpretivism is decentralized planning in Nepal. I explored the emergent issues of decentralization in general and decentralized planning, in particular, examining the practice of district development planning in Nepal through the perspective of local self-governance. When I started my research, the making of the new constitution was in hot discussion but it was not clear about what the role of District Development Committee would be as it was practising the district development planning even after the historic political change of 2007.

However, I was aware that the local development planning would also be equally important in the newly structured local governing bodies because of the foremost priority given to the development agenda and the issue of local people's participation in decision-making of the development matters that affect them. At the same time, I undertook this study to draw insights from the practice of decentralized planning over the decades as it is believed that past practices and experiences inform not only the present but also guide the future (Grabowski et al., 2007).

I have examined the practice of decentralized planning in light of the power theories particularly informed by decision making power as postulated by Lukes (2005). Besides, I have considered the role of institutions in the planning process drawing from the relevant concepts and perspectives of institutions. Considering the multidimensional nature of decentralized planning, I have drawn from various perspectives of decentralization and governance and planning theories to understand and interpret the decentralized planning policy and its practice. Hence, it is imperative here to highlight some aspects of decentralization and decentralized planning and its existing context in Nepal.

Decentralization has been an important theme for the developed and developing countries, donor agencies and academicians and researchers because of its role in development and governance. Though decentralization is defined in various ways as it is implemented in different forms in different contexts, decentralization in its common understanding is the transfer of power to sub-national governments by the central governments. Decentralization has been so widespread that it is in practice worldwide (Faguet, 2014). Moreover, there is high diversity in designing and carrying out decentralization in different countries with different outcomes (Meenakshisundaram, 1999). Despite the differences among the countries in pursuing decentralization, one of the common goals for most of them is to make the local governance effective in providing services to local people. It is viewed that services are best managed by those who are the primary stakeholders of the services (Olsen, 2007). As part of decentralization, decentralized planning is in practice to allow local bodies to identify their needs and plan them on their own.

Policy documents show that decentralization in Nepal has been an overarching agenda since the 1950s. It is noteworthy that decentralization has got a high priority

in the state's policy despite changes in the political ideologies of different political regimes. Since the beginning of 1960s, several acts and policies have been formulated and various programmes have been launched for strengthening the decentralization process in Nepal (Gurung, 2003). In the history of decentralization reform in Nepal, the promulgation of Local Self-Governance Act (LSGA), 1999 is considered an important outcome which remained in effect till 2017. It is believed that the LSGA, 1999 enabled local bodies providing them with adequate power to execute local development needs mobilizing resources at their own (United Nation Children Fund [UNICEF], 2006). As the development of the legal basis is important to institutionalize decentralization in any country, its implementation accordingly is vital. It is argued that decentralization often faces difficulties during its implementation mainly in developing countries and these countries become unable to establish decentralized governance systems (Martinez-Vazquez & Vaillancourt, 2011). The foremost challenge of decentralization has been its implementation as it involves transfers of power from the centre to the local levels.

From the very beginning, decentralization reforms in Nepal have given priority to involve local people in the development and governing process. It is argued that to understand the working of decentralization reform, it is essential to focus at the local levels (Bienen et al., 1990). The decentralized planning was thought as an essential approach to involve local people in development. The LSGA had given the high emphasis on participatory planning in the district. The focus of decentralization in Nepal, thus, has been on strengthening the districts to plan and manage their needs of local development at their own. For this, the districts are expected to be autonomous to independently design and practice their own plans

(Panday, 2009). This indicates the role of local bodies in the formulation and implementation of the development planning at the local level.

In this introductory chapter, I intend to draw the landscape of my research problem. In the section that follows, I present my research interest and stance in the research. Then, I state the research problem more specifically presenting the focus of this study mainly raising the issues that this research intends to address. Based on the statement of the problem, I have constructed the research purpose and research questions that direct the whole research. I have highlighted what this study contributes to in the context of the changed political situation particularly after the new constitution with federal political system whereas my study is based on the previous political situation in the rationale as another section of this chapter. Then, finally, at the end of this chapter, I present the layout of the chapters of the whole thesis report.

My Interest and Stance in the Research

I believe the researcher's interest and stance is an essential part of research as the researcher is one of the participants in most of the qualitative research. One of the elements that help to determine research is the interest of the researcher in addition to the research problem and the researcher's skill (Creswell, 2014). Researcher's interest, as I understand, is influenced by several things. One's personal and professional background in the existing socio-economic context helps to form the researcher's interest. With this conception of research and researcher, I here try to briefly inform how my interest aroused for this research and what my stance is concerning the research problem?

The source of my interest in local-level planning lies in my professional experience of implementing drinking water projects for rural communities in remote

areas of Nepal. It is a fact that drinking water has been a high need of the Nepali communities, both rural and urban alike. But the communities and local stakeholders are not consulted which sources of water among the many they prefer to use and what kind of projects they prefer to run themselves in the future. During my professional engagement, I came to know that the drinking water projects were designed by external consultants hired by the central department without consulting the local people. It reflects the tendency of making the projects big and complex so that these would fall under the premise of the central agencies (Bienen et al., 1990) and local level could be bypassed. Thus, the central authorities were deliberately insensitive towards understanding the needs and preferences of the local communities. This was the top-down model guided by the modernist thinking of development that overlooked the participation of local people and their knowledge.

Further, in the course of my professional career in the development sector, I saw how the development projects intended to benefit the local people did not pay any attention to the local needs and interests. Also, I got chances to see the development work of government and non-government organizations. I found the development efforts in Nepal highly disintegrated – various agencies were working in their own way. Local people were not consulted in true sense. Duplication and overlapping and poor coordination were the pertinent issues among the development agencies. Though the decentralization policy had provided a mandate to the local bodies to bring all development efforts in their constituencies formulating and implementing integrated development plan, there were development agencies often working in their own way with little coordination with the local bodies. Hence, one question emerged in my mind: why is the decentralized planning policy not working in practice though it seems highly essential?

As a development professional and researcher, I believe that decentralized planning is essential for the participation of people in the development process. For this, the local level governments are appropriate institutions to facilitate all development organizations working at the local level. The local governments can work effectively if the central government respects their autonomy in identifying local needs and planning and implementing them on their own. I believe that all stakeholders need to participate in the development process and they all need to work within the common framework and priority of the local government prepared by the participation of all stakeholders. My stance is that all of these things are possible when the central government is sensitive to the autonomy of local governments and the local governments work in a democratic and participatory way for the formulation and implementation of the local development plan with the participation of all stakeholders.

Statement of the Problem

The above context shows that there has been considerable efforts at least in making legal and policy provisions for the decentralization reform and consequently for the decentralized planning over the decades. Recently, the country has entered into a new phase of decentralization from the unitary system of the past to the federal system at present with the Constitution of 2015. Nepal is at the crossroads in its history of decentralization that it has a legacy of unsuccessful implementation of the decentralization policy of the past and now it has adopted a federal system with constitutionally powerful local governments. It is yet to see the practice of federalization as per the new constitution, particularly how the federal system decentralizes the planning of different levels of government.

In such a context, it is highly essential to take into account the long history of decentralization and decentralized planning to inform the practice at present and in future. However, the situation is such that the decentralization reforms in the past despite continuous government efforts and the high scale of support from donor agencies could not work as expected *(*Adhikari, 2006; Gurung, 2003; Hesselbarth, 2007; Panday, 2009). Indeed, there was much expectation for the improvement in decentralized governance and decentralized planning when the country introduced the LSGA, 1999.

The poor performance in decentralization could also be linked with the lack of strong educational context in the country. While the traditional culture of a decentralized and participatory system of local governance was rejected, the new system failed to develop an educational culture in the country that would promote values in favour of decentralized local governance. Hence, the issue of poorly functioning decentralization in Nepal has been an educational issue as well. It is argued that there is a lack of innovations in the education system of Nepal (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2015) to address the changing needs of society. Existing literature further indicates that there is a deeply rooted reluctant tendency with the central agencies to support the decentralization process in the spirit of LSGA. It was also argued that the central level politicians and administrators are not willing to transfer power to the local level (Gurung, 2003). One research reports several obstructions that weaken the decentralized planning (Adhikari, 2006). Hence, the decentralization reform has been a widely concerned issue in Nepali politics and in society as a whole.

Given the above context, there arise pertinent questions about decentralization and decentralized planning policy and its practice. Mainly, why did the past policies

not work? Why could the policy like widely appreciated LSGA not be implemented well? Are there institutional barriers to the implementation of the policies? Why does none of the institutions take accountability of policy failures? Why is ownership lacking in policy formulation and implementation? Finally, what can be the implications of our past experience of decentralized planning policy for the present and coming days? These are the concerns that I have attempted to explore in this research.

Rationale of the Study

When this study was initiated, Nepal was practising decentralized planning policy under the unitary political system. But soon, Nepal promulgated its new constitution in September 2015 amid widespread uncertainty which introduced the federal political system. With the elections of the local level as well as federal and province levels held in 2017, Nepal has got a whole set of legislature and government bodies at all levels. Though there are some confusions as well as tensions on the working system in the beginning days, there is a high level of expectation among the public for prosperity and good governance (*Sambriddhi* and *Sushashan*) now.

This expectation is particularly high at local levels as they have elected local governments now after the void of them for more than two decades. There are not only elected local governments but these are also more powerful than before with the constitutionally provided rights in 22 different areas of local development and service delivery including basic and secondary education (Government of Nepal, 2016, pp. 250-251). In this sense, the role of and need for development planning have increased than before as the local governments have been more autonomous legally. The local governments have to take the responsibility of public services delivery at their own planning management. School education is the most important and large in scale

public sector that the local governments need to deal immediately. This entails local governments to incorporate the educational planning in their overall development planning. Indeed, the local governments' planning is the integration of different sectors like education, health and so on that fall under their responsibility in a holistic way.

In addition to the need for integrated planning, raising the local level capacity to carry out the planning is equally important. This calls for the development of an innovative educational course on participatory planning policy and practice. Further, it is essential to educate people from the school level because large numbers of people need to be involved in development planning at the local level. In fact, the stakeholders are of different capacities – political representatives, government staffs, local people and members of other related organizations. Hence, this study provides insights for innovative academic curricula to address the need for participatory development planning.

The above context shows that participatory decentralized planning is equally important for the local levels and even for higher levels for identifying local needs with the participation of local people and all kind of stakeholders. Nepal has an experience of the participatory planning process namely formulation of the district development plan. This experience and its lessons can be useful for the future planning of the local level in Nepal and in other developing countries which are practising decentralized planning.

However, despite the importance of decentralized planning for development and governance, there are no adequate studies in this field to explore the issues from the local perspective. There is a growing concern for the poor implementation of the policy with a wider gap in policy and practice in the case of Nepal (Khanal, 2013). It

is argued that only the critical analysis of the existing policy and practice can explore the effective working approach of decentralization (Bhatta, 2009). In such a context, it is pertinent to explore why decentralized planning policy was not implemented well. One striking fact is that the research so far focuses more on what is not happening rather than why it is not happening. I think the latter is more important in our present context.

Since Nepal is struggling in implementing the federal system where the local governments have much more responsibility for undertaking local development needs, the provincial governments are at the same time seeking their space in governing development. Whereas, the central level is lagging to facilitate the overall process. Therefore, the study on the practice of decentralized planning can contribute to this area. As this study intends to explore the workings of decentralized planning at the local level, its findings can be useful for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. Mainly, this study explores the policy – practice nexus using a qualitative case study approach. Its significance lies in understanding the existing process of decentralized planning in the form of the district development plan.

I believe the findings of this research can be helpful for the newly elected local governments and provincial governments as well as the federal government from the insights drawn from the complexity of the practice of decentralized planning in the past. The rationale of this study is not limited only up to the understanding of the decentralized planning practice of the district development plan but it also contributes to the understanding of the overall decentralization process in Nepal and similar developing countries. I urge that it is an academic work and its implications and contribution should not be taken in a very tangible way in a narrow context but in a broader context.

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of this study is to explore the practice of local development plan namely the District Development Plan in Nepal and analyze the issues of local government concerning decentralized planning in a federal context.

Research Questions

I have devised the following two research questions that contribute to achieving the overall purpose of my research.

1. How do the district level stakeholders perceive and experience decentralized planning at the local level in terms of policy and its practice, particularly concerning the District Development Plan (DDP)?

2. What are the emergent issues of decentralized planning policy, particularly from the practice of DDP and present local level planning from the perspective of self-governance, and how they inform the local government planning in federal Nepal?

Delimitations

The stakeholders of decentralized planning exist at different levels of the governance system. Among them, this study focuses on the perspectives of district-level stakeholders of the decentralized planning process. So it does not cover the perspectives of policy-level stakeholders. The study observes the Ilaka (an entity just below the district and above the village level) level planning workshops and district level planning activities but does not observe the planning process at the village and settlement levels. The participants of the study are those who have been involved in the district planning process for a considerable time. Thus, the study does not include those who have not participated in the local planning process as research participants. Though the study discusses the historical context of decentralized planning, its main focus is the Local Self-

governance Act, 1999 which remained in practice from 1999 to 2017 and local government planning in federal governance in the last two years.

Layout of the Chapters

I have organized the thesis in eight chapters. In the first chapter, I introduced the overall research landscape. In Chapter II, I discuss the conceptual and theoretical landscape related to the research problem – particularly the themes: decentralization, governance, power theory, institutional analysis and the planning theories. I conclude this chapter conceptualizing decentralized planning.

I present the research methodology in Chapter III where I discuss the philosophical stance of research and interpretive paradigm as its theoretical framework. Furthermore, I describe case study as the approach of research inquiry. Methods of data generation and analysis are the contents of this chapter. Finally, I explain the quality and ethical standards of the research.

Then, in Chapter IV, I provide a review of the historical context of decentralization and decentralized planning in Nepal. In this chapter, I set the context in a substantive way for the next three chapters (i.e. V, VI, and VII) on findings and discussion. This is the reason for placing this context review here separating it from the theoretical literature review made in Chapter II. One of the main contents that I discuss in this chapter is how decentralization evolved in Nepal in the ancient time to the present time. The motives for decentralization in different periods in the Nepalese political history reveal the struggles and tensions of its policy design and its implementation. After the discussion on decentralization reforms, I discuss substantively on the evolution of decentralized planning and concludes providing configuration of district development planning.

Chapters V, VI and VII are the findings and discussion chapters. I have thematically organized these chapters based on the themes that emerged from the research data. These themes are the key aspects generated from my case study research. In Chapter VI, I particularly deal with research question one. Here, I focus on how the stakeholders perceive decentralized planning and what are their experiences of the practice of development planning at the local level. I discuss the reflections of the practice of decentralized planning policy dealing with the research question two in Chapter VI. Here, I have come up with the key issues that emerged from the practice of decentralized planning.

I synthesize the above two chapters in Chapter VII and present the reflections on recent practice of local government's planning in federal governance which finally contributes to theorizing the practice of decentralized planning. Finally, I wrap up the whole thesis in Chapter VIII providing a summary, conclusion, implications and reflections.

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL LANDSCAPE

In this chapter, I intend to draw the conceptual and theoretical landscape of the research topic - decentralized planning. Since my research issue is multidimensional, I have discussed multiple concepts and theories relevant to the research problem. Decentralization, governance, local government, planning, power and institutions are such concepts that essentially inform and influence the decentralized planning policy and its practice. I have, therefore, thematically organized this chapter to discuss these multiple concepts and theories to develop an understanding and to conceptualize decentralized planning. The conceptual framework derived toward the end of this chapter reflects the relationships and interactions of these concepts concerning decentralized planning.

In the beginning, I discuss the conceptual and theoretical underpinning of decentralization and governance as decentralized planning which is one of the important components of the decentralization reform. Then, I discuss the concept of local government and local self-governance as they are indispensable institutions in the practice of decentralized planning. The notions of power and institutions play a significant role in the process of decentralized planning. I discuss the conceptual and theoretical understandings of these two concepts in this chapter. Planning theories and their practices are also the two themes that I discuss in this chapter. Besides, within this section of planning, I discuss the role of planners in planning and finally, I conceptualize decentralized planning. Then, I draw a conceptual framework to

visualize the interrelationships of various themes with the research problem. Finally, I draw the conclusion of this chapter.

Decentralization and Governance: Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinning

Decentralization is a fundamental concept that informs decentralized planning. In the latter stage of its development, decentralization is well linked with the notion of governance. Indeed, decentralization is considered essential to strengthen governance (Wilson, 2000). Hence, to understand decentralized planning, it is essential to develop an understanding of the concept of decentralization and governance. In this section, I discuss these two themes that are related to decentralized planning. At first, I discuss decentralization and then in the latter part, I deal with governance.

It is difficult to draw a single definition of decentralization since it is a complex and dynamic concept. In essence, decentralization inherits the issue of power distribution itself and is both a vague and broad term, which is interpreted in various ways (Widmalm, 2008). Mainly, decentralization is classified based on the degree of power distribution or degree of autonomy provided to the sub-national units from the central authorities of the state.

It is interesting to note that decentralization has been such a hat which fits everywhere and with everyone. Various actors of differing ideologies with different motives have adopted decentralization as it is in practice in all kinds of political systems irrespective of the conditions of governing organizations and cultures whether advanced or backward (Manor, 2011). Since it is not meaningful to generalize the term decentralization as it embodies power-sharing (Widmalam, 2008) of various degrees, it has been typically specified in three main categories – deconcentration, delegation and devolution (White, 2011). Schneider (2003) explains these categories in terms of different points within a continuum of governing

autonomy they possess of low level, moderate level and the highest level in deconcentration, delegation and devolution respectively. Thus, the devolution is considered as the highest level of decentralization because local governments can play a vital role in comparing with deconcentration and delegation in public administration rather than overwhelming involvement of the centre at all governmental levels (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2001). Thus, I see decentralization mainly in two forms – one is centrally directed and controlled that comprises deconcentration and delegation and another is an autonomous form of decentralization which allows local government to work independently of the central government which is devolution.

In addition to the above classification, there is also practice to categorize decentralization as administrative, fiscal and political decentralization. Falleti (2005) finds that administrative and fiscal decentralization both have possibilities of positive or negative impact on the autonomy of sub-national governments depending upon the appropriateness of the decentralization policies and their implementation. However, she argues that political decentralization brings positive changes in the independent working of the sub-national levels. All the above three types of decentralization are not complete in the sense that each of them represents one aspect of the many facets of the sub-national government. Even political decentralization cannot be effective if it only provides decision-making rights to the elected local bodies without administrative and fiscal autonomy. Hence, the argument that political decentralization always lays a positive impact on the autonomy of the sub-national government needs to be examined critically.

Despite difficulties in defining decentralization, White (2011) draws a definition from a wide range of literature as she postulates that decentralization refers

to the nature of relations among the various levels of government which is difficult to assess observing from outside. Thus, in general, there can be a relatively common definition of decentralization. However, it is essential to identify what kind of decentralization it is, considering its design and the context where it has been implemented. Hence, one can identify the type of decentralization only in its practice to get the real working meaning of it.

From the perspective of local self-governance, I found Faguet's definition relevant as he defines decentralization as the "devolution by central (i.e. national) government of specific functions, with all of the administrative, political and economic attributes that these entail, to democratic local governments" (Faguet, 2005, p. 4). I have adopted this definition for this study as this study intends to examine the decentralized planning policy and its practice in terms of autonomy from the central government to the local government. Therefore, the discussions of my findings implicitly or explicitly are informed by the devolutionary perspective of decentralization.

In my view, this is not much worthy to classify decentralization in separate dimensions like fiscal, administrative and political since they are interrelated. The degree of transfer of rights related to these dimensions determines the levels of decentralization – deconcentration, delegation and devolution. If there is a very low degree of transfer, it will fall under deconcentration and if the transfer is of moderate level, it is delegation. If the transfer is of a higher degree, it is devolutionary decentralization. In the present context, from the perspective of local self-governance, only the devolution is decentralization as it provides the local level with self-governing autonomy.

There are no theories of decentralization that explain it in completeness as a paper reports that decentralization is practised in various contexts with a wide range of motives in different forms of governance systems (UNDP-Government of Germany,1999). This suggests perceiving the notion of decentralization from its various conceptual positions and practices rather than from an established theory to explain it.

Why is decentralization pursued? It is a crucial question as decentralization is sought for different reasons in various countries. Like the types of decentralization, it is essential to know the motives of decentralization as it determines the nature of decentralization in any country. Theoretically, many reasons are postulated in favour of decentralization (Manor, 1999; White, 2011). It is also the fact that all reasons do not apply everywhere. One rationale is that it helps to bring the government closer to the people. Increasingly, decentralization has been associated with development and governance with a focus on the role of governments for efficiency, accountability and sustainability (White, 2011). According to Schneider (2003), poor economic progress and weak performance of the central level bureaucracy, as well as the internal political environment of the developing countries, pushed the governments and donors to initiate decentralization that began in the 1980s.

The motives for decentralization vary depending upon the actors. For donors, it is the efficiency of resource utilization and service delivery while for the central government, it is to address the issue of power-sharing through democratization (Schneider, 2003). Shah and Thompson (2004) have given a wide range of motivation for decentralization, a few of them are political and economic transformation, ethnic and regional conflicts, service delivery, fiscal crisis, and globalization and information revolution and even for distribution of budget deficits

to the lower level of governments. These are, in my view, the most visible reasons but there are also some hidden agenda that play roles for pursuing decentralization policy. In most of the developing countries, the governments show their willingness mainly to please the donors (Agrawal, 1999; Nadeem, 2016) as a result the implementation becomes weak in reality.

Having discussed decentralization above, now I discuss the concepts of governance. Decentralization and governance are intertwined terms, which come together as both deal with power exercise. Cheema and Rodinelli (2007) argue that decentralization itself has been changing with the emergent concept of governance. Indeed, one of the goals of decentralization is to improve governance (Bardhan, 2002; Faguet, 2014). Like decentralization, governance has been defined in various ways. It is defined as a process that provides opportunities to all kinds of institutions and individuals to negotiate their various interests, utilize resources and act for collective actions (Lewis & Hossain, 2017). The World Bank (1992) defines governance in terms of use of power in mobilizing resources of a country for development (as cited in Zanotti, 2005). Similarly, Jenkins (2002) defines it as a practice of power in the public sphere in a given social condition. Thus, governance embodies the issue of power and the use of resources, particularly how they are practised.

Fukuyama (2013) defines governance as the capability of the government in implementing policy. Cheema and Rodinelli (2007) view that governance at present does not mean only government but also includes non-government actors like civil organizations. They do not limit governance within only the gamut of government and therefore follow the concept forwarded by the United Nations in the 1990s which defines governance as a framework of institutions and processes where all kind of stakeholders – government, non-government and private sector play roles in

influencing public agenda and issues and people also actively participate in this process raising their own interests and priorities (Cheema & Rodinelli, 2007). Recently, the World Bank (2017) has defined governance as the interactive relationships that exist among the stakeholders both state and non-state in the process of policy design and implementation within the prevailing context of formal and informal rules that both determine power and be determined by power. Thus, governance considers both the role of the state and non-state and formal and informal institutions in the public decision-making process within the framework of the prevailing power structure in the society.

<center>**Local Government and Local Self-Governance**</center>

The concept of local government is founded in the concept of decentralization. In the absence of decentralization, there can be only sub-ordinate organs or sub-units of the centralized government system. In my understanding, decentralized planning is not only a function of the local government, it is also a means of implementing decentralization policy. Therefore, it should be noted here that depending upon the legal provisions, there can be a local body or local government. Though both the local body and local government[3] denote the government structures formed at the local level, the term local government refers to a more powerful unit while the local body is considered less powerful than the former one. Conceptually, local government is defined as "specific institutions or entities created by national constitutions … or by executive order to deliver a range of specified services to a relatively small geographically delineated area" (Shah & Shah, 2006, p. 1).

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[3]In this thesis, local body and local government have been used to denote different status they possess inthe context of Nepal as there were local bodies formed as per the Local self Governance Act, 1999 and now there are local governments as per the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 and established through elections held in 2017. In other contexts, the term 'local government' has been used.

With the evolution of decentralization, local government and local self-governance are in discussion. Indeed, the local government is created by the decentralization reform in a country. It has been considered as the nearest entity of the state to people (Bailey & Elliott, 2009). It is assumed that people can regularly interact with the local government because of the proximity and easy access. It is argued that it is essential first to know how local governments function to know what decentralization is (Faguet, 2005).

It is widely accepted that local governments are the best alternatives to deliver public services in effective and sustainable ways at the local level. It is believed that local government can grasp the local situation and needs more efficiently and can be more egalitarian in providing public services to the needy people (White, 2011). Furthermore, the local government is more efficient to explore local resources and mobilization of the resources (Visser, 2009). Further, Visser (2009) emphasizes that local governments can play indispensable roles in coordinating multiple stakeholders as they observe closely the real performance of development agencies in delivering services to the local people. These are essential elements for local governments which are widely accepted in principles.

According to Shah and Shah (2006), there are some well-established theories that justify the essentiality of the local government of which the decentralization theorem and the subsidiarity principle are important from the perspective of decentralized governance. Similarly, Shah and Shah (2006) have discussed the roles of local government from various perspectives. Of them, new public management perspective assumes local governments as autonomous actors to serve local people for the benefit of the public (Shah & Shah, 2006). Thus, it is assumed that autonomy is essential for the effective functioning of the local government.

Erlingsson and Odalen (2013) advocate for constitutionally ensured local self-government as they view that those who claim themselves as democrat must firmly support constitutionally empowered local self-government. For them, local self-government is different from local administration as the former must have sufficient political power to make decisions at their own while the latter's role is limited to the implementation of the central level's decisions. However, in practice, the performance of local governments may not be as per the ideal expectations as it is affected by the political economy of the country which itself is a complex and multidimensional issue. Among the various factors, centrally controlled planning practice that does not capture well the local level needs of people and activities of various agencies running parallel at the local level have impeded the decentralized governance in case of Nepal like other low-income countries (UNDP, 2001). Hence, the entire process of decentralized planning has been an important issue.

At present, the concept of local government has been expanded to the concept of local governance. Local governance does not limit its role within the formal legal boundary and intends to involve all kind of stakeholders working formally and informally in the field of development (Olsen, 2007). It is argued that local government works within the formal structure and becomes accountable to the upper-level government while the local governance emphasizes accountability towards the citizen (Olsen, 2007). This view suggests that local governance which is formed as a network of local stakeholders is more participatory and accountable to local people.

The concept of local self-governance is not a separate concept than local governance. The prefix 'self' only emphasizes the autonomy of the local network to allow them to work independently without any interference in local agendas. In my understanding, it does not mean that there cannot be any interrelationship of local

government with other levels of government but it is the assumption that there will not be any obstruction in the working of local government in the interests of local people. In this sense, the concept of local self-governance is in practice.

So far, I have discussed concepts like decentralization, governance, local government. As reflected above, these concepts embody another important concept – power. Furthermore, in efforts to understanding decentralized planning, the role of power becomes essential. Hence, I am discussing the concepts and theories of power.

Power: Concepts and Theories

Power is a complex concept. There are ample theories to explain it. Of them, there are some foundational theories of power that I discuss here to get insights into decentralization and decentralized planning. Also, there are some specific theories of power which are more relevant to inform the decentralized planning.

In my understanding, power exists everywhere and acts everywhere. It is such a phenomenon which plays a role in all spheres of society in both visible and invisible ways. The concept of power has been widely discussed in political science since historical time. The power lies at the centre since long ago from the time of Machiavelli to explain political power (Wolfe, 2009). But, later the concepts of power have been widely used across most of the disciplines beyond the field of political science.

Accordingly, various perspectives attempt to explain power. However, I am selective here and limit myself within the more relevant theories and perspectives that are essential to inform the discussion of decentralization and decentralized planning policy and its practice.

The concept of power is termed variously (Dahl, 1957). Authority, influence, domination, control are some of them used by different authors to denote the concept

of power (Dahl, 1957; Hill, 2009; Lukes, 2005). The fundamental fact with the notion of power is that it is reflected in the inequality among individuals and groups in society. One can sense power play where there is inequality. Hypothetically, it can be argued that power would disappear if there is equality in society. But, the assumption of absolute equality even in the highly egalitarian society would be an utterly idealist view. Since human society is diverse and stratified with inequality in different dimensions, the power which is embedded in society is worthy to be analyzed to understand society. Power analysis is essential to know the users of power, to identify the nature of power and to know the process that develops power and plays a role for its continuity in the changing context (Pantazidou, 2012).

It will be imperative to discuss some basic theories of power to be acquainted with the foundational knowledge of power, before going into the specific relevant theories and perspectives related to this research. One of the major power theories is the pluralist theory developed by Robert A. Dahl and his colleagues who postulate that power is not concentrated in a few hands but distributed in every section of the society though in an unequal way (Hill, 2009). This pluralist theory sees no particular dominant power holder over another even it considers the government institutions as one of the power holders among the various holders in the society (Hill, 2009). The pluralist theory of power is based on the assumption of a democratic society where the number of power groups can compete with each other to influence decision-making in own favour (Abrahm, 2006). However, even in the democratic society, there can be a few power groups like political parties and business corporations who hold power and influence the whole society. The nature of power in my view tends to be concentrated rather than dispersed unless measures are taken to regulate it. Whether the power is

distributed widely or concentrated to a few explain the nature of society– egalitarian or less-egalitarian or non-egalitarian.

Another major power theory is the power elite theory. Mills (1995) defines the power elite as highly influential groups with positional authorities to make decisions that affect ordinary people in society. This theory postulates that a handful of people who occupy top-level positions in the state apparatus hold the decision making power that affects the larger public. But, there is also critique that in the democratic system various groups compete and counter each other so it is not possible to hold the society by a very small elite group (Hill, 2009). According to this theory, the affluent and privileged class can influence the higher-level authorities to exercise the power they possess for the benefit of their own class (Abrahm, 2006). Thus, who can hold authority and resources also become able to influence the decision-making process. In this sense, the difference between pluralist and elite theories of power is that there are a handful or many powerful individuals and groups in society.

In this series of power theories, the concept of Max Weber is important as it deals particularly with the bureaucratic power. Weber explains power in terms of domination (Lukes, 2005). His notion of power is associated with the authority particularly the power of the bureaucracy which is obtained legally as one holds a position in the government (Sadan, 2004). From this perspective, Weber's power is more close to the elite theory as bureaucracy largely influences decision making that affects the general public.

Explanation of power and domination in Mitchell Foucault's writings is considered very diverse in itself. According to Sadan (2004), Foucault's concept of power has no systematic explanation. The essence of Foucault's view on power is that power exists in the practices of regular life; therefore, it is not always possible to

be guided by rules and norms and imposed force but exists through wider and messy interactions in the society (Joseph, 2004). Some authors draw from the writings of Foucault that there is an inevitable relationship between power and knowledge (Joseph, 2004; Sadan, 2004). The notion of power as Foucault discusses is useful to get insights into the power relation in a particular context as he describes power relations as changeable and mutual depending upon the context (Flyvbjerg, 1998). Similarly, Foucault's concept of power and knowledge relationship is also useful in understanding the role of expertise in the planning process at the local level.

All of the concepts and theories are useful in understanding the nature of power and give insights for this study. It is also noteworthy that the perceptions on power, however, differ depending upon the context and perspectives of the analysts and according to the different fields of social sciences (Pettit, 2013). Hence, what I draw from this view is that understanding of the appropriate perspective from the numerous concepts of power is important for any research.

The most relevant theory for this study is that one which explains the role of power in decision-making, particularly in policy development and implementation. It is argued that the policy study embodies research on how power plays a role in society (Hill, 2009). From this perspective, Steven Lukes' (2005) three-dimensional theory of power is more useful for this study as it explains how power plays a role in decision-making and setting the agendas beforehand to make decisions. Lukes has postulated three dimensions of power which include decision-making power, non-decision-making power and ideological power. According to Lukes (2005), one-dimensional power relates to the power of decision-making while two-dimensional power refers to the power of agenda-setting. The third dimension, which is

ideological power, plays the role in forming beliefs and norms in the society through institutions.

I found Lukes' theory of power relevant to research decentralized planning policy as it involves the decision-making process. So, the decision making power deserves attention in the planning process. Here, it is essential to understand the source of such decision-making power. It is equally possible that such source can be formal and informal, visible and invisible. The agenda-setting power in Lukes' analysis denotes the role of planners or experts or technocrats that facilitate the decision-making but do not involve in decision-making in the planning process. The ideological power works in a more subtle form as it influences the stakeholders of planning in forming beliefs and attitudes through the institutions operating in the society. Koglin and Pettersson (2017) have explained well the relevancy of Lukes' three-dimensional theory of power in planning (see Appendix). With this theoretical background on power, I move now to the theoretical review of institutional analysis in the section follows.

Institutions: Conceptual Understandings

Institutions are considered increasingly influential in shaping the interactions and changes in politics, economy and society. Institutions refer to the broad range of prevailing rules that guide the behaviours of the stakeholders and their interrelationships in the development process (World Bank, 2000). According to Hodgson (2006), institutions are such stable arrangements of socially accepted rules that shape and guide the relationships in society. Scott (2004) suggests three vital elements of institutions – regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive systems that work concomitantly in society. Thus, the common thread in these definitions of institutions is interaction at the societal level among the various actors. Since the

planning process involves various types of individuals and organizations, it becomes essential to understand the roles of institutions in this process. The concept of institutions considers the role of both formal and informal institutions in political analysis (Burnell et al., 2011). Further, the newly emerged concept of governance recognizes not only the government as an institution but also other non-government actors of society as the institutions such as private agencies and civil society organizations (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007). Considering the role of both formal and informal institutions, the main concern of the institutional theory is to explain clearly the role of institutions in shaping the social and political events or changes in society (Hall et al., 1996).

Rothstein and Tannenberg (2015) suggest that Andrews' analogy of an institutional iceberg (2013) is appropriate to illustrate the concept of formal and informal institutions. According to them, the above the water part of the iceberg in the Andrews' analogy of an institutional iceberg, represents "the visible formal rules that are in play, such as, written laws, freedom of information, freedom of expression etc" while the under the water part of the iceberg covers "all informal rules that shape interactions, both normative and cultural-cognitive" (p. 33). This analogy of iceberg reveals that most of the institutions are informal and most of them are invisible. Given the role of institutions, the informal institutions are not only larger and highly influence than the formal institutions but also the interaction between policy and its practice is highly determined by the informal institutions (Rothstein & Tannenberg, 2015). This suggests that understanding of informal institutions minutely is essential to understand the working of the policy.

Lawrence and Shadnam (2008) view that institutional theory provides a theoretical lens to explain the society that embodies various kinds of institutions that

determine the basis for any activity or behaviour that takes place. They further argue that institutions are context and actors specific, not in all places and not for all. Hence, i institutional researchers need to pay attention to the context of the institutions and their interrelationships to see their influence in that particular context while carrying out institutional analysis (Lawrence & Shadnam, 2008).

All kind of institutions both formal and informal influence the policy-making of decentralization and its practice like decentralized planning. However, they may not work in the same direction. For example, formal institutions such as rules, regulations and organization work towards achieving the intended objective of the policy while the informal institutions like cultural system and attitudes of certain actors may not be supportive in practising the policy as intended. Indeed, there can be regular interactions between these two forms of institutions depending upon the context.

Like resource, an institution is also one of the important sources of power. Indeed, power often plays a role through the means of institutions. "Power operates both through 'formal' institutions and rules and 'informal' relationships and cultural norms" (Pettit, 2013, p. 21) as both the formal and informal institutions influence all stakeholders of society and economy (Rothstein & Tannenberg, 2015). The role of power through formal institutions is more visible while it is less visible with informal institutions in society. It is argued that power is deeply rooted in all institutions and activities of the society and becomes an integral part of its functioning (Acosta & Pettit, 2013). Moreover, there are often chances that informal institutions influence largely the formal institutions as the informal institutions are deeply rooted in society and most often difficult to change.

Since decentralization is highly influenced by "politics and institutional dynamics" (Eaton et al., 2010, p. 1) institutions similarly influence the local level planning which is a part of the decentralization process of the government.   Though there are both formal and informal institutions and actors playing role in the process of planning at the local level, formal institutions are found to have discussed (Persson & Sjöstedt, 2015, as cited in Rothstein & Tannenberg, 2015) while informal institutions can be more influential in the decision-making process. Hence, consideration of informal actors and institutions is also equally imperative while analyzing the workings of decentralized policy.

So far in this chapter, I discuss various concepts that are relevant in understanding the decentralized planning. Now, in the section follows, I enter into the field of planning to discuss its conceptual and theoretical aspects essential to understanding the decentralized planning.

Planning: Philosophical and Theoretical Premises

Since planning is multidisciplinary phenomena, planning theory, consequently, is complex and somewhat vague. Campebell and Fainstein (1996) opine that planning theory draws on all social sciences which make difficult to define its specific disciplinary boundary. Friedmann (1998) in his article 'Planning Theory Revisited' discusses the context of planning theory. He views that even culture influences planning as there can be different planning practices depending upon the nature of political systems.

As there are many typologies of planning termed and classified in various ways (Dale, 2004). There are various perspectives in planning theory (Fox-Rogers & Murphy, 2014; Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000) which can be grouped broadly into two major theoretical camps – classic rational planning and communicative or

collaborative planning. The former is related to positivist thinking which was in influence during the 1960s to 1980s is bureaucratic as well as mechanistic in its nature and role of people is very limited in this rational planning (Innes & Booher, 2014). It concerns more on cause and effect relationship to produce certain results and ignores the dialogic process. It values only scientific knowledge in planning (Khakee et al., 2000). The rational model of planning, according to Mitroff, appears more technical which follows a standard structure (as cited in Innes & Booher, 2104). One of the weaknesses of rational planning paradigm is that it deliberately ignores the role of any kind of power in the planning process (Friedmann, 1998).

In addition, rational model of planning is more inclined to the technical and scientific aspects of planning. However, Friedmann (1998) argues that the need is of more critical analysis of planning than its technical parts. Some believe that scientific knowledge does not represent the whole as knowledge is a socially constructed phenomenon (Khakee et al., 2000). Healey (1996) argues that scientific rationalism concept of planning was not appropriate for democratic societies. Instead, she postulated the concept of the communicative process of planning which is appropriate for the participatory style of planning. Thus, with the democratization of the political system, participatory planning emerged and influenced changes in the traditional model of scientific planning. It appears that in the present time of participatory development the classical rational model of planning could not keep its significance and relevancy. Hence, the search for an alternative model of planning theory is quite understandable.

As a consequence, the communicative/collaborative theory came as a theoretical shift in the field of planning since the early 1980s (Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 2002). Hence, in the early 1990s, the collaborative planning theory

became a dominant planning theory (Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000). Thus, it is imperative to focus further discussion on collaborative planning.

'Communicative planning' and 'collaborative planning' are the terms being used in planning theory since the 1990s which draw from Habermas's critical theory (Allmendinger, 2002) to denote the new concept of planning over the concept of traditional instrumentalist planning. According to Healey (2003), collaborative planning is performed with the open and free exchange of ideas, opinions among the actors of planning which takes place in the setting of "… complex and dynamic institutional environments" (p. 104).

The theorists of this paradigm consider planning as a participatory process where various actors freely exchange their views and describe planners as a member of the society familiar with the context particularly political culture and practice of decisions making (Innes, 1995). Hence, it is argued that interaction among stakeholders is the pivotal activity of communicative planning in its process (Friedmann, 1998; Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000; Innes & Booher, 2014). Among the stakeholders, the role of the state is dominant in the planning process as the role of government is not declined even in the neoliberal period as the planning practice worldwide driven by the policy and financing from the state (Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000). According to Friedmann (1998), inputs on planning are not limited within the formal structure of the state but also come from the non-government and private sectors.

According to Innes (1995), the communicative action theory is a practice focused theory as the theorists of this tradition emphasize on what planners do in reality rather than a contemplation on what planners should do. Methodologically, the communicative planning theorists believe in qualitative inquiry instead of quantitative

and emphasis on context-based understanding rather than generalization (Innes, 1995).

Innes (1996) discusses the role of "consensus-building as a method" (p. 461) in developing comprehensive planning. She argues that this method is appropriate to seek a common understanding of the difficult and conflicting public issue that involves multiple stakeholders with variant interests (Innes, 1996). This approach appears close to the collaborative planning as both argue for the equal participation of stakeholders in the issues arises in the planning process. The notion of consensus-building here is important than the comprehensive planning as the term comprehensive has been used in the context of urban physical planning to cover all aspects of the city as a whole rather than multidimensional nature of the planning process. Rider (1982) argues that the planning system of the local government should have flexible characteristics to have decisions made as per the changing local context. This view calls for the active and meaningful participation of all stakeholders in the entire planning process.

As mentioned above, there are many theorists with their own perspectives even within the communicative /collaborative tradition of planning theory. Consequently, there are ongoing debates in the literature of planning theory. Innes and Booher (2014) suggest us to consider the differences as the opportunity of learning in the field of planning to "develop richer theory" (p. 13). Further, they suggest that recognition of the vital role of communication is a power itself which help overcome differences in various perspective of communicative planning.

Thus, the issue of power is the common source of debate in planning theory especially in the case of communicative or collaborative planning theory. Power is

the most debatable theme regarding the collaborative planning theory. The main issue is treating power as it can be neutralized in the interactive process of planning. According to Fox-Rogers and Murphy (2014) planners who advocate collaborative planning argue that power can be neutralized recognizing its effect in the planning process in advance and allow all actors freely to participate in the process. For Fox-Rogers and Murphy, "economic power" of stakeholders is determining element in the process of collaborative planning (p. 245). Huxley and Yiftachel (2000) critically examine the communicative theory and draw that the role of power is not addressed adequately by this theory. Thus, the assumption of power putting aside while undertaking planning is widely suspected by many theorists.

Not only in planning, but there is also a practice of power analysis in the development field to explore the existing power relations in the political system and development actors. Development agencies apply power analysis which considers the role of stakeholders, and the institutions to examine the power distributions as well as its practice in the development process (Acosta & Pettit, 2013). So, it is essential to consider the planning process that is influenced by the dynamic power relations of the stakeholders (Koglin & Pettersson, 2017). Flyvbjerg and Richardson (2002) argue that power is an indispensable issue in planning; however, there is a tendency that many theorists of planning have overlooked this. They advocate the power analysis of Michel Foucault and reject the communicative theory of planning which is founded on the Jurgen Habermas' communicative action theory. The main thrust of their argument is that the communicative theory fails to recognize the role of power in planning while Foucault adequately addresses the role of power in planning. Hence, according to Flyvbjerg and Richardson, it is indispensable to recognize the role of power in planning if its goal is to achieve social change in a democratic way.

Brownill and Carpenter (2007) argue that power cannot be neutralized as it is assumed in collaborative planning but it plays its role in all the process of planning which is essential to be recognized by all stakeholders in initiating dialogue for consensus building.

Fox-Rogers and Murphy (2014) discuss the concept of "shadow planning" (p. 262), in their article -'Informal strategies of power in the local planning system'. They call shadow planning to denote the activities and process that take place beyond the formal process of planning. According to Fox-Rogers and Murphy elite from higher economic class create and use this parallel informal channel to meet their vested economic interests. The practice of shadow planning is so powerful that it cannot be ignored in most of the cases. Thus, it is considered useful to analyze the roles of stakeholders in the planning process in any context. But, the concept of shadow planning, in essence, is not separate typology as Fox-Rogers and Murphy have presented it; rather it is again the recognition of the role of power not only in the formal process but beyond it– in the informal domain of society.

Healey (2003) has responded to the critique of the issue of power in her collaborative theory. She argues that power exists in all kind of relationships that occur in society and should be taken as an object. So, she disagrees that her collaborative theory of planning has ignored the role of power as she believes power relations are manifested in the planning process during the interaction among the actors. However, Friedmann (1998) asserts that the role of power is missing in the contemporary theories of planning and argues to incorporate it in the planning theory. But, he argues to differentiate power in its negative, controlling, and positive, enabling role. Nevertheless, the issue of power about planning theory is such vital that there is need of further research with open discussions on the role of power

theory to improve the practice of planning (Friedmannn, 1998). Thus, the realized

gap in planning theory is the issue of power which suggests to the future researchers

to consider it adequately.

In this section, I discussed the concept of planning and its theoretical premises

which showed that the theory of planning has shifted from the rationalist planning to

communicative and collaborative planning. In view of decentralized planning, the

notion of collaborative planning is more relevant as it informs well the participatory

planning process. However, as discussed above, the issue of power needs to be

considered while practising collaborative planning. With such discussion on

planning, now I move to the next section where I briefly discuss the role of planners

in planning.

Planners in Planning

The role of planners in carrying out planning is emphasized largely in the

literature of planning theory and practice. Hence, it is imperative here to take into

account briefly the role of planners in planning. It is argued that "planning academics

are assuming ever-larger roles as participants in practice, as public scholars, as

advisors or consultants, as community-based researchers, or as activists"

(Siemiatycki, 2012, p. 147). There would be no debate on the role of planners in

planning. Planning requires certain professional knowledge and skills which ordinary

people may not have (Alexnder, 2005; Litman, 2013; Sandercock, 1999). Thus, it

suggests that there can be a need for some professionals in the planning process

depending upon the availability of the skills with the local people. Alexnder (2005)

argues that it is important for planners to facilitate the participatory planning process

and to reach a common decision. However, he further argues that such a role can be

played by other actors, from politician to any official, who participate in the planning

process. This indicates the need for professional input as to help the political process of planning but not to influence it.

The planning process is such a complex activity in view of the involvement of contesting stakeholders, it would not bring an outcome if professional planners do not facilitate it. There is more emphasis on the challenge of implementing collaborative planning in view of the established practice of rationalist planning (Harris, 2002). It is viewed that local governments are collecting a mere list of projects in lack of capacity for proper planning (Blair, 1998). In such a context, the role of planners is to support the various stakeholders providing them with useful information, playing a role in coordinating the stakeholders, and supporting them to take decisions (Litman, 2013). The discussion made above on the role of planners in planning suggests for the adequate planning capacity with the local governments. This all suggests the need for planners to facilitate the planning process in a participatory way and mainly providing technical inputs to the stakeholders to help them make decisions.

Since the planning capacity of the local government plays a significant role in its effective functioning (Loh, 2015), it is essential to educate the local stakeholders. Particularly, the need is to educate the stakeholders on collaborative planning as they face various problems in its practice (Margerum, 2002). Similarly, there is also a need for providing education on integrated planning as local governments are increasingly realizing its significance (Smith, 2014). This suggests that the planning issue embodies an educational role to enhance the planning capacity of the local stakeholders.

Conceptualizing Decentralized Planning

Decentralized planning is informed by various concepts like development, decentralization, governance and planning. It can be seen as a part and parcel of

decentralization of both the development process and the governance system. Decentralization and decentralized planning have been evolved with the introduction of participatory development approaches. Since the 1950s to present, development approaches have been shifting in almost a decade or so in a series as development "for the people, of the people, with the people and by the people" (Hyden et al., 2005, p. 11). The latest concept – development by the people – advocates the empowerment of local people and is in line with the concept of decentralized planning.

Similarly, there was the increasing popularity of democratic governance (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007) that urged the policymakers to transfer the decision making power from the central level authorities to the local levels (Miraftab et al., 2008). As a consequence, as a part of the whole decentralization process, development planning at the local level came into policy and practice. In short, shifts of development approach from the top-down to bottom-up, decentralization of government system devolving power to the local level and introduction of governance in the development process make it transparent, participatory and accountable in combined helped initiating the decentralized planning process. Hence, decentralized planning, for this study, is the planning exercised by the local governments which are autonomous bodies themselves through devolutionary decentralization.

Conceptual Framework

I have developed a conceptual framework based on the focus of my research problem – decentralized planning and research questions. This conceptual framework depicts my research focus, which particularly presents the concepts, theories that inform my research issue – the local level planning of local governments. As shown in Figure 1, the decentralized planning policy and its practice are informed by various concepts and theories while these all are also related in some way with each other.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of Decentralized Planning and Its Practice
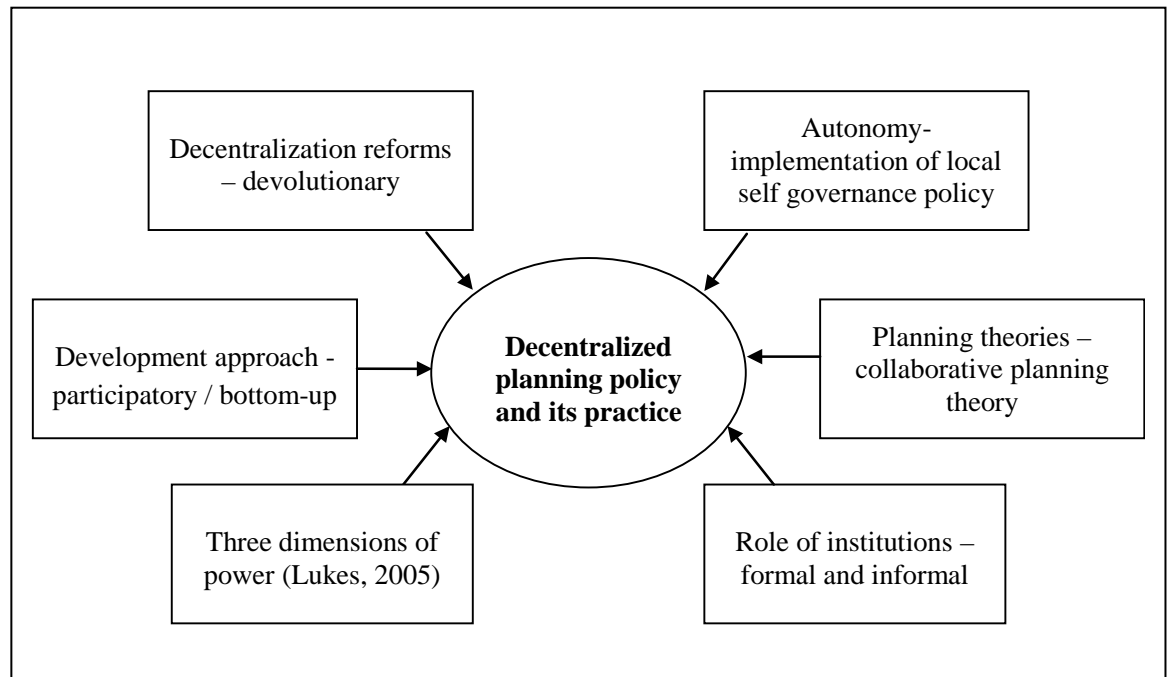
A devolutionary form of decentralization is the foundation for decentralized planning policy that provides autonomy to local governments for planning. The bottom-up participatory approach of development provides an impetus for decentralized planning which aligns with collaborative planning theories. At the same time, power plays a vital role in the planning policy implementation process mainly through three dimensions of power – decision making, agenda-setting and ideological influence (Likes, 2005). Institutions both formal and informal play roles in exercising power in the planning process. Thus, the concepts and theories depicted in the above framework inform largely in an interactive way the decentralized planning policy and its practice.

Essence of the Chapter

Decentralization and Decentralized planning are intertwined concepts. Decentralized planning being a multidisciplinary phenomenon draws from a wide range of concepts and theories. Fundamentally, it is informed by the concept of the devolutionary form of decentralization. Decentralization in its later stage is closely associated with the concept of governance and advocates decentralized governance instead of centralized governance. Power theories and institutional analyses are essential concepts in understanding the practice of planning. Particularly, the three-dimensional theory of power postulated by Lukes (2005) is helpful to explain planning. Institutions refer to both the formal and informal institutions. Planning theories have been shifting from traditional rationalist perspective to the present collaborative planning.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

I use the term methodology here to denote all methodological processes which range from philosophical underpinnings to research strategy to methods and tools of data collection (Boden et al., 2005). Philosophical position orients the research process and contributes to building a perspective by drawing from the research. Hence, in this chapter, I discuss both the theoretical underpinnings of the methodology and how I practised the methodology for this study. In the beginning sections of this chapter, I dealt with the philosophical aspects of qualitative research. Then, in the remaining sections, I discuss case study as my research approach and methodological procedures from the fieldwork to data analysis including the quality and ethical standards of my research.

Philosophical Stance: Ontology and Epistemology

Philosophical stance of any research directs the whole research methodology. It is primarily expressed in terms of ontology as it deals with the characteristics of the reality of any social phenomenon (Willis, 2007). Any research explicitly or implicitly begins with some ontological assumptions about the social world. Different ontological assumptions give different views of the world. There are two major ontological stances in research – positivism and subjectivism. Positivists believe in the independent nature of reality while constructivists or subjectivists reject it and argue that reality is created (Gray, 2004). This research is founded in subjectivist philosophy. Ontology is considered as the first step in any research followed by epistemology in the research process in a logical fashion (Grix, 2002).

Epistemology deals with what is knowable and how it is known (Willis, 2007). Epistemology follows the ontological assumptions in any research. These two are closely related. Indeed, ontology and epistemology are intertwined as they develop and act concomitantly (Crotty, 1998). Fundamental questions that epistemology seeks to answer are "how reality can be known" and "the relationship between the knower and what is known" (de Gialdino, 2011, para 8). Guided by the subjectivist ontological assumptions, this study follows an interpretive approach which believes in multiple realities and in the possibility of multiple methods to be used in the research (Willis, 2007). In the epistemology of interpretivism, both the researcher and research participants interact to find out and know any phenomenon (Snape & Spencer, 2003).

Qualitative Inquiry

This is a qualitative study. I chose a qualitative methodology for this research as I found it not only interesting but also highly suitable for my research problem. The methodological approach of research is determined collectively by the nature of the research problem, interest of the researcher and skills or experience of the researcher (Creswell, 2014). My research problem seeks to explore understandings on the issue that requires textual data. Words are essential to developing an understanding of any issue or process and people's feelings in real-world (Bowen, 2005). Thus, the explanation of understandings through texts is the main characteristic of qualitative research.

Considering the practice of decentralized planning policy as my research area, the qualitative methodology is more appropriate as it is increasingly used in policy studies, where the intention is to study how various actors bring views and make meaning in actual concrete settings and the consequence of these actions. It is

suggested to use qualitative research to explore the complicated administrative system which is responsible for the implementation of policies in the public sphere (Altheide & Johnson, 2012). Since my study examines the policy into practice, the qualitative inquiry highly suits the research purpose.

Research through the qualitative approach is not a straightforward enterprise. It has to follow an iterative process passing through many bending and curves from philosophical assumptions to methodological perspectives to the methods of data generation and analysis which ends in reporting and dissemination of the findings. I was aware of such a nonlinear iterative process that I would have to follow during my research project. It is viewed that there is a reciprocal relationship between the research objectives and research methodology as both of these interplay concomitantly in designing research and selecting methodology (Carter & Little, 2007). This suggested considering both the research problems that I was going to undertake and the epistemological stance that I intended to follow while identifying the methodology. In other words, philosophical assumptions about the world and the way of knowing the world have a vital role in framing the research methodology.

Research Paradigm: Interpretivism

We use a research paradigm as an overall framework that directs the whole research process (Willis, 2007). Several research paradigms are in practice in response to the varying needs of the research. My research paradigm is interpretivism. It embraces those research strategies that focus on the subjective meanings of a phenomenon that occurs in the social world (Outhwaite, 2005). It suggests that interpretation plays an important role in qualitative research. The interpretive research paradigm assumes multiple realities of the same phenomenon under study. Commenting on the nature of reality under interpretivism, Willis (2007)

argues that as research is a social construction, the reality it tends to explore is also a social construction. This, therefore, tells us that there is no absolute truth of any phenomena but there can be many truths depending upon their social constructions.

Since the purpose of my research is to explore the understandings of different participants, this interpretive approach well fits into my research. In addition to multiple understandings of the research phenomenon, I tried to capture the critiques articulated by the research participants. Further, Wlasham (2006) argues that there can be critical insights within the interpretive research. Thus, interpretivism is the appropriate paradigm to guide my research which intends to explore multiple understandings and critiques of the research issue from the perspectives of individuals in a particular context and social environments (Snape & Spencer, 2003).

Case Study: Approach of Inquiry

Informed by the interpretive paradigm, I chose the case study approach as it is highly appropriate to study social problems from the subjective perspective (Chadderton & Torrance, 2012). To study the complex issue in detail, case study highly suits qualitative research (Baskarada, 2014; Gummesson, 2007). Its popularity in qualitative research is mainly because it is instrumental in dealing with how and why type of research questions (Yin, 2014). With such research questions, case study method aims for detailed description and analysis (Berg, 2007) of a phenomenon or a case. A case in the case study may represent "a process, a program, events, or activities" (Creswell, 2012, p. 465). Since the case study is considered suitable to understand the working policy with the impacts of its practice in a complicated environment (Chadderton & Torrance, 2012), I chose it for studying the decentralized planning policy.

The research questions that are developed should be indicative of the case study (Thomas, 2011). I used the case study research as an approach and strategy of inquiry of the study (Chadderton & Torrance, 2012; Yin, 2014) as my research questions clearly demanded that I adopt the case study design. The main aim of case study is to develop a comprehensive understanding of any particular issue, agenda, process, practice and social phenomena and to provide insights and ideas for policy formulation and practice (Simons, 2009). Further, she suggests that the case study is useful to capture the multiple perceptions of stakeholders of a program or policy.

While considering the case study as a research strategy, it is imperative to explore different perspectives of it. Mainly three prominent authors' (i.e. Yin, Stake and Merriam) perspectives are considered significant in case study research (Brown, 2008; Simons, 2009; Yazan, 2015). According to Brown (2008), Merriam is an educationist, Yin is a methodologist and Stake is an interpretivist. Merriam has used the case study in educational research from a qualitative perspective; Yin's work on policy research appears as methodologist while Stake's research on programme evaluation is interpretive (Brown, 2008). According to Yazan (2015), Yin draws from both positivist and non-positivist research and has developed a practical and common methodology of the case study. It is the uniqueness of Yin's approach that he suggests considering theory while designing the case study research and also talks about theory building from the case study research (Yin, 2014). This shows that Yin's case study research approach draws upon both positivist and non-positivist research philosophy. More importantly, his concept of "analytic generalization" (2014, p. 40) shows his inclination to the non-positivist approach.

Unlike Yin, Merriam and Stake are explicitly interpretivists in their epistemological understanding of their case study approaches. Stake's writings on

qualitative case study research clearly show his epistemological tradition (Yazan, 2015). Stake (1994) finds the case study to be interpretive to explore multiple realities as he says ontological assumptions construct understandings and both are dynamic concepts. Stake's (1995) emphasis while conducting case study is particularity on complexity and context. Like Stake, Merriam follows a qualitative approach as she views that constructivism is an appropriate epistemology to guide qualitative case study (Yazan, 2015). Since my research is informed by interpretive paradigm, I have followed Stake's perspective of case study research. However, some aspects of other authors were also found useful like the concept of analytic generalization of Yin.

Defining the boundary is a crucial aspect of a case study. Simons (2009) sees the possibility of conceptualizing the case based on the findings and views that there is also a possibility of changing the boundaries during the research process and even in starting the analysis. This study defines the case as the practice of district-level planning. The practice was observed in a particular district as the site of it in terms of its physical location. But, the issue was explored beyond this site other than the observation of practice. It becomes essential to study research to collect data outside of the specified study area and the case in such a condition does not become only the practice of a certain policy in that particular site but the policy itself (Chadderton & Torrance, 2012). Concerning my research issue, the practice of decentralized planning policy is the case. Framing of the issue forms the boundary of the case which was studied in a certain physical site. However, research participants were from out of physical site depending upon the bearings of them in the case – the issue.

Most of the authors have explained case study categorizing in different types (Stake, 1994; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2014). The kind of case study required depends

upon the objective of the research. Therefore, selection of an appropriate type of case

study is an important aspect of the case study research design. Stake (1994) has

suggested three types of case study– intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. From

these types, I found the instrumental case study appropriate to my study which helps

to get "insight into an issue" (Stake, 1994, p. 237). Stake (1994) argues that in the

instrumental case study, the case plays a secondary role providing a basis for the

understanding of the research issue. Similarly, Berg (2007) states that instrumental

case study intends "…to help the researcher better understand some external

theoretical question, issue, or problem" (p. 291). Since my research aimed to

understand the practice of decentralized planning policy, my case study research is

largely informed by Stake's concept of the instrumental case study.

Study Site and Fieldwork

The practice of decentralized planning policy is my case. To study the

practice of this issue, I selected a mid-hill district of Bagmati province. I considered

the district as the unit of study since the district was the main avenue for the practice

of decentralization (Gurung, 2003) in the political and administrative history of

Nepal. Now with the implementation of the new Constitution of 2015, rural and

urban level municipalities have taken the place of the district in view of the

decentralization of power and governing the development planning. Though there are

variations, in terms of socio-economic and geographical features, among the 77

districts of Nepal, they are identical in view of decentralized planning policy as they

all were guided by Local Self-Governance Act, 1999 and Local Self-Governance

Regulation, 2000 till 2017. I selected this mid-hill district because it can be an

illustrative case for the study of the practice of decentralized planning policy. For my

study, the districts which had been practising district development planning more

regularly was an essential condition to study the practice of planning. From the districts that were practising such planning, I selected this particular district from Bagmati province considering the availability of my access to research participants to conduct the qualitative case study research.

Indeed, access to research participants and study site was one of the important criteria for any research. My experience in getting access to politicians and government officials who are working at the district level in leadership positions of their respective institutions was that researchers need the support of the local people who have good connections with them. I needed to use various persons to get access to various kinds of research participants. To prepare myself to conduct the fieldwork, I made preliminary visits to my study district. I visited District Development Committee with my colleagues at the local level and got introduced with some staff to inform them in advance that I would visit them and their office sometime onward to conduct my research and expressed hope to get their help. Similarly, I also visited an NGO Office which was more influential in the district and met some key officials of it who were leading the NGO federation of that district.

With help of the persons of my contact, I met a politician who had been involved in DDC for a long time, particularly since the first election of the local body in 1992 after the restoration of the democratic system in 1990. I held an informal meeting with this matured politician. This politician not only became a research participant but also became my close person to contact some research participants especially from the political parties. I had collected some names of possible research participants in the meeting with the NGO officials mentioned above. I also consulted with this politician about the possible research participants for my study. Most of the possible participants suggested by this politician matched with the participants

suggested by the NGO officials. At the same time, I came to know that I needed to take the help of different persons to contact different possible research participants. I followed this strategy while contacting my research participants which proved helpful for me to get access to my research participants.

From the preliminary visits that I made in September 2015, I came to know that to participate in various planning workshops it was essential to get the permission of the Local Development Officer (LDO) who was the Chief of the District Development Committee (DDC). I contacted the Ministry of Local Development (MLD), the central authority to guide the DDC, as I came to know that to get access to various planning workshops and meetings it was essential to have some sort of connection with the LDO to get their permission. I met a senior officer at the MLD, whom I knew before, at the ministry who telephoned the LDO and told him to help me in my research. While I visited the LDO, at first I introduced myself with my purpose to visit him and his office. His response to this point was quite reserved. Immediately, I linked my conversation with him telling him about my visit to the Ministry and the senior officer who had called him to help me. Then, his response did not remain reserved and he expressed that I could sit in the planning related workshops. My intention to mention this event here is to document the context that even in academic pursuit, one needs a connection to get help from the authority. It shows the absence of professionalism in Nepali administration and reveals the favouritism that is deeply rooted in our society (Bista, 1994).

After the preliminary visits, I remained in touch with my study district and collected relevant documents available in the DDC. Meanwhile, I decided to make observations of the district development planning activities before commencing the interviews with my research participants. I thought the observations of various

planning workshops and meetings would provide me deeper understandings of my

research phenomena which would ultimately help me to explore further during the

interviews with the research participants. Various planning workshops following the

LSGA procedures were held from January to March 2016. This period became

important for me to observe the planning activities and to have an informal

conversation as well as to strengthen trust with the DDC staff and some possible

research interviewees. Thus, as I mentioned earlier, my preliminary visits to the study

site took place in September 2015. Then I observed the planning workshops in the

first quarter of 2016. This was followed by interviews held from June 2016 to June

2017. Also, I conducted the field visit even in the final stage of research to explore

the recent practice of the newly elected local government's planning under federal

governance over the past two years. I discuss further the interviews, observations and

document analysis as the methods of data generation in the section that follows.

Selection of Research Participants

Research participants are the main sources of data for qualitative case study

research. Further, the views of stakeholders were particularly important to generate

data on the practice of decentralized planning. Hence, selection of the right research

participants is highly important to get rich data on the research problem. For the

selection of the research participants, I worked out a basic criterion that research

participants should have participated in the district development planning process for

at least five years. This criterion was specially applied for the political party

representatives and people from the study district. However, in the case of

government officials working in the DDC and line agencies, it was not applicable

since they were transferred frequently with no possibility of working for a long time

in a district. So, for such research participants, I selected those who were involved for

a relatively long time in the planning process. The research participants who were political party representatives included both who worked as elected representatives and who worked as nominated by parties to work in the DDC.

In addition to the research participants from the study district, I also took a few research participants from the associations of local bodies that were deemed essential to explore the issues relevant to my study. As a whole, my research participants composed of the district level stakeholders – political party representative, NGO Officials, member of local bodies associations, government officials in DDC and line agencies, and DDC staffs. Besides, at the final stage of research, I interviewed some newly elected representatives of the local government. In total, I interviewed 19 research participants. Though my selection of research participant focused on their participation in district development planning, I took care to have political party representatives from the parties who were particularly active in the district for a long time.

Methods of Data Generation

One of the merits of the case study research is flexibility of using multiple methods in inquiring the phenomenon under study. The case study methodology allows for generating data from various sources. The qualitative case study is "an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon with its context using a variety of data sources" (Jack & Baxter, 2008, p. 544). I found the suggestion of Chadderton and Torrance (2012) useful as they view that balanced use of interviews, documentary analysis and observation is common in carrying out the case study. My data generation strategy included the collection of data both from primary and secondary sources. The data generation activity was an evolving process as the

data were generated in the course of data collection itself. Now, in the following section, I describe the methods that I used to generate data for my study.

Interview

I employed interviewing as the main method to generate data from the stakeholders of district development planning. Since my research approach is a qualitative case study, the interview became an important method to get views of the research participants. "Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities" (Stake, 1995, p. 64). To conduct qualitative interviews, I used an interview guide that was adequately flexible to incorporate additional ideas that might emerge during the interview sessions. The interview guide was mainly helpful in initiating the interviews. The interviews mainly evolved based on the views of the respondents with subsequent probing questions. However, the interview guide had essential broad themes based on the research questions that were helpful to include the themes if they were not covered during the interview. In my experience, the interview guide is an essential helping tool to conduct interviews but it needs to be used flexibly.

My experience in interviewing the research participants was mixed as there were some differences between the ways of their expression. There were some similarities as well as some differences in their views among the research participants irrespective of their involvement in different sections of the society. Here, I am briefly sharing their styles of presentation. Most of the political party representatives were frank and open in expressing their views. They were interested in going deep in each question posed to them. However, one of them tried to give me a whole summary in response to my few questions. I guessed he was dealing with me like a journalist and hurried to conclude his views. I also found him that he was in the

conviction that he thought better to extract gist than going in-depth in each question. However, he dealt with some specific questions after his conclusion, too.

Most of the DDC staff and government officials were more cautious while answering my questions. They were different than the political parties' representatives. Though they were descriptive in providing the information they were trying to maintain a balance in expressing critical views, especially on the role of the central level and political parties. Though they were more reserved in the beginning, they became frank at the later stage of the interview. The representatives from NGOs were found in between the above two. Not so frank like political parties' representative and not so reserve like the DDC staff. A major interesting fact than my doubt is that all of the participants allowed me to record their interviews. It is probably due to the generosity of Nepali culture which motivated people to trust and share their views and feelings. At the same time, they might have trusted me as I had made them clear about the purpose of my research and the policy of confidentiality at the very beginning of the interviews.

Document Analysis

Documents review and analysis was an important data collection method of my study. I collected relevant documents throughout the research period. Researchers need to "frequently gather documents, artefacts and other kinds of materials that will contribute to the inquiry" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 29). From the study district, I gathered the district development plans and budget documents of various years. Similarly, I also collected periodic development plans of the district. Many of the documents I collected from the internet source were from the website of the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD) and National Planning Commission (NPC). I need to be updated of the documents regularly

released by MoFALD since the promulgation of the new constitution with the federal

system. Particularly, I collected documents like various circulars, guidelines, and

instructions provided by the MoFALD to the local level.

Observation

Observation is an important research activity for qualitative research.

Researchers often employ it in case study research. "Observations work the

researcher toward a greater understanding of the case …. We need observations

pertinent to issues" (Stake, 1995, p. 60). I started observations of various activities

related to the development and participation of people from the beginning of my

preliminary visits to the study district. I observed the DDC office, municipality office

and NGO offices and people visiting in these offices to get insights into the practice

of the interaction of local people with the staff and officials. It was remarkable that in

some cases I saw very common people visiting these development organizations but

with some activist like people representing either a political party or an NGO. It was

also noteworthy as I found more people visiting the NGO offices than the DDC

office. There could be two reasons which might have attracted community people

more to the NGOs: one was easy access to the NGOs as NGOs' staff stay at the

community level for the mobilization of community people, and another reason was

more resources were channelled through NGOs at the local level.

Since one of my research questions was to explore the practice of district

development planning, I focused my observations on the planning activities in the

district. I observed the Ilaka level planning workshop, one of the important steps of

district development planning, which helped me to understand how planning

workshop was conducted in practice. Similarly, I observed sector-wise planning

meetings at the DDC and meeting of the Integrated Planning Formulation Committee.

I observed all these planning meetings as a non-participant observer. These meetings were important to understand the relationships and interactions among the various stakeholders in the process of district development planning. I also got a chance to observe the meeting of the District Council that was organized to approve the district development plan. All district level stakeholders, members of parliaments and minister of the Ministry of Local Development from the central level had also attended the District Council meeting which was a formal meeting like a ceremony to announce something than to discuss, interact and reach consensus on something. This was a good chance to observe the position of various stakeholders in the district.

In addition to above, I got a chance to observe informal meetings in the NGO offices mainly as conversations between the NGO leaders, staff and local people and other informal meetings among villagers and development activists. In such events, I acted as a non-participant observer. My experience of the observation is that though it is a continuous process throughout the research it is highly useful to make preliminary visits and non-participant observations before beginning the interviews. It gives confidence to the researcher providing the familiarity of the field environment as well as additional knowledge in research issue which helps the researcher to make the interview meaningful.

<div align="center">**Data Management**</div>

In this section, I explain the three activities of data management – recording, transcription, and analysis of data.

Recording of Data

I recorded all the interviews in an audio device. For each interview, I took the permission of the research participant in advance. As I stated above, I did not face any difficulty in recording the interviews. Along with the audio recordings I took

note of some major points in my field notebook without allowing any disturbance in the conversation. While noting such major points, I also framed the probing questions to ask the research participants at appropriate points of interviews with care in not obstructing the flow of the conversation at certain questions. At the end of the interview, I reviewed my field notes so that I could find if some points or issues were missed out that I could ask the other research participants later. In this sense, I considered qualitative interview as an evolving process which becomes richer and richer in generating data with the consecutive interviews.

In addition to interviews, I also recorded observations made in the field. I noted each and every activity of the planning workshops. Since I acted as a non-participant observer, it allowed me to note down the main processes of the planning workshops. After the end of the workshops, I prepared the expanded field notes that I used as data in writing the report. It is suggested that the best way is to transcribe the observations as soon as possible to capture the details (Butler-Kisber, 2010). I also noted all kind of informal meetings and conversations in my notebook. I did not limit to record only the interviews and observations but also recorded any idea, insights, and questions aroused within me on my research problem. So a pen and notebook, as I experienced, need to be the all-time company of a qualitative researcher. I think here appears a distinction between qualitative and quantitative research as for the former anything can be a possible data collected iteratively while for the latter structured data collected through a standard linear process can serve the purpose.

Transcription

Transcription is an important part of the interview data. Since interviews were the main sources of data in my research, I paid special attention to transcribing the interviews. There are different practices of transcription. The exactness of

transcription depends upon the nature of research as linguistic and conversation analytic studies may need full details while it may be selective and flexible for general sociological studies (Flick, 2009). "Is more detailed transcription always better?" Tracy asks this question and answers that "No. Qualitative research demands flexibility, and transcribers use what works for them and their audiences" (Tracy, 2013, p. 178). Indeed, all of the interviewee's conversation will not be relevant to the research problem. In such a case, a full transcription of taped interviews in the cost of time for the interpretation of the data is not worthy. The best alternative is to be selective in identifying the relevant and significant portions of interviews and transcribe them (Alvesson, 2011). Strauss (1987) suggests that "It seems more reasonable to transcribe only as much and only as exactly as it is required by the research questions" (as cited in Flick, 2009, p. 300). Such a strategy of transcription saves time and energy of the researcher which can be put into the meaningful analysis of data (Flick, 2009). I consider these views while carrying out the transcription of the interviews.

I transcribed a few audio recorded interviews in full detail in the beginning. However, I realized that some part of the interviews were not so relevant. Moreover, it was taking too much time. Then, I made a selective transcription of the remaining interviews. I listened to the audio-recordings several times as required to capture the conversations rightly. While listening to the audio-recorded interviews, I noted the time point where relevant parts occurred so that I could come back and replay that particular section when required. It was a useful strategy for the researcher who was carrying out thematic coding. I made all transcriptions in the Nepali language – in which the interviews were conducted. I used the parts of the transcriptions in writing the findings translating into English.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is not a separate activity with other activities of research. "It is an inherent and ongoing part of qualitative research" (Spencer et al., 2003, p. 199). I kept the suggestions of Wolcott (2009) in mind to start preparatory work of data analysis from the very beginning, even before starting the fieldwork. I found this useful and regularly work on data concomitantly with the fieldwork. Before the fieldwork, my attention was on the review of a wide range of literature and the planning of my field activities. But I realized later that Wolcott's suggestion was to aware and prepare the researchers about the data analysis from the very beginning as it is a very complex job for the qualitative researcher.

Data analysis procedures comprise a wide range of activities in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003; Tracy, 2013; Willis, 2007). Since my research is guided by interpretivism, data analysis is informed by this tradition. Interpretivism allows flexibility in generating data as well as in its analysis (Willis, 2007). This suggests that interpretive researcher are to be innovative while collecting and analyzing data. However, there are well-established methods and practices of data analysis procedures that help researchers providing a framework that can be used with some required level of modifications as per the specific research context.

Explaining the analysis of data in his book on the case study, Thomas (2011) suggests interpretive researcher use the constant comparative method. I followed the constant comparison methods but not exactly in the linear steps but flexibly as per the requirement of the research process. For example, I collected data in different phases with some interval between these phases. Meanwhile, I analyzed the collected data and even carried out writing partially. After a while, I collected another lot of data.

Thus, I used an iterative process of data collection and analysis and consulted literature likewise. However, the focus of the research was constantly guided by the overall purpose of the research and linkages among the data as a whole were constructed to get a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

In addition, some other data analysis strategies also informed my data analysis work. Particularly, I also found Butler-Kisber's method of constant comparison inquiry (Butler-Kisber, 2010) useful for data analysis. She suggests a phase-wise process of analysis of "field texts" dividing into "coarse-grained phase and fine-grained phase" (p. 30). This, as I found, allowed for flexibility in categorizing, organizing and analyzing the data travelling through a "back-and-forth way" as per the requirement of the research and the experience of the researcher. This iterative process finally helped me to draw themes from the data and thematically write the report. I used this process to find themes and to refine the themes further to use for report writing. In the beginning, I read the transcriptions and marked the segments of the text pertinent to my research questions. Then I reviewed these highlighted segments of the texts and organized them into possible themes to be used in the reporting. I employed this method throughout report writing.

Further, I found the conceptualization process very useful as suggested by Bendassolli (2013) while writing my findings as it helped me to situate the findings, to compare the findings with the theories and to connect different themes of the findings. Moreover, the conceptualization process helped me to interpret the data and to make the report writing analytical.

Quality Standards

To maintain the quality standards of my study, I followed Tracy's (2013) eight-points for the quality in qualitative research which include a worthy topic, rich

rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence.

Similarly, I found the views of Eisner (1997) useful for the considerations of quality in qualitative research as Willis (2007) has discussed "Eisner's three criteria of evaluating qualitative research as coherence, consensus, and instrumental utility" (p. 165). These three considerations share largely with Tracy's eight-points for the quality of qualitative research mentioned above. I used the concept of consensus as I shared the major findings of my research with selected research participants and professionals which in turn helped me to maintain the validity of my research. The instrumental utility has been considered as the most important quality standard of a qualitative study when a study helps to understand the past practice and guides the future situation (Willis, 2007). From the view of the instrumental utility, my study has gained this quality as it helps us to understand the past practice of decentralized planning and provides insights for the future in the changed context of the federal decentralization in Nepal.

I made myself aware of the above aspects while carrying out fieldwork, data analysis and reporting. Following the criteria of Tracy (2013), I tried to make my topic worthy as it was relevant to the context. I spent considerable time in the field that helped me to build trust among the research participants. Likewise, the collection of data from various sources and interviews with a wide range of participants helped me to assess the trustworthiness of the data which enriched the credibility of the research. Similarly, a description of the entire research process in a transparent way has enhanced credibility. I used the instrumental case for this study which I found useful to draw naturalistic generalization. In addition to these, I synthesized the findings of the research to make them illustrative considering the changing context of

the research problem. Further, I have maintained coherence in the purpose, objective

and methods of the research. These all in combination worked well for gaining rigour

of the study as a whole. Thus, I have employed all possible measures for the

trustworthiness of qualitative research.

Ethical Standards

Ethics is fundamental in research as it is so in most of the professions. It is

essential to make research trustworthy from an ethical point of view. To maintain key

ethical values in my research, I followed the ethical standards as recommended by

McNabb (2008) and Tracy (2013). I clearly informed the research participants the

purpose of the study and the process of collecting data. Consent of the participants

was taken in advance. Participants were treated appropriately. Attention was paid

fully to ensure no harm to the participants. For this, I assured the confidentiality of

the participants and invited them for their voluntary contributions. To maintain

confidentiality, personal identity was not used. Narrations of the participants were

presented in the report but without their personal identity. Preserving confidentiality

is challenging in the case study research as there is a high possibility in recognizing

an organization and the people associated with it (White et al., 2003). Thus, ethics in

my research was not limited during my fieldwork but has been preserved at the stage

of reporting and even after it when presenting it as well as when it has to be

disseminated to wider audiences.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONTEXT: DECENTRALIZATION AND DECENTRALIZED PLANNING

IN NEPAL

In this chapter, I intend to present the context of the research topic providing a historical background of decentralization and decentralized planning in Nepal. This chapter aims to provide the context that informs the discussions of the findings of this thesis. Since the understanding of decentralized planning in Nepal cannot be made in isolation, review of decentralization that was in existence since long ago in the country becomes essential. Therefore, in this chapter, I discuss the evolution of decentralization and decentralized planning in different periods of Nepal's political history (please see Table 1 for its chronological development). At first, I present the historical development of decentralization in Nepal organizing it in different periods. Then after, in the second part, I discuss the development of decentralized planning in Nepal with more focus on the LSGA period (1999-2016). By analyzing the evolution of decentralization, I argue that there were various motives for decentralization reform but it remained mainly as a centrally controlled project and in its consequence, the decentralization reforms were not truly implemented.

Decentralization in Nepal: A Historical Overview

Decentralization in Nepal has been in practice from the ancient period and evolved in different forms influenced by the changes in political and socio-economic conditions in different periods. More importantly, with the changes in political regimes, decentralization has also been affected significantly. To provide an overview of the development of decentralization, I have presented it in four

significant periods in parallel to the political history of Nepal. At first, I trace the evolution of decentralization that occurred before 1951 which marks the traditional practice of decentralization during ancient Nepal. This is followed by the decentralization that evolved after 1951 up to 1990. This period aligns with the advent and development of the modern notion of decentralization. Then thirdly, I present the efforts of decentralization that took place from 1990 to 2015. Fourthly, I discuss the present context of decentralization in post-2015 as in this time Nepal promulgated a new constitution converting the country from the unitary political system into the federal system.

Before 1951: Traditional Practices of Decentralization

Decentralization was in practice since long ago all over the world though it was not called by this term as today. There was a practice of distributing powers between central and local levels in ancient states (Local Development International, 2013). In Nepal, though the modern concept of decentralization was introduced after the country went through the political change in 1951, overthrowing the century-long Rana rule, decentralization was believed to be in practice in ancient Nepal before it was unified in 1769. Bajracharya (1973) and Shakya (1980), as cited in (Poudyal,1986), mention that in the Kirat[4] period, the administrative system was divided into 'Thums' while in the Lichhavi[5] period, the system was organized in three levels– centre, provincial called 'Samanta' and local level, called 'Panchali' (p. 112). Further, they view that the local level government's bodies had enjoyed autonomy in these periods as there were defined functions for the central and local levels.

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[4]Kirat is "a generic term used to refer to the Rai and Limbu ethnic groups. In ancient times, they ruled the Kathmandu valley for about 1500 years , until the rise of the Licchavi rule" (Shretha & Bhattarai, 2004, p. 189)
[5]Lichhavi rule (400-879 A.D) considered as the Golden Age of Nepal (Shrestha & Bhattarai, 2004)

Though not effective as it was in the Lichhavi period, the decentralized administrative system was also there in the Malla[6] period which followed the Lichhavi period and ended with the unification of Nepal in 1769 (Poudyal, 1986). The term 'Panchayat' which denotes local level administration was popular in this period that referred a team of reputed five members nominated in consensus by the local public (Hachhethu, 2008). Though the various types of administrative units were established as extended wings of the central level to fulfil certain functions of the state like tax collection, it was the activity of a certain level of decentralization as the power and functions of the central level were distributed to some extent.

Nepal's unification process that began in 1769 went for a long time up to 1816 (Whelpton, 2005). It is viewed that with the unification of Nepal, the governing system was centralized (Amatya, 1996). However, the process was gradual as it was not possible to control all the unified states from the centre as the local administrative autonomy was provided to the annexed states (Vaidya & Bajracharya, 1996a). The Rana rule which lasted for more than 100 years is known as an autocratic family rule which established a highly centralized political and administrative system (Amatya, 1996; Vaidya & Bajracharya, 1996a) with no priority to the local level government (Vaidya & Bajracharya, 1996b).

Kathmandu Municipality was established in 1919 to look after local issues (Gurung, 2003) and in 1926, the Rana rule started a new form of local governments in some places that were called Village Panchayats (Hachhethu, 2008). There were administrative divisions with accountability directly to the Rana Prime Minster (Amatya, 1996). This was only the extension of central power to control the local level but not an effort of decentralization. The Rana rule was abolished in 1951 and a

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[6]Mallas ruled Nepal, particularly Kathmandu valley, from 1200-1769 (Shretha & Bhattarai, 2004)

multiparty democratic political system was established. Though it is difficult to judge, what determined the autonomy of local units in the ancient time, it is argued that the local institutions in the ancient time were developed through community tradition and had also got political authority from the central agency of the state (Hachhetuhu, 2008). There is a high possibility that the state carried out some of its functions through its decentralized units or locally developed and appointed agents. It is also true that either because of inaccessibility or because of 'weak' centre, local units/agents might have enjoyed more autonomy. Indeed, the reciprocal needs of the centre and local had helped to maintain the centre-local relationship in the ancient time of Nepal.

After 1951 to 1990: Advent of Modern Decentralization

The initiation of decentralization after the end of the Rana rule in the 1950s was different from the locally evolved model of self-governance practised in ancient Nepal as the former was a modern concept of development and democracy largely influenced by the contemporary external world. With the establishment of multi-party democracy (1951-1960), Nepal was not only opened for the outside world but also entered into the age of modern development. Development became the main agenda of the country and foreign aid was welcomed for the development. The political environment was being conducive for decentralized administrative system. The Interim Government Act of Nepal, 1951 recognized the Village Panchayats as the institutions of local government (Hachhethu, 2008). In this multi-party democracy period, some local development programmes such as Village development programme were launched with the assistance of the USA and India (Gurung, 2003). But the multi-party democracy remained only for a short period as it was ended by the

King in 1960. However, this period gave a message that there was a need for decentralization reform to devolve power (Amatya, 1996).

Dismissing the newly introduced multi-party democracy, the King seized all state power and introduced a different political system, a party-less system, called Panchayat in 1960 which ruled for the next 30 years. This move of the King was a clear indication of the centralization of all of the state apparatus. However, the King introduced shortly a new constitution in 1962 with the promise of decentralization as the main state policy for people participating in the development process (Dhungel et al., 2011). As an effort of decentralization, the country was divided into 14 zones, 75 districts and 3600 Village Panchayats in 1962 and the Local Administration Act, 1965 had considered the Village Panchayats and District Panchayats as important institutions in view of local governance (Gurung, 2003).

During the Panchayat period, decentralization was a popular agenda in reforming the government system. It was evidenced by the formation of various commissions, committees and task forces (Agrawal, 1999; Amatya, 1996). Of the various commissions' reports, the report submitted in 1964 by Biswa Bandhu Thapa was considered radical which had suggested that the government provide a wide range of authorities to the local level (Bienen et al., 1990). However, this report was not materialized. Instead, the Decentralization Act, 1982 and Decentralization Rules, 1984 came into operation. However, the implementation of this act also remained weak (Gurung, 2003).

The efforts for decentralization during the Panchayat system appeared contradictory as the power was fully centralized with the King and top-level bureaucracy while some efforts were also made to engage local Panchayats in the governance process. Despite various efforts for decentralization, power was highly

concentrated at the central level (Gellner, 2015). Further, the lack of political

openness in the Panchayat system and poor performance of development (Agrawal,

1999) shadowed all efforts taken for decentralization. Thus, there was a conflicting

situation between the Panchayat system's centralized ideology and devolution of

power that caused the poor working of decentralization reforms (Hachhethu, 2008).

As a consequence, the phrase 'Mathiko Adesh' was in the everyday currency which

meant 'instruction from the above' and 'the above' was to indicate the royal palace

and the King. Due to the 'Mathiko Adesh' culture, local decision making was not

effective as all sections of the society used to find connections with the central power.

The decentralization reformed during 1951-1990, therefore, can be considered as

deconcentration and delegation but not devolution.

In the wave of democracy worldwide, the struggle of political parties for

multi-party democracy became more intense and ultimately the Panchayat system was

removed and multi-party democracy was introduced again in Nepal in 1990. In the

section that follows I discuss how decentralization in Nepal moved ahead since 1990

in the multi-party democratic system.

1990-2015: Reform Efforts Within the Existing Structures

In the beginning, three separate acts were introduced in 1992 to replace the

existing laws in governing village, town and district development committees. Based

on these acts, local elections were held in 1993. Though the constitution of Nepal

promulgated in 1990 had clearly directed for the participation of people in the

governance process through decentralization, it has been criticized that the acts

introduced in 1992 did not capture the changed spirit of democracy and people

participation at the local level (Agrawal, 1999). In particular, the problem of local

bodies and line agencies coordination was further weakened than it was established by the 1984 Act (UNDP, 2001).

As a result, in the changed political environment with the elected local bodies across the country aroused pressure for the devolutionary form of decentralization. The Ninth Plan (1998-2002) thus emphasized largely decentralized development and governance. Further, there were donor partners that were advocating for a participatory approach for local development to address the issue of inefficiency with the central level government (Hesselbarth, 2007). These all led to the most significant change in decentralization as the Local Self Governance Act was promulgated in 1999. It was accompanied by the LSGA regulations, 2000. The most important element of the LSGA, 1999 was envisioning of local self-governance.

The LSGA, 1999 impressed most of the stakeholders as it was believed that it created enabling environment at the local level for development and governance (Hesselbarth, 2007; Pokharel et al., 2004). Further, the LSGA had the policy of devolution of certain sectors like health and education (The Asia Foundation, 2012). While appreciating the LSGA 1999 and expecting much from it, there were also doubts in its implementation in view of the implementation of the past efforts of decentralization mainly due to the rigid central authorities (Gurung, 2003). Indeed, the reluctant tendency of bureaucracy in implementing decentralization (Manor, 1999) was overlooked. As a consequence, the devolution of three sectors, Education, Health, and Agriculture, to the local body, namely the District Development Committee, did not take place as expected. It was because the LSGA did not change the existing administrative structure (Pokharel et al., 2004) to fit with the principle of self-governance.

The problem further exacerbated when there was an absence of elected representatives in the local body since 2002 for about 15 years. In the absence of the local bodies' election, the government employee took the responsibility of local bodies for a long time. In my view, during this period, central authorities got a favourable environment for further controlling local bodies. This indicates the mentality of the rulers at the centre not willing to devolve power to the local level. As a result, the process of devolution unlike the expectation of the LSGA, 1999 became more vulnerable.

Thus, there were continuous efforts of decentralization reforms in Nepal for decades (Gurung, 2003) and it faced various constraints in its implementation. It is argued that there is a lack of conducive institutional structure for local government and devolution policy of key sectors is not fully implemented (World Bank, 2014). This suggests that decentralization did not take the form of devolution but somewhere in the continuum of autonomy between delegation and devolution. Indeed, strong reluctance worked parallel to counter the efforts of decentralization as the bureaucracy and elite politicians wanted to grab the power and resources (Bardhan, 2002) even in the decentralized mechanism. Hence, decentralization did not occur in true sense in Nepal and its progress faced ups and downs during different periods though there have been some revisions each time with the political changes (Pokhrel et al., 2004). This indicates that local governance was not well institutionalized.

In addition to the above, it is imperative here to note the political events that came on the way of the decentralization reform disturbing its gradual evolution. One of them was the Maoist insurgency initiated in 1996, which severely affected the operation of the local bodies throughout the country. Another event was the takeover of the King in 2005 which brought the democratic decentralization process into a halt

sidelining the political parties. But within a short period, the joint movement of the Maoist and parliamentary parties succeeded to end the rule of the King in 2006. As a result, the constitution of Nepal 1990 was replaced by the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007. The interim constitution aimed to hold the election of the constituent assembly to make a new constitution to institutionalize a federal political system in Nepal. Then, a new course of decentralization came into discussion in Nepal, particularly, the federal system of governance came into the political discourse in the process of new constitution-making.

Thus, Nepal has taken different political courses since 2007 which is considered a significant shift in the political history of Nepal– making a constitution through the constituent assembly became the main agenda. Then, the election of the constituent assembly was held in April 2008. The first meeting of the constituent assembly held in May 2008 formally abolished the monarchy from Nepal. It was a step that removed the historically institutionalized top power centre of Nepal. This was the only outcome of the first constituent assembly as it could not formulate a new constitution though its initial two years period was extended three times and finally it was dissolved in May 2012. This event in Nepali political history reflects the complex nature of power-sharing among the different political forces.

The election for the second constitution assembly was held in November 2013. Again the constituent assembly took another two years to formulate the new constitution. Thus, Nepal remained under transition since 2007 for a long time which went up to 2015. Since the interim constitution of Nepal 2007 did not introduce any new structure of local governance and no elections were held, the local bodies operated as per the LSGA, 1999 in this transition phase.

Post-2015: Beginning of a New Course

Amid such history of decentralization, the second constitution assembly in September 2015 finally promulgated the new constitution of Nepal with the federal governance system. From the perspective of decentralization, the constitution stands against the centrally controlled unitary system– with a shift to federal decentralized system. The constitution has envisaged autonomy of the local level providing executive, legislature and judicial rights. A wide range of powers has been devolved constitutionally to the local level through Schedule Eight of the constitution of Nepal (Government of Nepal, 2016).

The new constitution has structured the three tiers federal governance system in Nepal – federal, state and local level. The local level has been categorized mainly in two categories – municipality and rural municipality. There are in total 753 municipalities and rural municipalities across the seven states in Nepal. There were local bodies in the past but there are now local governments. The existing district-level body, the District Development Committee, will be no more but there will be a District Coordination Committee with only a role to coordinate with the Federal and the State and the local level municipalities and rural municipalities within the district (Government of Nepal, 2016).

There are widespread arguments in public that there would not be any such changes in the governance system if the decentralization reforms in the past were truly implemented. The fact was that the practice of decentralization for a score of years revealed deep-rooted centralist mentality that made it impossible to provide powers to the local level without some major structural change with constitutional provisions for the devolution of power. Even though the new constitution has made

the local levels constitutionally powerful, the effectiveness is yet to be seen in terms of autonomous power.

The local election, which was held in 2017, was successfully completed. Despite the constitutional mandates, the newly elected local governments were found in chaos in governing their organizations. Mainly, the lack of essential legal instruments to execute the constitutional rights provided to the province and local level has created confusion among the three levels of government. It would be rather a hasty comment to assess their initial performance, but the central – provincial–local relations appear complex. All three levels of governments have been established after the election as per the new constitution. Naturally, the initial phase faces some difficulties in managing their operations.

There are growing problems particularly in the areas of lawmaking, owning the responsibility of development works, and management of human resources (Bhattarai, 2019). With the lingering of such problems instead of resolving them gradually, there is increasing tension among these three levels of governments (Gautam, 2019; Sejuwal, 2019). It is argued that there is a lack of a well-thought implementation plan to execute the federal system (Bhattarai, 2019; Sharma, 2019). In view of the Chief Ministers of the newly established provinces, there is a problem of centralist attitude resided with the central level government that is obstructing the true implementation of the federal system of governance (Staff, 2019). But the central level government is facing a challenge in managing the staff mainly the staff adjustment process. Similarly, the central level has a vital leadership role in institutionalizing the federal governance. However, the delay in this process has been fueling frustrations with the province and local levels as they are facing public pressure for not delivering services. For all this, as a leading role, central level has

been responsible. After that, the question of the capacity of the newly established province and local level governments counts for the prevailing situation.

In such a context, analysis of the past experiences of the local bodies, mainly, practising the self-governance, would be an important lesson for the newly elected local levels. Meanwhile, at the end of the first part and before entering into the second part of this chapter, decentralization of development planning, I present the chronology of decentralization and decentralized planning in Nepal after 1951 to provide an overview of the evolution of decentralization and decentralized planning.

Table 1

Chronology of Decentralization and Decentralized Planning in Nepal (after 1951)

Year	Events	Impacts
1956	Tribhuvan Village Development Program introduced by US and Indian Aid	Village Development Centers established and Block Development Officer appointed to co-ordinate rural development.
1956	Education development plan recommended by Nepal National Education Planning Commission	Formulated a long term education development plan; suggested roles and responsibilities of the central government and communities for the school education development; and recommendations of regional and district authorities which were never realized.
1962	Promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal	Recognition of decentralization as the state's policy

Year	Events	Impacts
1982/ 1984	Decentralization Act/ Decentralization Byelaws	Devolution of decision making power to local level Panchayats for their development.
2002	Expiry of elected local bodies	Local bodies governed by bureaucrat led All Party Mechanism (APM)
2017	Elections of federal, state and local levels	Implementation of the new constitution in the federal governance system

Source: Tiwari (1991, as cited in UNDP, 2009) & additional updates by the researcher

Since planning by the newly elected local governments as per the new

constitution promulgated in 2015 is yet to be practised in full-fledge, the policy and

practice of planning that was practised so far at the district local level has been

discussed in the following section. I believe the policies and practices of

decentralized planning in the past would be valuable learning for the local

governments that are making the best efforts to perform their roles as per the new

constitution.

Decentralization of Development Planning in Nepal

Development and development planning in Nepal began almost together in the

1950s with the introduction of the democratic political system. With this Nepal

entered into the modern development age and planned development system. It is

noted that the present notion of decentralization also began almost in this time. Thus,

in the context of Nepal, development, development plan, decentralization and

decentralized planning are interconnected which are simultaneously in practice since

the country entered into the development process in the 1950s. It is imperative to

have an overview of development planning in Nepal before the discussion of its decentralization.

Development Planning in Nepal: An Overview

Nepal geared-up its development efforts after 1950. According to Stiller and Yadav (1978), Nepal launched its first five-year plan in 1956 with the assistance of foreign experts from different agencies. Indeed, Nepal's want for development has been accompanied by international support from the very beginning. Hence, Nepal's planned development has also been influenced largely by foreign development agencies. With the beginning of donor agencies' support in Nepal, the concept of development planning also became popular (Stiller &Yadav, 1978). So far, over six decades, Nepal has already implemented 13 development plans and now implementing the 14th plan for the period of 2017-2019.

Fundamentally, all of the plans are central level plans guided by a top-down approach. In the Fourth Plan, the concept of regional development was introduced. Similarly, with the introduction of decentralization in the 1980s, bottom-up planning approach was practised at the local level, albeit to a limited extent. This clearly indicates that Nepal has a centralized nature of planning and planning institutions from the beginning. The practice was to set the development targets at the centre and separate them to fix the lower levels' targets (Bienen et al., 1990). This reveals that Nepal had followed the modernist approach of development which was in practice globally without considering its geographical and cultural context. Only with the introduction of decentralization, initiatives were made in decentralizing the development planning to some extent. In the following section, I trace how the decentralized planning evolved in the course of development and administrative reforms in Nepal.

Evolution of Decentralized Planning

The centralized planning system experienced serious ineffectiveness in the implementation of the plans. The huge gap in the implementation of the plans (Stiller & Yadav, 1978) indicated the constraint of the highly centralized planning approach. Nepal suffered from very poor development performance (Bienen et al., 1990) from the beginning. In response to such a situation, the concept of local self-governance emerged as an alternative to the centralized tendency of development and planning (Dahal et al., 2001). Hence, the question was not only of the effective implementation of the national development plans but also matching the needs of people targeted by the plans as there was no mechanism for the participation of local people in the planning process. The plans were formulated by the central level authorities guided by the experts at the top levels that did not consider "local needs, participation, or process" (Agrawal, 1999, p. 45). Thus, there was a need for development effectiveness on one hand and on the other hand, there was a pressure to democratize the political system by promoting participation in the development process. These two key factors including others created by Nepal's geographical and social context (Bienen et al., 1990) worked simultaneously to decentralize the development planning process in Nepal.

Decentralization in Nepal has been focused, since its inception, on practising decentralized planning (Aziz & Arnold, 1996; Gurung, 2003). Decentralized planning in Nepal initiated with the efforts taken for administrative reform. The Local Administration Act, 1965 had provided the responsibility to the District Panchayats to manage development works in the districts and there had been attempts to introduce various forms of the district-level plan in the process of exercising decentralization in the 1970s (Gurung, 2003). The district bodies were asked to

prepare their own plan. However, line ministries' district-level agencies were working in guidance of their central authorities and practising their own plan of the projects without coordinating with the district bodies. As a consequence, the integration of development activities into the plan was not in practice as directed by the decentralization regulations (Bienen et al., 1990).

In view of planning by local bodies, the Decentralization Act, 1982 and Decentralization Rules, 1984, were significant as these legal documents mandated to prepare their own annual and periodic plans (Gurung, 2003). Though the legal efforts were important, the political and social environments were not conducive for their implementation as there was a deep-rooted centralized culture of decision-making that was in the hands of a small group of power elites (Martinussen, 1995). In such a context, one could not hope for meaningful decentralization of the planning system as the planning is not only the technical and legal matter as rationalists perceive it (Friedman, 1998).

However, again in the 1990s, efforts were initiated to strengthen the districts to plan and manage their needs of local development at their own. At the same time, donors were also actively involved in supporting decentralization and strengthening decentralized planning (Association of District Development Committees [ADDCN], 2001). As a consequence, the LSGA, 1999 provided the institutional power to the DDC to prepare and implement periodic and annual development plans at its own discretion (His majesty's Government [HMG], 2000a) considering the DDC as an "autonomous and corporate body" (HMG, 2000a, p. 66). It has provision for the formulation of an integrated district development plan incorporating the sector-wise programmes and projects into the plan. The LSGA, 1999 has made provisions of two committees, known as Sectoral Plan Formulation Committee (SPFC) and Integrated

Plan Formulation Committee (IPFC), for the formulation of the district development plan.

The main essence of the LSGA, 1999 was its emphasis on the participatory process for the district development planning as it had instructed clearly to the DDC for this. The LSGA had urged for the participation of civil society with the notion of self-governance promoting "democratic process, transparent practice, public accountability, and people's participation" (HMG, 2000a, p. 3). In line with this provision, the Local self-Governance Regulation (LSGR), 1999 had provisions of nominating a representative from the non-government organizations as a member in the IPFC and SPFC (HMG, 2000b). Thus, it was clear that the LSGA planning policy was not limited only to the participation of government institutions but also a wide range of stakeholders following the notion of self-governance at the local level. The planning process as provisioned in the LSGA, 1999 was designed with the principle of a bottom-up approach that "involves need identification, prioritization, and resource estimation and feasibility studies" (ADDCN, 2001, p. 3).

With the above context of decentralized planning in Nepal, now, I present the institutional arrangements and processes of district development planning in the section that follows.

Configuration of District Development Planning

Since the development planning of the newly constituted local levels as per the new constitution of Nepal, 2015 is yet to be developed and practised in its full-fledged form, the practice of the DDP illustrates the decentralized planning in Nepal. The LSGA and its district development planning policy remained in practice from 1999 up to 2017 just before the election of the local levels as per the new constitution.

Specifically, the LSGA and LSGR were the main policy documents that provided institutional guidance to the planning process of the District Development Plan (DDP). In addition to these, the National Planning Commission (NPC) and the Ministry of Local Development (MLD) used to send directives to the local bodies each year in connection with the district development planning. Though the LSGA provided planning rights to the local bodies, the central government's concern was the capacities of the local bodies to carry out the planning as stipulated in the LSGA. In this context, some international development agencies were involved in supporting the government in building capacity of the local bodies in the participatory planning process (Agrawal, 1999; Gurung, 2003). This indicates that there was a kind of realization for the need for professional support to the local bodies in the participatory planning process; however, it was not institutionalized adequately.

Based on the provisions of the LSGA and LSGR, a '14 steps' planning process was derived which configures the whole process of DDP that starts from the settlement level and goes up to the central level as depicted in Figure 2. In this framework, at first, the NPC and sectoral ministries send directives and budget ceilings to the District Development Committee (DDC). Then, it becomes the responsibility of the DDC to communicate the directives received from the central level authorities to the local bodies and units in the district. Up to the fifth step, the communication process goes downward to the settlement level and right from this settlement level the planning process moves upward.

The settlement is the lowest level which is lower than the ward as a ward can have one or more settlements within it depending upon the distribution pattern of the houses in the ward. The planning process identifies the needs of each settlement. It is in this settlement level, the ordinary citizens are expected to participate in the process

to express their needs. Then, the process moves upward in the sequence of the ward,

VDC, Ilaka[7] to the district as shown in Figure 2. Here, it is noted that in this process,

Figure 2

14 Steps of District Development Planning

Flow of directions from top to bottom		
Step 1: Directives from the NPC and ministries to DDC on budget and plan	**Step 14:** Implementation of DDP- forward DDP toMLD,NPC and ministries	Implementation of planning process from bottom to up
Step 2: Review of directives provided by the NPC and ministries and the NPC	**Step 13:** District Council- approval of the DDP	
	Step 12: DDC meeting -submission of the draft plan to the District Council	
Step 3: Pre-planning workshop organized by DDC for all stakeholders	**Step 11:** Integrated Plan Formulation Committee meeting – submission of the draft DDP to the DDC	
	Step10: Sectoral Planning Committee meeting - Prioritized program identified by *Ilakas*	
Step 4: VDC meetingfor the preparation of planning workshops	**Step 9:** Ilaka level planning workshop- prioritize sectoral program identified by VDC and Municipalities	
	Step 8: Village Council meeting -approve VDC plan and forward program/projects for external resources to DDC through Ilaka	
Step 5: Settlement level planning workshops in each ward of the VDC	**Step 7:** VDC meeting - prepare VDC level plan	
	Step 6: Ward committee meeting- prioritization of programs/projects	

Source: Dhungel et al. (2011)

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[7]The Ilaka is a cluster of 3-5 VDCs and there can be 9 -17 Ilakas in a district depending upon the number of VDCs in a particular district. There is no any administration set up for the Ilaka. It is only for election purpose of DDC members as they are elected based on Ilaka.

plans will be prepared only at two administrative units – VDC plan at the VDC and DDP at the DDC.

Through steps 10-13, the planning process comes under the direct scrutiny of the DDC. The DDC prepares a draft of the DDP that categorizes the projects that can be financed through its resources and the projects to be recommended to the central level, namely the National Planning Commission for financing those projects that cannot be covered by district resources. Finally, the district council is the apex authority to approve the district plan. The DDC submits the approved district plan to the NPC and the MLD for further implementation. The central government according to the Section 205 of the LSGA sanctions "the budget along with necessary guidelines to implement the district development plan, after the annual program and budget have been approved" (HMG, 2000, p. 79).

In the process of district development planning as explained above, many actors from the local to the central level are involved. Figure 3 portrays the involvement of actors and their interrelationship at different levels of the planning stages. The dotted arrow in the figure indicates a modest coordinating relationship among the actors while the solid arrow indicates a strong coordinating relationship of the respective actors.

The LSGR instructs that in the ward level panning workshop, there should be the participation of "concerned organizations, consumers or groups, non-government organizations and residents of the ward" (HMG, 2000b, p. 29). From the settlement level to the VDC level, the respective local body interacts with the local people and community organizations. However, there was no practice of the participation of NGOs in the ward, VDC and Ilaka level workshops as they participate only in the DDC level workshop. The sector line agencies participate only from Ilaka level

workshop. From the DDC level workshop, the line agencies participate in the

planning workshop and the NGOs also participate but their relationship is modest

with no obligation. According to the Section 204 of the LSGA, it is the role of the

DDC, at the district level, to coordinate with the district level governmental

Figure 3

Actors of District Development Planning and Their Interrelationships

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                              ┌─────────┐
        ┌─────────────────────│   MLD   │─────────────────────┐
        ▼                     └─────────┘                     ▼
┌──────────────────────┐  ◄──────►  ◄─·─·─►  ┌──────────────────────┐
│ National Planning    │                     │ Sectoral Ministries  │
│ Commission           │                     │ List of Projects     │
│ National Plan/ Annual│                     │                      │
│ Plan                 │                     └──────────────────────┘
└──────────────────────┘
          │                     │                          │
          ▼                     ▼                          ▼
     ┌────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐      ┌──────────┐
     │        │        │ DDC Level Planning   │      │ District │
     │  NGOs  │◄─·─·─► │ District Development  │◄─·─·─►│ line     │
     │        │        │ Plan                 │      │ agencies │
     └────────┘        └──────────────────────┘      │ offices  │
                                  │                   └──────────┘
                                  ▼
                  ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
                  │ Ilaka Level Planning (A cluster  │
                  │ of 3-5 VDCs; 9-17 Ilakas in a    │
                  │ district)                        │
                  └──────────────────────────────────┘
                                  │
                                  ▼
                  ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
                  │ VDC Level Planning (9 to 120 VDCs│
                  │ in a district)                   │
                  └──────────────────────────────────┘
                                  │
      ┌────────┐                  ▼
      │ Ward   │        ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
      │ Citizen│◄─·─·─► │ Wards Level                      │
      │ Forum  │        └──────────────────────────────────┘
      └────────┘                  │
                                  ▼
                  ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
                  │ Settlements Level/Communities/   │
                  │ Local People                     │
                  │ (There can be one or more        │
                  │ settlements in a ward)           │
                  └──────────────────────────────────┘
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Source: HMG (2000a)

organizations in formulating the integrated district development plan and play a role "to remove duplication in investment to be made in any service sector" (HMG, 2000a, p. 79).

The DDC is the authorized local body that interacts with the central agencies mainly with the NPC and the MLD in relation to district development planning. Similarly, there are sector ministries that coordinate with the NPC for preparing national development plan at the central level. District development plans from all 77 districts provide the basis for the central authorities to allocate resources for the district level projects incorporating them into the national development plan. Thus, the concept was that the central level undertakes the projects identified and prioritized by the local body at the district level and thus the local development planning is an integral part of the national development planning.

However, in practice, the above policy did not get implemented as the sectors like education, health, agriculture were not devolved which was reflected in the planning process of the DDC as the district offices of these sectors prepared their plans at their own and submitted to the respective departments in the centre (Dhungel et al., 2011). Hence, it cannot be said that the devolution was in full effect since district offices were operating in the district with loyalty to their concerned ministries and departments at the central level rather than towards the local government. Instead of devolving the sectors' district offices, some departments converted their district offices into division offices to escape from the devolution policy as the division offices were supposed to look after more than one district.

The reluctance in the devolution of certain sectors to the DDC reveals the centralist attitude deeply rooted in politics and administration of Nepal as any reform for decentralization did not progress as planned. It is argued that the highly

centralized governance culture is reluctant to transfer power (Gurung, 2004). This

realization might have pushed Nepal for federal governance with constitutional rights

to the local level; however, its implementation is yet to be seen since the

transformation of the constitutional rights needs support of the central level again.

Decentralized Planning and Centre Led Local Projects

Despite the high emphasis on decentralization and decentralized planning for

self-governance of local development, some practices go parallel at the local level.

Such practices have raised some issues in relation to the study of decentralization and

decentralized planning. Particularly, it is imperative to discuss the practice of the

Constituency Development Fund[8] (CDF) and some centrally led local projects in

Nepal.

Though the legislatures are elected mainly for law-making, their direct

involvement in the development projects is also in practice in Nepal over the decades.

They do so mainly through the mobilization of CDF. The CDF is on the debate in the

field of development and governance with arguments both for and against it. My

intention here is to analyze the use of CDF in Nepal from the perspective of

decentralization and decentralized planning perspectives.

The CDF in a district was more than the amount received by the DDC in that

district from the central level (Enabling State Program [ESP], 2001). This was mainly

noticed in the district where the number of the Member of Parliament (MP) was high

as one study reports "Jhapa–one of the income-surplus districts– was allocated Rs 2.8

million as its development expenditure per annum, while its six MPs were provided

with Rs 6 million constituency development fund, that is Rs 1 million per head per

annum" (Kumar, 2008, p. 34). This indicates that the MPs were getting a prominent

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[8] The Constituency Development Fund is defined as "public money to benefit specific political subdivisions through allocations and /or spending decisions influenced by their representatives in the national parliament" (Zyl, 2010, p. 1).

role than the local bodies in the local development. This reveals the prevalent attitude to hold development resources to gain further power in politics.

Though there had been a steady increment in the CDF fund, severe criticism on its misuse in public which was reflected in almost all of the national newspapers in a regular way (Biswakarma, 2017; Staff, 2018). However, the concern of this study is not the amount of the CDF and its misuse but its implication on the decentralization and decentralized planning and working of the local governments in preparing and implementing their development planning.

It was the reality that local bodies were running out of resources to fund the local needs demanded by the community through the district development planning process. The local bodies had been forwarding many projects to the central level which could not finance through the resources of the concerned district. Here, the concerning issue is that the government instead of supporting the local bodies to finance the projects selected through participatory planning process has been providing a huge amount of resources to the MPs to spend at their discretion ignoring the district planning process. However, less attention has been paid to its effect on the decentralized planning system of the local government. This can be considered as an impending cause in weakening the spirit of self-governance envisioned by the LSGA, 1999.

In addition to the implementation of CDF for local-level development, there are certain programmes and projects that central government agencies design, plan and implement at the local level. Interestingly, such programmes and projects more often are designed and supported by donors. The characteristics of such programmes and projects are that they employ the approach of collecting needs and demands from

the community level; they are local level micro-projects by nature and size but they are resourced and implemented by the central level.

For the implementation of such projects, the central agencies directly mobilize community organizations and NGOs. Despite strengthening the local level, why central agencies generate such programme and projects is a crucial question from the perspective of decentralization and local self-governance. On the one hand, the central level rhetorically advocates decentralization and keeps certain projects of local nature undermining the role of the local body. On the other hand, it is contrary to the principle of decentralization. Further, in the section that follows, I discuss this issue with examples of some centralized local projects in Nepal.

I mention here only three examples from several of the centrally implemented local programmes and projects in Nepal. My aim here is only to see the implication of them from the perspective of decentralization and decentralized planning. One of the centrally implemented local programmes in Nepal is the Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF). The PAF Board is headed by the Prime Minister who ironically also heads the Decentralization Implementation and Monitoring Committee (DIMC). It is viewed that the PAF activities would not weaken the local government (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2003). But it appears contradictory to assume that centrally designed and implemented programme will not affect local bodies and their autonomy.

Another centrally designed and implemented local level programme is the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Fund Development Board (Fund Board). This implements community level drinking water projects which overlap with the scope of local bodies. The third programme that I am presenting as an example of a centrally implemented local development programme is the Local Governance and Community

Development Program (LGCDP) designed and implemented by the Ministry of Local Development which is the liaison ministry in supporting decentralization and local bodies in Nepal. The LGCDP also overlaps with the premise of local bodies, mainly the activities like Local Community Infrastructure Development, Social Development, Local Economic Development and Livelihood Improvement Schemes (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development [MoFALD], 2013).

All of the above three programmes have many common features. All of them are centrally designed and implemented local development projects with institutional set-up at the central level. Similarly, they are donor-supported programmes. They all advocate participatory approach in planning and implementation of the programme at the local level. Similarly, they all mobilize NGOs and community organizations in their programme. The LGCDP being executed under the Ministry of Local Development involves the local bodies in the implementation of the programme but through the mobilization of NGOs and Community Organizations. Thus, it is obvious that it is donors' interest to increase the role of NGOs in local development instead of local bodies. Moreover, the central level agencies are interested in such projects as they get a chance to hold and mobilize resources with the centrally set-up project apparatus. With such matching of the interests of both the donors and the central agencies, projects, as mentioned above, are in implementation undermining the role of the local bodies.

Local Government and Local Level Planning in Federal Nepal

As mentioned above, Nepal has now new federal governance composed of three levels of governments– federal, provincial and local. For planning, there is a planning commission at the central level, as it was in the past, to look after the development policies and national development plan. As the new entities, there are

provincial levels planning commissions– one in each province. At the local level, there is no such separate entity for the planning purpose but the local government itself works for planning, possibly forming specific committees.

Just after the election of the local governments held in 2017, the then Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD) issued a guideline to the local governments for the formulation of local-level planning and budget. This was intended to guide the local level for facilitating the functioning of the local governments as the new acts were not yet promulgated. As per the new federal governance, the previous LSGA, 1999 had been redundant with the new election of the local level. This guideline issued on 23 June 2017, appears more instructive than suggestive to the local level. This has not only instructed for the formation of various committees essential for planning and budgeting but also given details on who will be the members in such committees and what will be the tasks, duties and responsibilities of these committees. This has also provided priorities of the projects and programmes that should be included in the local level plan and budget. This guideline, thus, has given the planning procedures that the local governments are expected to follow.

Instead of 14 steps in the previous act LSGA 1999, this guideline has limited the process into seven basic steps (Table 2). The apex institutions in this new system are rural municipalities/municipalities instead of the DDC in the past. The planning process starts from the settlement level and ends at the municipal level. One significant change is there is no more Ilaka in federal governance. Though there is a District Coordination Office, it appears as a redundant institution at present as there is no space for this in the present planning process.

Another significant aspect of this local planning process is that there is no connection of the local level with the province and federal government as the process

ends within the local level. In one sense, this reflects the autonomy of the local level in the planning process. However, in another sense, this lacks coordination between different levels of government in the planning process. Autonomy with a required level of coordination is essential for the integration of different levels of plans into the national development in some way. Though the constitution has provided autonomy to the three levels of government, it seems essential to have minimum coordination between the planning processes of these three levels.

Table 2

Plan Formulation Procedures of Local Level in Federal Nepal

Procedural steps	Activity
1	Receive the financial transfers framework and budget and program formulation guideline from the province and federal government
2	Source estimation and determination of total budget ceiling
3	Projects selection from settlement level
4	Ward level projects prioritization
5	Preparation of budget and program by the Budget and Program Formulation Committee
6	Approval of budget and program from the executive of Rural Municipality/ Municipality and submission to the council
7	Approval of budget and program from the council of Rural Municipality/ Municipality

Source: (MoFALD, 2017)

Meanwhile, after the local election, to govern the local level government in the federal governance system, Local Government Operation Act, 2017 (LGOA) has been

introduced in October 2017. This act has mentioned about the plan formulation and implementation in chapter six, particularly in article 24 (Government of Nepal, 2017, pp. 58-60). This article has instructed to have maximum participation of the local stakeholders like local intellectuals, subject matter experts, experienced professional, marginal communities, women, children and Dalit and minority groups and so on. Many of the points given for the plan formulation are similar to the features of the LSGA. Except for the above provision in the LGOA, there is no yet further regulation to guide the local level development plan formulation as it was in the past (e.g. Local Self Governance Act and Local Self Governance Regulation).

So, in this initial stage of federal governance, there is confusion about how the bottom-up planning will be practised and what will be the coordination mechanism among the three levels of government to establish a linkage among their development plans (Gautam, 2019). However, the National Planning Commission of Nepal (NPC, 2018) has published a "Local Level Plan Formulation Guideline, 2075" in 2018 as a sample guideline for local governments. The planning process in this guideline is similar to the process provided by MoFALD as discussed above. Since this is a sample guideline, it is yet to see how local governments accept and follow it. Hence, in view of local-level planning, how the stakeholders participate in the planning process is yet to be seen. Therefore, learning from the past practice of decentralized planning can be helpful despite the changes in the governance system.

Essence of the Chapter

For a long time, Nepal underwent a centralized system of politics and administration which established a centralized culture among the political rulers and bureaucrats. Arguably, this centralized culture impeded all the efforts of decentralization and decentralized planning that were made after the 1950s in

different political regimes. Though there were problems in implementing it, decentralization has been an integral part of the governance system for significant time in the political history of Nepal. Similarly, decentralized planning has been intertwined with the decentralization reform. The main essence of district development planning is that it is guided by the theories of participatory development accompanied by the wave of decentralization in the 1980s and 1990s for the wider participation of people in the decision-making process (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007).

Finally, with the implementation of the new constitution, there has been a significant change in the governing system of Nepal. But, it is yet to be seen how the local governance and planning system evolve in practice as per the new constitution of Nepal. It is quite a new course for Nepal but many things can be learned from the past experience.

With such background on decentralization and decentralized planning, now, I move on to chapter V where I discuss the district level stakeholders' perceptions and experiences of decentralized planning.

CHAPTER V

DECENTRALIZED PLANNING: PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF

DISTRICT LEVEL STAKEHOLDERS

In this chapter, I focus on how the stakeholders perceive the decentralized
planning and what their experiences from the practice of development planning at the
local level are. I have used the terms 'decentralized planning', 'development planning
at the local level', and 'local development plan' interchangeably which all refer to the
district development planning when discussions are specific to the Nepali context.
The perspectives and experiences discussed in this chapter are of district-level
stakeholders that were from political parties, NGOs, local body association,
government staff and DDC staff who had been involved in the district development
plan formulation process.

While conducting interviews with the stakeholders, I asked open questions to
the research participants which focused on their perceptions and understanding of
decentralized planning and the experiences they gained from the practice of district
development planning. It is noteworthy that though my query was particularly on
decentralized planning, most of the participants responded it relating to the main
thrust of decentralization itself. Hence, the two terms 'decentralization' and
'decentralized planning' were found well intertwined in their understanding. As a
result, the perceptions and experiences of the participants are on both the
decentralization and decentralized planning with more focus on the practice of the
latter. It appeared from the responses of the stakeholders that without mentioning the
main aspect of decentralization, decentralized planning could not be explained.

Drawing on the perspectives of the district stakeholders, I sense four key aspects of decentralized planning. One of the key aspects is that the decentralized planning process is a means for the participation of local people to articulate their needs to the local governments which are closest institutions of the local people to respond to their needs. The second aspect is the understanding of the stakeholders who consider only devolution as decentralization since it provides autonomy to the local governments. Similarly, the third aspect, I sense that the central level does not recognize the outcomes of the local-level planning carried out following the bottom-up planning process of decentralized planning policy which raises the dissatisfaction of the local level with the central level. Finally, the fourth aspect of decentralized planning in the context of Nepal is that the LSGA, 1999 and its planning policy itself were good but it underwent poor implementation in practice particularly with distortions from the central level. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I illustrate these features of decentralization and decentralized planning from the perspectives of the stakeholders.

Decentralized Planning: People Participation and Identification of Local Needs

Decentralized planning puts people at the centre of the development process particularly to determine their needs and priorities. This is a means for the participation of people in the decision making of their development needs. One research participant referring to the LSGA, 1999 mentioned that decentralized planning focuses on people participation throughout the development process. As he expressed "*Decentralized planning seeks direct participation of people in the planning process and taking ownership. It allows people to participate in the plan formulation, selection of the projects and implementation of the plan*" (Aitasingh, political party representative, male, 43). This view reflects the essentiality of people

participation in the local development process which is in wider acceptance with the realization in the development thinking that organizations or institutions situated far from the local level cannot provide a solution to local problems (Agrawal, 1999, Pieterse, 2001).

Similarly, another research participant expressed his perceptions equating decentralized planning with the participation of people in the development process and the decision making of their development needs as he explained:

> *Decentralized planning is the development process on which the people do themselves what they can do when they cannot they request to local bodies and if local bodies cannot do of those activities requested by the local people the local bodies request to the upper-level government. (Arjun Prasad, Executive Member, local body association, male, 60)*

This reflects the bottom-up planning process and the ideal relationship between the central and local level government. Further, the above view indicates that the ultimate responsibility is of the central level government which in another way also demonstrates that local-level planning is an integral of the national-level plan as the local needs move upward from community to the central level through the means of local government. This is an ideal process depicted in the formal policy. However, in practice, it faces complexity because of the local power dynamics that influence the development activities to a large extent (Lewis & Hossain, 2008).

One of the research participants very simply put his views on decentralized planning – *"Needs of people that are raised at the local level and included in the development plan is decentralized planning" (Narayan Dutta, political party representative, DDC, male, 58).* This participant was referring to the participatory planning process that starts from the lowest community level and identifies the

people's needs to be included in the development plan of the local bodies. Similarly, another participant stated that decentralized planning is "*plan formulation process as per the needs identified at the lowest community level through a participatory process*" (Pradhumna, DDC Staff, male, 38). However, the planning process in practice had been complex due to unhealthy competition among the political parties.

One of the above participants commented on the role of political parties during the local development planning and reflected his experience as he expressed *"We have a kind of greed – how I can allocate more projects in favour of my party as per the demands of my party workers. All parties are acting in this way at the local level"* (Narayan Datta, political party representative, DDC, male, 58). This was a confession of the participant over the ongoing practice of planning through the ad hoc mechanism in the absence of elected local bodies. At the same time, it also reveals that when the political parties and their representatives who are the main actors of local development plan work with such attitude, there will be a high possibility that common needs of local people are ignored and instead interests of the influential get space in the plan.

According to the above participant and some other participants, such practice took place when there were no elected representatives in the local bodies. These participants had a strong belief in elected bodies. They argued that election raises the accountability of the local body and the elected often work in favour of local people to win the next election while the political party in opposition watch closely the work of the elected local body. One study reports that "the absence of elected representatives at the LBs has been the major obstacle to their proper functioning" (Dhungel et al., 2011, p. 61). Normally such arguments come in favour of the democratic political system. In addition, elected local bodies were considered as

legitimized institutions to undertake the practice of local planning according to the decentralized planning policy than the ad hoc type mechanism.

However, it is not to be interpreted that there would be no problems when there are elected local governments. But what I sensed is that the political party workers were in deep want of local election as it was not happening in Nepal for a long period (2002-2016) due to the armed conflict and the unexpectedly lingering transition in course of making a new constitution. Another reason can be that political party workers, when elected, would get more respect with positional power than they have been getting it while working as mere political party members. The present context of recently elected local governments is of widespread public dissatisfaction (Gadtaula, 2019; Katuwal, 2018). However, it is a bit early to judge the workings of the local governments in view of the initial phase of the newly introduced federal governance system. More importantly, there is no plausible alternative to democratically elected local governments. But, even the elected local governments may not be accountable to local people and their needs unless people are empowered to pressurize the governments for maintaining accountability (Shah & Shah, 2006).

One research participant (Ramdhoj, political party representative in DDC, male, 65) recalled his experience on party self-interests guided practice in the local-level planning even during the time of elected local body in the past. He argued that such practice was there when one single party had the majority in the DDC allowing it to exercise monopoly ignoring the demands of other parties' supporters in the district. There was, however, different opinion than this as one research participant (Narayan Dutta, political party representative in DDC, male, 58) viewed that elected representatives are highly responsive to people rather than the representatives nominated by the political parties to look after local development plan. He argued

that "*elected representative becomes accountable to the people who had elected him to get support from the voters in the next election. But in the case of party nominated representative, people cannot control the representative in the local body*". This indicates that the mechanism of accountability of local government to people is higher with the elected governance system.

Therefore, one of the reasons to institutionalize the decentralized planning through decentralization reform is to "make local representatives more accountable and responsive to local needs" (Desouza, 2008, p. 310). To enhance the accountability of the local government, the empowerment of local people is equally important (Panday, 2009). Empowerment is possible where there are people-friendly institutional arrangements for the meaningful participation of people in the development process (Parajuli, 2002, p. 114). This all suggests that there is equal need of elected local representatives as well as empowered local people for the functioning of the local governance.

One of the research participants substantiating the assumption of the closest relationship between local government and local people and the participation of the people argued:

> *Local government is such government which can be met all the time – morning, day and evening. But the upper-level government can only be heard on radio and television. The difference lies here between these two– one can be met and another can only be heard. While talking about participatory democracy, people will participate not only in the matter of development but also in the whole local governance system. (Bhoja Raj, Former elected chairperson, DDC, male, 62)*

Indeed, the above participant was claiming his togetherness and familiarity with the local level as an elected local body's[9] official comparing with the far distanced position of the central level. He mentioned his working approach applied to reach to the local people as he stated *"We had community organizations to ensure people's participation. There were 15 to 20 households in such community organizations. We emphasized social mobilization through such groups"*. Thus, he had adopted a strategy to reach closer to the local people through the formation and mobilization of community groups at the settlement level. Community needs were identified in a participatory way through these community groups which moved upward to be included in the local development plan. This reflects why local government is considered so close to the local people (Bailey & Elliot, 2009; White, 2011) and efficient in working for them than the central level (Berad et al., 2008).

Decentralization Must Equate With Rights

As discussed in Chapter II, decentralization has various forms in terms of the power devolved to the local level. In view of the democratic political system in a country and from the perspective of self-governance, only the devolutionary form of decentralization is noteworthy here in view of autonomy as the delegation and deconcentration forms of decentralization do not provide autonomy to the local bodies. However, only the legal policy does not determine the nature of decentralization, its implementation becomes important in shaping the types of decentralization in practice. The LSGA, 1999 advocates participatory democracy and self-governance of the local bodies entailing the features of devolutionary decentralization in Nepal. But, in its practice over the decades, the local level

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[9]Here it needs to be noted that though there were local bodies when this study was conducted most of the participants often used the term local government possibly impressed by the phrase 'local self-governance' used in the Local Self-governance Act, 1999 or it was the impact of the provision of the local government in federal governance as per the new constitution.

stakeholders have different understandings from what they had expected from the LSGA, 1999. It was the perception of stakeholders that fundamental rights were not materialized in practice while implementing the LSGA, 1999.

Understanding of the research participants, in general, was that decentralization is the devolution of rights to the local bodies. In their view, the functioning of local bodies with no interference from the higher level is the essence of decentralization and accordingly the decentralized planning. According to a participant, there was no decentralization so far as he viewed, *"For me, there has not been decentralization yet. In my understanding, if we say decentralization this must be with rights. If rights are not given to local bodies, how I can say that there has been Decentralization?"* (Ramdhoj, Political party representative, DDC, male, 65). He presented an example of the appointment of a Local Development Officer (LDO) to show that the local bodies did not have even a fundamental right. According to him, *"If there was decentralization in a real sense local body should have to appoint its secretary, the LDO, who is supposed to serve the DDC"*.

The research participant above was articulating his comment on the practice of appointing the LDO from the Ministry at the central level which was not the spirit of the LSGA. Another research participant also commented on the issue of placing the LDO to the DDC from the central level and expressed that "*The provision of LDO was put in LSGA for a certain period. But it got continuity. This has been an issue at present too*" (Arjun Prasad, Executive Member, local body association, male, 60). Further, a DDC staff viewed that "the *frequent changes of LDO without consulting the DDC has hampered the working of DDC severely in the spirit of self-governance*" (Rabindra, DDC Staff, male, 41). The motive of the centre level in sending staff at its discretion to the local level is to seize the executive power of the local body. The

centrally deployed staff are less responsive to the local needs and be accountable to the central level (World Bank, 2014). While urging for the right to appoint the LDO to the DDC itself, the above research participant (Ramdhoj, political party representative, male, 65) was seeking autonomy from the central level as the role of the executive staff remains vital in governing the local body.

One of the above research participants further commented on the practice of the district development planning that the situation is no different as he expressed *"the priority and budget come from the central level in specifying manner leaving no room for local bodies to decide on their own needs and priorities"(Ramdhoj, political party representative, DDC, male, 65).* This indicates that local decision making was curtailed. Further, one research participant viewed that *"There was a provision in the LSGA, 1999 for establishing subject-wise sections in the DDC. But, the centre did not implement it and continued the line agencies district offices' (Bhoja Raj, Former elected chairperson, DDC, male, 62).* Thus, the responsibilities which were decentralized to the local level were not brought into practice with the hesitation of the central level. It is reported that the sectors which were said to have been devolved to the DDC were not materialized and no one seemed accountable for this (Dhungel et al., 2011).

The above perceptions entail the central-local relationship which often becomes problematic in implementing decentralization policy (Manor, 1999). From the perspective of the local level, it is central's interference to local autonomy and against the principles and values of decentralization and self local governance. However, it is often argued that central's support and guidance is essential when the local level's capacity is not at the required level (Ribot, 2002). These issues of capacity and autonomy reflect upon the central-local relation since the inception of

the decentralization and have been most challenging even now for most of the countries pursuing decentralization (The Asia Foundation, 2012; Manor, 1999; Agrawal & Ribot, 1999). Both the central and local levels usually put arguments in their favours. Hence, it is not easy to determine an ideal situation of central-local relationship which varies as per the context and the position of power of respective levels which fluctuates over time.

However, it is the issue to be examined by the types of decentralization as the degree of autonomy of the local level depends upon the type of decentralization whether it is delegation, deconcentration, and devolution. In the devolutionary form of decentralization, the autonomy of the local government becomes crucial and avoids the interference and unwanted guidance from the central level as Bailey and Elliott (2009) suggest that high level of interference of the central level government over the local governments is a wrong strategy and undesirable act. Thus, undue interference of central level over the local level has been a barrier of effective implementation of decentralized policy from the perspective of local stakeholders.

Thus, from the perspective of autonomy, it was revealed that decentralization has been an uncompleted affair in spite of the country's constant efforts over the decades for decentralization and decentralized planning. One participant argued, *"If decentralization is giving rights to local bodies, how can we say there is decentralization if there is no right of self-governance?"(Ramdhoj, Political party representative, DDC, male, 65).* Such critical argument suggests policymakers to reflect upon the performance of the policy in view of obsessive support to decentralization (Saito, 2008) emphasizing its possible benefits and overlooking its shortcomings arisen due to hurdles during the implementation. Baliley and Elliott (2009) suggest for the "virtuous circle" instead of "vicious circle" (p. 437) as the

former urges for powerful local government having a strong relationship with local people and the latter refers to the opposite condition of the former.

The above situation leads to the conclusion that policy formulation is not enough in the countries where accountability is weak. In the context of a weak accountability system, the LSGA was not implemented properly. The degraded situation of accountability is the consequence of the past centralized culture inherited with the political and administrative system reflecting the role of informal institutions over the formal institutions (Rothstein & Tannenberg, 2015). At the same time, it is the issue of power-holding. In absence of the elected local bodies, as a study reports, the local bodies were less powerful (Dhungel et al., 2011) to put pressure on the central level for the implementation of the LSGA while the central level enjoyed more decision-making power in controlling the local bodies. However, it is argued that the local governments can work better in their local contexts only when the central administration does not control them and allows for their independent working (Saito, 2008). Thus, from the perspective of self-governance, the autonomy of local governments is essential even for the development of their capacity.

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Outcome of the District Dropped Into 'Raddiko Tokari'[10]

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As I described in Chapter IV, the LSGA, 1999 has envisaged a rigorous participatory planning process that should come up from the lowest level of the communities so that real needs of local people through DDP get integrated into the national development plan to be prepared at the central level by the National Planning Commission with the coordination of sectoral ministries. However, this essence of decentralized planning does not corroborate in the practice of planning as per the LSGA, 1999.

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[10]Wastebasket

One of the research participants (Bhoja Raj, former elected chairperson, DDC, male, 62) expressed his frustration over the process of National Planning Commission (NPC) in considering the outcome of the district development planning. He commented, *"Projects that were selected by the participatory process from the lower level and recommended as to be undertaken by the NPC and sectoral line ministries were dropped into the Raddiko Tokari so far"*. Though the DDC planning is to be an only basis for the NPC and sectoral ministries to include the local needs through DDP as stipulated in the LSGA which was not occurring in practice (The Asia Foundation, 2012). The above research participant expressed his relief in overcoming such situation of the past with the provisions in the new constitution and remarked *"Now, I hope this will not continue as the new constitution has exclusive rights given to each level– central, state and local. All will act accordingly"*.

In my query, why NPC and other central ministries discard the projects locally recommended through DDP and put forth new projects instead, one of the participants (Bhoja Raj, former elected chairperson, DDC, male, 62) argued that

> *This was due to the influence of the member of parliaments at the central level. Contradiction surfaced between the Member of Parliament and the locally elected chairperson of DDC in the matter of development as the former played a role to put the projects for the district from the central level avoiding the recommendations of the local level.*

In view of another participant *"when there were different parties ruling at the central and local levels, the process did not work as the central ruling party normally influences the NPC and central level ministries" (Arjun Prasad, Executive Member local body association, male, 60).* Conceptually, the NPC should have planners and development experts. However, in view of the widespread party politicization of

most of the institutions in Nepal, the NPC could not play the expected role of professional policy institution as it was also affected by petty party politics and self-interests of the ministry-level bureaucrats. As a consequence, the controlling attitude of the national level planning institutions gets continuity as usual (Panday, 2009). It reveals the centralized planning culture and disbelief in the bottom-up participatory planning process as well as the lack of accountability at the top level not implementing the decentralized planning policy.

The interferences made over the decentralized planning process which itself has been guided by the mandates of the government is one of the issues of self-governance. Further, one research participant explained the nature of influence over the local development plan of the local body as:

The problem in the district development plan arises when the central level sends the list of projects with the budget to the districts in favour of certain political party or group without considering the local needs identified through the local planning process. Thus, with the interference of the central level, the projects not in the local plan also implemented in the district. (Arjun Prasad, Executive Member, local body association, male, 60)

The above practice has weakened the autonomy of the local government. When a policy is not implemented or implemented with distortion is the issue of governance as governance is the implementation of law and regulations (Fukuyama, 2013). The local bodies were not in a position to avoid the projects that were not selected through DDP as the resource base of local bodies was weak to finance the development needs of the district. So, the projects that are sent with the budget from the central level are not checked by the local bodies, even though, they complained the central level about this practice contrary to the local level planning policy. Such

practice of directly sending the projects from the central level to the local level takes

place in the efforts of certain interest groups who have the ability to influence the

central level. Indeed, a nexus forms between the central level authority and the local

groups with some vested interest to control the development resources. Powerful

people at the central level and district level hold and mobilize the resources to

maintain their power status (Panday, 2009). This reflects the role of economic power

in planning (Fox-Rogers & Murphy, 2014).

Further, such projects were to be implemented as per the interests of the

pressure groups as one research participant commented on such practice as:

The political party or group which is lobbying for the project of its interest

also organizes some members of the local communities where the project is

going to be implemented and puts pressure on DDC from the local community

to accept and implement the projects in the interest of the group. (Arjun

Prasad, Executive Member, local body association, male, 60)

Therefore, development has been such an obsessive matter, it has swallowed

other essential aspects like governance and integrity. It has been common that

contractors and business people have been winning the election while honest and

established political persons are not being able to fight the election (Pokharel, 2018).

This entails a great challenge for governance in Nepal as the development without

governance face the problem of sustainability and benefitting the larger communities

except for the limited powerful groups.

Thus, decentralized planning confronts serious flaw in its implementation.

The conflict between competing political parties abandons the acts and regulations

and spirit of the LSGA, 1999. It entails poor governance in the fragile democracy. At

the same time, it also reflects that only a democratic election does not pave away for

good governance. Indeed, the aim of decentralization reforms after the 1990s is to enhance democratization, bring the effectiveness of development efforts and promote good governance (Saito, 2008). Since the decentralization in Nepal faces the complexity in its beginning in the 1990s, this context provided a fertile environment to grow conflict in Nepal in the mid-1990s.

Hence, the issue of decentralization in the changed political scenario took a paradigm shift from decentralization under the centralized unitary system to federal decentralization with the promulgation of the new constitution of Nepal, 2015. It can be argued that this change has been made to solve the issue of autonomy. There were no serious efforts made to promote local self-governance while providing autonomy adequately (Panday, 2009). However, in terms of policy implementation, there are scepticisms at the central level that, the top-level bureaucracy may hinder the effectiveness of the constitutional rights provided to the local level as per the new constitution.

LSGA and Planning Policy Good, Implementation Bad: A Paradoxical Reality

The perception of a research participant "there is no decentralization so far" discussed above in this chapter may sound radical since there was widespread appreciation of the Local Self Governance Act (LSGA), 1999 (ADDCN, 2001; Hesselbarth, 2007; Shakya, 2008; UNDP, 2001) as a milestone in the decentralization history of Nepal. The main attraction of the LSGA, 1999 was that it was founded in the principle of self-governance. Different actors worked to get into this comprehensive form of the act for local bodies in Nepal (Hesselbarth, 2007). Of them, the associations of local bodies, namely Association of District Development Committees of Nepal (ADDCN), Municipal Association of Nepal (MuAN), and National Association of Village Development Committees in Nepal (NAVIN), and

some donors supporting for the decentralization were important as they had lobbied for the LSGA and influenced its formulation to some extent though not fully as per their expectation. So, unlike the above participant who did not see the fundamental rights provided to the local level equating the principle of decentralization, other participants appreciated the LSGA, 1999 and the decentralized planning process that it had incorporated.

One research participant (Harischandra, Executive Member, local body association, male, 47), appreciated the Local Self Governance Act, 1999 as it was in direction of decentralization in its initial years. It should be noted here that there were elected local bodies in this period. However, the research participant expressed dissatisfaction with the implementation of LSGA in course of time. He opined, *"It seems that, while looking into the LSGA and its context, there is a good spirit to move into the path of decentralization but in practice, I do not find it moving ahead in that spirit"*. According to him, there were problems for this more or less at all levels. One research participant focused on the good aspects of the LSGA and commented that *"What we wrote in policy we did not bring it into practice" (Harischandra, Executive Member, local body association, male, 47)*. At the ministry level, he argued: *"though the Ministry of Local Development has accepted autonomy in principle does not work for its materialization"*. At the district level, he viewed *"there is no good coordination between DDC and line agencies"*. There were also problems at the community level as he added: *"We could not teach the spirit of LSGA going down to the level of users because of that we fulfilled only the formalities of the act but not as per its spirit"*.

The above views of the research participant indicate the inability of prioritizing from a huge number of development needs arising from the community

level. Though the local bodies reached the grassroots level, they were not fully able to facilitate the community to address the various interests of the local people. This suggests two aspects of local-level planning at the same time– increasing participation of local people and low level of capacity of the local body to manage the planning process in its initial phase of the LSGA, 1999. This also entails an educational implication for the capacity enhancement of the local stakeholders for technically sound participatory planning. Further, as mentioned above there was no required level of support from the central level ministry and no cooperation from the district level line agencies to the local bodies to make the planning process as per the expectation of the LSGA, 1999's planning policy.

Another research participant (Bhoja Raj, former elected chairperson, DDC, male, 62) also appreciated decentralization as it was envisaged in the LSGA and the planning process inherited with this. He clearly stated that *"there is a system that provides access to each citizen to participate in the planning process of a local body to choose their own priority"*. However, for this, according to him, the required condition is that there should be elected local bodies. A comment from one of the research participants was that *"The LSGA, 1999 had given enough rights including the 14 steps planning process. It was very nice. But, we could not implement it as we did not have elected representatives in the local body" (Rabindra, DDC Staff, male, 41).* He saw the importance of the elected local bodies as he argued: *"District line agencies did not follow the spirit of LSGA, 1999 to include only the plan come from the community and there were no elected bodies to pressurize the line agencies for this"*. Like him, other research participants saw the essentiality of the elected bodies for the implementation of the planning process as per the LSGA.

These participants were advocating elected local bodies as they had expressed repeatedly that elected local bodies can put pressure on the central authority for the implementation of the LSGA, 1999 and can deal with the district level agencies more powerfully. In addition to this, there would be no quota system in distributing development projects among the political parties as it was there under the bureaucrat led mechanism in the absence of the elected DDC. However, there was another research participant who emphasized good governing system and schooling of political parties to implement the planning process in favour of the local people whether there is an elected body or a representing body of the political parties. This type of view seeks cultural transformation among the institutions of local-level planning.

Whatsoever might the case be, it was the experience of the local stakeholders that the planning process had only followed so far up to the district level, but not supported it from the central level. The local stakeholders were found unhappy with the central authorities as the local needs forwarded as per the planning process was minimally responded or not responded at all while new projects were introduced by the central level without consulting the local bodies. One participant shared his experience and expressed *"The National Planning Commission did not consider the projects of locally prioritized. Rather, it creates own list with most of the projects recommended by influential individuals at the top-level" (Bhoja Raj, former elected chairperson, DDC, male, 62).* Though, as mentioned above, there was difficulty in making adequate prioritization at the local level, it was further worsened by the central agency ignoring the bottom-up process. Thus, the implementation of planning policy had been poor, even worse, as it had been twisted and turned from different

sides making the policy only a ritual work. One of the research participants commented on the planning process and practice as follows:

The planning process which starts from the community level to identify the needs of the community is a very good aspect of it. But the projects demanded by community remain outside while the other projects are inserted into the plan from the pocket of the influential is still in practice. In short, the centralist mentality is there. (Sonam, NGO Activist, male, 55)

The "centralist mentality" as the above research participant used is such a term which I had heard frequently among the stakeholders while discussing the issue of decentralization. This is used in the wider public when one has to expose someone that his or her activities and manners are against empowering people that lie at the lower level. As mentioned by the above research participant, when community demands that are collected through means of the participatory process are discarded by those in power, it is considered to be of the centralist mentality that ignores the needs of the ones at the lower level. Yet, it will be a misunderstanding that if one thinks that the centralist mentality is only with people who are in the central level in the political and administrative hierarchy as it can be with the people who are at the local level but work against the decentralized process to meet own interests using their network of influence.

The most admired aspect of the planning policy was the provision to reach the lowest level of the community – the settlement level. The process had worked relatively well up to the district level when there were elected local bodies. It was argued that the local bodies had disciplined themselves to consider the projects that had come up through the participatory planning process selecting them from the local communities themselves. As one participant articulated *"We followed the process*

very strictly and did not try from our side too to inject any project from outside the process. For this, we coordinated closely the opposition party members and convinced them to maintain the transparency among all actors" (Arjun Prasad, Executive Member, local body association, male, 60). Though this cannot be considered a general case in light of the discussions made above, this shows enthusiasm and commitment of the local level leaders toward the LSGA, 1999 in general and it's planning policy in particular.

However, in spite of the efforts at the local level, the planning policy of the LSGA lost its essence since the institutions of government like the NPC and sectoral ministries which need to be accountable did not honour the outcome of the local level planning process. Indeed, the essence of decentralized planning was undermined while it needs to be considered as an effort to enhance the participation of local people to make decisions on their own (Bevir, 2013). But, the above discussion showed a lack of such understanding. Hence, the issue of decentralized planning has been the implementation problem which in turn is the situation of poor governance with the central level. Here, one can infer that there is a problem not only of lack of required level of capacity with the local level in implementing decentralized policy but also with governance, more than this with the central level authorities. I agree with Manor (2011) as he comments "We must avoid blaming the victim–decentralization– when the real culprit is the opposite: a refusal to decentralize" (p. 20). The accountability goes to the central level as only its willingness and commitment can change the situation.

Further, the above perceptions of the local stakeholders reflect the complexity of implementing a policy. The implementation becomes more problematic when a policy intends devolution of power and resources. It is often seen that central level,

though rhetorically echoes the decentralization, appears reluctant in its implementation (Gurung, 2003; Manor, 1999; Panday, 2009). The poor coordination between the DDC and line agencies in the district is the reflection of unwillingness of the central level to bring them in close coordination of the local body. The role of the local level also becomes important in understanding and adapting the decentralized practices so that the central level's reluctance in implementing the decentralized policy will be discouraged. For this, associations of local bodies have been preferred (Agrawal, 1999) as the nationally organized bodies of VDCs and DDCs of Nepal had played the role in the time of LSGA formulation. However, their roles declined when the election of the local bodies could not take place for a long period. Since the policy envisaged at the central level through the high-level political decision to bring certain change or reform the role of central level not only becomes vital but it is also its responsibility from the perspective of accountability.

Why the central level acted contradicting with the local level in supporting the plan that was prepared at the local level as mentioned above may have different reasons from party politics to bureaucratic rigidity and an exercise of holding resources in the self-interest of certain groups and classes. However, there is one clause in the LSGA, 1999 itself which can be manipulated when central seeks its own role over the local level. Section 234 has such a space that provides the central government with the responsibility to direct the local body and it is the obligation of local body to honour the direction given by the central government. Hence, it relies upon the central level how it deals with the local body – in a controlling manner or respecting the autonomy.

Based on the above section, the Ministry of Local Development (MLD) provides instructions, guidance to the local bodies. However, the local bodies

consider such instructions as interferences from the MLD over their self-governing autonomy. One participant (Harischandra, Official, local body association, male, 47) showed his dislike to the treatment of MLD to the local bodies. He commented, *"In my view, at first, the MLD must discard its assumption that District Development Committees and Municipalities are under its management to instruct every time"*. This view indicates that the local bodies were not happy with all of the MLD's directives rather taken them as interference in their working autonomy though they were obliged to follow the directives of the MLD as per the above clause in the LSGA. For stance, the MLD used to send the list of the projects to be implemented by the DDC in the direction of central level politicians and senior bureaucrats out of the premise of the decentralized planning process.

Another participant (Bhoja Raj, former elected chairperson, DDC, male, 62) argued that the role of MLD has been confined to control local bodies rather than support to promote local self-governance. He put his views on the role of the MLD in implementing the LSGA as following:

> *I say the MLD was obstructing the decentralization. It is because its manner was control-oriented. It should act only as a liaison. It used to point out other ministries for not supporting the decentralization, but, in reality, the MLD itself was a barrier.*

Such a perception at the local level not only reveals the complexity of centre-local relation but also reflects the unwillingness of the central level toward implementing decentralization. It is argued that the central level generally lacks the willingness to transfer power to the local level in spite of the commitment made in public (Blair, 1998). Despite such reluctance in implementing the acts and regulations intended to promote decentralization, the central level supports the policy

formulation only to please the donors (Agrawal, 1999; Nadeem, 2016) and to keep silent the local pressure for a while when the context is in favour of the local level. Interference of the central level has been realized since long ago and arguments have been raised on the essentiality of minimizing such interventions (Aziz & Arnold, 1996).

Thus, it has been the reality of the decentralization scheme that the implementation phase is more complex than the policy formulation phase. The policy itself does not bring changes unless it is implemented properly. It is also equally possible that while implementing the decentralization policy there can be derailing of it in course of implementation (Shah & Thompson, 2004). The question of accountability must be taken into account when assessing the performance of decentralization. So far, the issues of the capacity of the local level and reluctance of the central level to implement decentralization had been raised equally. Here, from the perspective of governance, particularly accountability, both issues are related to the role of the central level since enhancing the capacity of the local level is also the responsibility of the central government if it aims democratic decentralization.

In summary, the above discussion entails that the issue of the implementation of decentralization seeks accountability on the part of the central government which has not been raised sufficiently in the field of decentralization. There is an argument, according to Bailey and Elliott (2009), that democratic system through elections controls the local government itself and the interventions from the central level is not morally justifiable. Further, they argue that local government should be such powerful that it should not be "perceived to have-inadequate powers and autonomy" (p. 437) by the local citizens. Local stakeholders in Nepal who were practising the LSGA found disempowered due to the poor implementation of the LSGA.

Conclusion: Appreciation at Local Level, Distortion at Central Level

The stakeholders at the local level appreciated the decentralized planning as stipulated in the LSGA, 1999. It does not mean that there were no shortcomings in the LSGA. In spite of that, the local stakeholders were found optimistic towards it if the DDP was responded well by the central authorities in the spirit of local self-governance. This raises the issue of accountability as 'not to implement the policy' is an act of lack of accountability from the perspective of governance as accountability is considered one of the fundamental elements of governance (UNDP, 2001).

Though the act was said to be guided by the principle of self-governance, it was revealed that the central level implicitly and explicitly had been using all the three kinds of powers– decision making, agenda-setting and influencing the stakeholders (Lukes, 2005). In the absence of the elected local bodies, the central level interference was found more prevalent while the local level was unable to create pressure from below. In the country where centralization has been practised for a long time, it is difficult to expect that the central level is willing to implement decentralization. The politicians and bureaucrats at the central level deliberately do not implement the decentralization reforms to fulfil their vested interest in holding power and resources.

CHAPTER VI

DECENTRALIZED PLANNING IN PRACTICE AND ITS REFLECTIONS

The practice of decentralized planning reflects the working of decentralized development and governance system. The LSGA guided decentralized planning in Nepal was founded in the principle of bottom-up participatory planning approach. In Chapter V above, I discussed the perceptions of stakeholders on decentralization and decentralized planning. In this chapter, I focus on the practice of decentralized planning policy from the perspective of local self-governance. Hence, drawing from the practice of district development planning I argue that there is the encroachment of the central level in the premise of local bodies' local development and planning processes particularly by activating its extended wings in district level and allowing parallel working of specialized centrally designed projects and non-government organizations out of the local governance framework. I have drawn a conclusion on the tendency of the central level as its deliberate motive to control the local level using the authoritative power, not implementing the policy adequately, and not accepting the outcomes of the decentralized planning process.

Further, my exploration from the practice is that political parties are vital institutions which shape the workings of local government and their schooling is important to change the existing culture of forming a coalition for distributions of development resources through collaborative planning. Similarly, I also argue that the practice of decentralized planning in Nepal was only a formality while trying to follow the procedures with very weak technical competencies and skills of planning in

the DDC to facilitate the process in a participatory way and to provide technical inputs to the stakeholders to take decisions collaboratively.

I have discussed the above arguments in this chapter organizing it into four major themes. I have tried to comprehend the practice of decentralized planning and its reflections through these themes emerged from the field data. These themes capture quite a comprehensive picture of decentralization and decentralized planning. They include the relationship of various levels of government agencies, parallel working of different kind of projects including the work of NGOs, the role of political parties and capacity of the local level in formulating the local development planning. Finally, I have concluded the chapter drawing from the discussions of the four themes from the perspective of decentralized planning and local self-governance.

Central Agencies, District Line Agencies and District Development Planning

Development planning is such an extensive work which in general involves different levels of agencies. Bureaucrats and politicians at the central level intend to involve the local level agencies in the planning process (Manor, 1999). As I described in Chapter IV, the DDP as local development planning in Nepal seeks the involvement of agencies from the central to the district levels. The NPC and the sectoral ministries related to social and economic development and infrastructure sectors are involved in the local development planning. Again, some of these development ministries have set up offices in the district which are known as district line agencies. The DDC interacts with these district line agencies in the district development planning process.

The LSGA had assumed harmonized relationships among the central and district level agencies that concern directly and indirectly with the district

development plan. However, central-local tension occurs heavily in district development planning. It was revealed that the local needs were included to a significant extent following the planning process up to the district level though there was some influence of the political parties in the process.

But the problem arises when the sectoral ministries at the central level do not consider the recommendations of the district of their respective sectors. One research participant citing an example illustrated:

DDC recommended one irrigation project selected from the Ilaka level planning workshop to district irrigation office for financial and technical support. I coordinated with the irrigation office to include in its annual plan for the last three years. But, I did not find the project included in the annual plan of the irrigation office. I inquired with the chief of the irrigation office about this. The chief informed me that he had included the irrigation project in the list of the annual plan and forwarded to the central level for approval. However, he had received the annual plan without including the irrigation project recommended by the DDC. (Ramdhoj, Political party representative, DDC, male, 65)

My observation of the DDC's Sectoral Planning Formulation Committee's meeting reflects the role of the central level and district line agencies in the district development planning:

This was one of the Sectoral Planning Formulation Committees' meetings related to the 'Population and Social Development Committee'. The meeting was planned to be commenced at 11 AM in the hall of DDC. However, it started at 11.55 AM. Before starting the meeting one DDC's staff contacted the LDO. It was informed in the meeting that LDO had asked to begin the meeting and he would join the meeting in between when he reached the DDC

as he had been travelling on the way (The LDO joined the meeting at 12:45 PM). Participants of the meeting from political parties, DDC's local-level staff, NGOs representatives and some staff from district line agencies were present in the meeting. Meanwhile, Planning Officer of DDC who was deputed from the central level– Ministry of Local Development (MLD) – entered into the meeting. While introducing himself, the Planning Officer stated that his participation in the meeting would not be meaningful as he was likely to be transferred to another district soon.

At the beginning of the meeting, the DDC's local staff who was conducting the meeting read out the instructional guideline sent from the MLD on the district development plan. The staff who had been conducting the meeting had emphasized to consider the guideline. The main objective of the meeting was to seek the commitments of the district line agencies in considering the needs of the local people that were collected through the Ilaka level planning workshop and to get information on their annual plan's activities in the district related to their respective sectors.

In this meeting, representatives from the district line agencies, District Women and Children Office (DWCO), District Education Office (DEO) and District Health Office (DHO) had participated. It was noteworthy that from these offices there was no participation of the chiefs of these offices but the subordinates had participated. At first, the staff from DWCO presented her annual activities in the meeting. It was only a general description of regular type activities of her office which had not considered any activity recommended from the Ilaka level planning workshop. The representatives of

the political parties objected to her presentation as no local needs were included.

After that, a staff of the DEO presented which was also a general description. However, he tried to respond to the concern of the political parties that his office will try to include the local needs later while finalizing the annual plan. However, the political parties' representatives criticized the DEO as it had ignored the local needs in the past and had followed the central level's list of the projects. Meanwhile, the political parties raised the issue about the district line agencies who were not serious towards the district development planning process. The line agencies had sent only subordinate staffs in such an important meeting of the district. There was strong dissatisfaction with the political parties over the past two presentations.

Then, there was a turn of DHO to present in the meeting. But the staff from DHO informed that he was not well prepared today and would submit his plan later. Commenting over the situation, the DDC staff who had been conducting the meeting requested the district line agencies to consider the local needs recommended through Ilaka level planning workshop. Meanwhile, some participants in the hall were telling that similar was the situation in the past years too! (Field Note, February 2016)

The scenario of the above-mentioned meeting indicates that the district line agencies were not committed to the local level planning as envisaged by the LSGA (Dhungel et al., 2011; Hasselbarth, 2007). Further, the representatives of the focal ministry– the MLD the LDO and Planning Officer who were deployed to support the DDC were not taking ownership as indicated by their presence and role in the meeting. The instructional guideline from the central ministry and the emphasis given

to this reveals the controlling attitude of the central level using the second dimension of the power of agenda-setting (Lukes, 2005) as it was more controlling document rather than reference document to the DDC.

Thus, the presence of line agencies at the district level with their command at the central level had obstructed the local body to govern all development activities in the district. The central ministries were injecting the development projects outside of the DDP. They were simply increasing their development activities through line agencies year after year without considering the needs of the district (Gurung, 2004). This has created mistrust between local people and the local body as the projects recommended by the local body are not implemented in lack of resources while the projects from other ways injected from the central level get implemented.

As mentioned above, the projects included in the district development plan are the local needs of the district despite the inadequate prioritization and some influence of party politics. Based on the recommendations of DDP, the central authorities mainly the National Planning Commission (NPC) as envisaged by the LSGA needs to allocate resources for the projects to be implemented in the districts. However, the NPC and central ministries do not consider all projects recommended by the DDC and insert other projects in the list of the projects to be implemented in the district without consulting the DDC. This is contrary to the institutional policy. Reflecting upon the existing practice, one research participant commented on the NPC's behaviour in selecting projects and DDC's planning process as he articulated:

> *NPC needs to provide principally block the amount of money only specifying sector like road etc. But NPC sends the list of individual projects in different sectors requested by MPs and influential individuals and groups. DDC, on the other hand, cannot take projects selected by it through the planning*

process due to lack of money. The situation is such messy that everywhere is disorder and corruption, nothing good is happening in order. (Narayan Dutta, Political party representative, DDC, male, 58,)

Further, from the discussions with the district stakeholders, it was revealed that the focal ministry, Ministry of Local Development itself, often sends a list of the projects to the DDC to implement in the district without consulting the DDC but the projects recommended by the member of the parliaments and party workers of the ruling party. Similarly, one research participant argued that the essence of participatory bottom-up planning was not regarded by central level and its consequence was reflected in practice at the local level. He put forward a case as he mentioned *"We heard recently that big number of projects sent to the Prime Minister's constituency district. This was not good work. If the top-level does such wrong things, then, how we can expect good things at bottom level"* (Narayan Dutta, Political party representative, DDC, male, 58). He, therefore, asserted that the central level must establish an ideal practice which impacts the local level consequently. This reveals that the central level had been using its directive rights over local bodies against the spirit of the LSGA decentralized planning policy. On the other hand, it is the reflection of the use of power by the central-level over the local level.

The issue of devolution has become prominent. It is imperative to take into account a research participant's comment on the implementation of devolution policy as he expressed *"When initiatives were taken to bring the district level sector offices under the governance of DDC some district offices like irrigation and drinking water converted overnight into division offices while continuing their works in the district"* (Rabindra, DDC staff, male, 41). Similarly, another research participant's comment on this activity was:

The creation of division in the place of the district offices was the step to

betray the demand of local bodies to devolve the sector offices. The divisions

were implementing the small local level projects including them in the

ministry level program and budget and bypassing the local bodies. (Arjun

Prasad, Executive Member, local body association, male, 60)

Thus, though the decentralization implementation plan envisaged devolution of four sectors to local bodies, little progress was made in this line which reflects the central levels' attitude of holding development resources. It is found that sectoral ministries play a crucial role in the devolution process (Ribot, 2011) to protect their holding on the resources preventing local bodies from this. This act is explained as the first dimension of power where authority holders mobilize resources to maintain domination and to hold the rights of decision making (McCabe, 2013). Arguably, in the absence of the elected local bodies as discussed before the local level could not create necessary pressure over the central level to implement the devolving policy of the LSGA.

This entails that rather than being a self-governing entity, the local body was more an implementing agency of the central level. Several binding clauses in the LSGA as mentioned in Chapter IV and the motive of the central level holding the development resources controlled the local body which contradicts that the local bodies were formed as self-governing bodies. Further, in view of some clauses in the LSGA, there was no more room for mutual decision making and participatory decision making between the central and the local levels. For example, capacity building, as stated in Section 235 of the LSGA (HMG, 2000a, p. 86), was as imposed by the central level than as demanded by the local body. Instead of demand-driven nature of the capacity building, there are some clauses in the LSGA as discussed

above which impose the local body with directives and guidance to be followed compulsorily, which leads to the loss in the autonomy of self-governance. When there is no room to interact between the two levels, the powerful institution always dominates the weaker ones.

There was the controlling attitude of the central level than supporting the local body to groom and develop for self-governance. Instead, there is the perception of the central level that local body cannot carry out the responsibilities that were being carried out by the central level at the local level. One research participant illustrated it with an example of a successful land revenue collection performed at a local level which was previously being carried out by the central level for a long time. In his own words:

> There is deep-rooted feeling at the centre that if rights are devolved to the lower level, it is gone, destroyed. But it was not so when for the first time land revenue collection was given to the local level. In that case, as well, the central level thought that it would not work. But it worked well as the local level has been collecting land revenue successfully. (Harischandra, Executive Member, local body association, male, 47)

This participant further commented on the role of the central level in the implementation of the LSGA. He opined:

> Many things that need to be implemented by the central level to the effectiveness of LSGA did not take place in reality. What we got that was possible only by our pressure. We carried out a struggle for the LSGA. We were also beaten by police in that struggle within the premises of the Singha Durbar. Here, the central level gives by one hand takes back by another hand. (Harischandra, Executive Member, local body association, male, 47)

This implies that decentralization does not go easily to the favour of the local level. It demands an intense power struggle between the central and the local levels.

One research participant critically commented on the role of the Ministry of Local Development which was like a big brother than a cooperating partner. In his words,

> There is a kind of understanding that decentralization is only of the Ministry of Local Development. Indeed it is all of the ministries. So, the MLD should not think of itself as a big brother, instead, it should play a role of supporting the body. But, in practice, local bodies have to rely upon to the Ministry of Local Development for various matters. (Bhoja Raj, former elected chairperson, male, 62)

Further, commenting on the role of the MLD in creating the central level agencies' offices in the district instead of strengthening the DDC, a participant stated that:

> "the MLD converted the District Technical Office, which is under a department called DOLIDAR within the MLD, as a separate office like other line agencies' district offices though it should be a section of DDC. Thus, MLD kept decentralization within itself and only instructed and controlled the local bodies." (Bhojraj former elected chairperson, 62).

Such a practice manifests the tensions between the centre and the local level with the implementation of the LSGA. There was constant resistance of the local bodies associations to any interference of the central level. Particularly, it was observed that ADDCN had resisted when the central level government had curtailed the rights of the local bodies (Enabling State Program [ESP], 2001). But in the LSGA, the government had not only given but it also had several clauses that could

take or control what were given. This is the strategy central level often takes to control the local level. In the LSGA, Section 238 "Power to suspend and dissolve" and Section 242 "Delegation of power" (His Majesty's Government [HMG], 2000a, pp. 86-89) sufficiently reflect the controlling power of the central level over the local bodies.

Possibly, to overcome the above tension between the central and the local level created by the implementation of the LSGA, the new constitution of Nepal 2015 has instituted the rights of the local level. Legally, this is a radical shift since the local level rights so far were provided through the means of the act have now been provided by the constitution itself. This provides a strong basis that the rights provided to the local level cannot be altered or controlled by the central level. However, like in the past as discussed above, even in the federal governance, the central line ministries are creating district level offices, for example, District Education Development and Coordination Office under the Ministry of Education and Agriculture Knowledge Centre under the Ministry of Agriculture while these sectors are under the local level as per the new constitution.

Parallel Local Development: Implications for Decentralized Planning

I have given the background to some practices of centre-led local development projects namely the constituency development fund and the special projects like PAF and Fund Board Supported projects in Chapter IV. Here, I explore the implications of the above projects including the role of NGOs in local development in the institutionalization of decentralized planning.

Constituency Development Fund (CDF) as the stakeholders observed it in practice was a contravention of the local government autonomy and its planning process. One research participant commented that *"The practice of CDF has diverted*

the district planning process. It is against the decentralization and local self-governance" (Ramdhoj, Political party representative, DDC, male, 65). The main dissatisfaction was that the CDF does not consider the community projects selected through the district development planning process. In view of a research participant, the use of CDF reveals the attitude of the central government towards decentralization as he explained:

> *The CDF does not take any project identified through the DDP planning process. The CDF undertakes only those projects which are thought to be politically beneficial to the particular Member of Parliament or his or her political party. It does not consider district priorities. (Arjun Prasad, Executive Member, local body association, male, 60)*

As I observed in the Ilaka level planning workshop, a Member of Parliament of the district who had participated as Chief Guest in the workshop did not commit to taking the projects selected through the planning process in the district though he spoke on the importance of self-governance. The way government is increasing the size of CDF and local bodies are constantly facing the problem of inadequate resources even to finance small local development projects suggest that central level is not serious to support the district development planning.

Another research participant based on the past practice of CDF implementation in the district viewed that the CDF was introduced to weaken the local bodies and its development efforts and was against the principle of decentralization as he articulated:

> *It does not fit with the principle of decentralization. It is to divert the institutionalization of the decentralization process. Since, the Member of Parliament himself or herself is the member of DDC and involve in the*

decision-making process of the district development plan, why it is essential to

provide the MP separate fund? The MP is in such a position that he can use

his right in DDC in selecting development projects. (Ramdhoj, Political party

representative, DDC, Male, 65)

This shows how crazy the politicians whether elected or nominated were to
use resources at their own discretion without using the institutional mechanism of
planning and governance. The central level created an alternative way to mobilize
development resources to bypass decentralized planning and thus used the second
dimension of the power of agenda-setting (Lukes, 2005).

It is essential here to note the institutional arrangement for the role of MPs in
district development planning. As per the LSGA, MPs are the ex-officio members of
the District Council, DDC and Integrated Plan Formulation Committee (HMG,
2000a). Thus, the LSGA had provided sufficient role for the MPs in the main organs
of district development planning. However, it is conflicting that the MP who is a
member of the decision-making bodies of the district development planning process
ignores the projects that are identified from the bodies in which he or she is also a
member and selects projects outside the participatory planning process for the CDF.
This reveals how the central level is treating the DDC as an institution. The central
government is worried about winning the support of the MPs than strengthening local
bodies and local governance.

In spite of the above implications of CDF on the local self-governance and
decentralized planning, the new federal government in its first budget of the fiscal
year 2018/019 has given continuity to the CDF with some modifications. This time
than before there were strong voices in public to terminate the provision of the CDF
as it was against federal governance. While there was the dissatisfaction of the

provinces for less allocation of fund to them in the recent budget, the central government provided CDF for local development. The local governments also opposed this as a newly elected mayor expressed that "*The CDF needs to be stopped at all. It does not fit with the new federal constitution as the constitution has given the responsibility of local development fully to the local government*" *(Sunil Bhakta, Newly elected Mayor, municipality, male, 45)*. Hence, the issue of CDF needs to be examined through the perspective of autonomy of local government and decentralized planning. "Giving autonomy to local governments means that localities can make their own decisions without significant control by the central government" (Saito, 2008, p. 4). The continuity of CDF ignores the local needs and autonomy of the local government.

In addition to the CDF and its mobilization at the local level, the central level had also introduced new local-level projects ignoring district development planning. Such centrally implemented local projects were no more than the reinvention of centralization as the central interference in bypassing local development planning was occurring in practice. The selection process of the centrally implemented local projects, as an example, reflects how the district development planning was bypassed. One research participant who had worked with the Fund Board explained the selection process of the community drinking water projects that reflects well how such projects act out of the DDP:

> *The Fund Board at first selects NGOs to work in the districts based on their criterion. After selection of the NGOs, the Fund Board asks the selected NGOs to select water projects in their respective districts. For this Fund Board assigns a quota of the projects to each selected NGO. As per this quota, we contact the communities where there is a need for drinking water*

projects. For this, we use our various networks in the district. Naturally, we also consider the context where we can work in a more convenient way particularly where communities are more helpful and able to complete the project on time. After carrying out the feasibility study of the drinking water projects we submit it to the Fund Board for the approval. Then there will be an agreement between the Fund Board and NGO to implement the drinking water projects. The Fund Board asks us to inform it about these projects to the DDC. Then we send a letter formally to DDC to give the information about the projects to be implemented with beneficiary households and the total cost of the project. Based on this information the DDC include the projects and budget in the annual plan and program. (NGO activist, Norbu, male, 46)

This shows that there is very loose coordination between the NGO and DDC. Here, the Fund Board as a central agency is decisive. There is no consideration of the local needs identified by the DDC. Indeed, there were parallel mechanisms in the district in undertaking local development. The issue is the impact of the centrally implemented projects in local self- governance.

There was dissatisfaction with the centrally implemented local projects. One research participant commented that the central level and certain donors are interested in mobilizing resources and implementing such projects on their own, as he expressed:

Donors like the World Bank and ADB argue that community projects overcome the political biases of the local bodies. However, it is contradictory that there are representatives of the local bodies at each level of the community. In addition, projects included in the local bodies' development plan come from the settlement level with the participation of local people.

Hence, there is no reason to implement the projects directly by central authorities and donors on their own other than to bypass the process of local bodies for the sake of holding resources (Arjun Prasad, Executive Member, local body association, male, 60).

Thus, the central agencies which implement local projects have their own approach of project selections in the community. These agencies, though claim to coordinate local bodies, do not necessarily coordinate in the project selection process as they claim themselves as specialized agencies with their unique approach. For example, the Fund Board states its implementation approach where local people play a vital role in the planning and management of Water Supply and Sanitation (WSS) schemes (Fund Board, 2016). But, it does not make the linkage with district development plan prepared following a participatory planning process from the community level. A study reveals the sate of working relation of the Fund Board with the local government which shows that though there is the policy of the Fund Board to coordinate with local government through its Support Organizations (SOs) while undertaking local projects the local governments in practice were not found involved except fulfilling some formalities in the initial stage of proposal preparation (Buddeke, 2010).

However, instead of working with local bodies, like the Fund Board, PAF also focuses on NGOs to mobilize community organizations and select local projects without linking with the development planning of the local bodies. Instead, PAF's policy treats local bodies like NGOs as Partner Organizations (POs) to implement its programmes and projects (Poverty Alleviation Fund [PAF], 2017) but not as local government authority and no linkage with development planning. Though PAF has emphasized coordination with local bodies in recent years, there is no clear linkage

with the planning process of the local body but only informing the activities of the
PAF.

Both the central level authorities and donors are interested in introducing such
centrally implementable local projects. Donors' interest is to mobilize NGOs as per
their strategy. Because of the operational requirements of the donors, they sometimes
support the central authorities' policies that do not promote the decentralization policy
of the recipient country (Eaton et al., 2010). In such a context, projects of the interest
of the top-level politicians and bureaucrats often get the support of the donors, too.
For the centrally managed projects, the politicians need not consult the local bodies
and their participatory planning process where the project of their wishes might not
get selected and will not be implemented immediately to win the favour of the voters
and party workers.

So, the politicians prefer the short-cut routes of project selection as mentioned
above. Second, the politicians and bureaucrats play a role in providing opportunities
to the NGOs of their favour and control. The NGOs selection of such centralized
agencies becomes a hot cake. The bureaucrats get benefit from the central level set-
up where they engage themselves and these are such avenues where retired top-level
bureaucrats and officials get a chance in such central agencies. For example, in the
PAF Vice-chairperson position, which is a highly paid position, retired central
government's secretaries and officials of the planning commission had joined so far.
Thus, the central level agencies' interest is in control and mobilization of
development resources and donors' interest for their direct involvement have played a
role in hatching the local projects from the central level and weakening the local self-
governance.

Some donors were found more interested in promoting community organization but not involving the local bodies. Such an act creates confusion at the local level and weakens local self-governance. Such policy of mobilizing community organizations in local development parallel to local government is considered a difficult issue (Shotton, 2004). Though the donors are advocating more community organizations for the access of marginal people but such community organizations are captured by elite groups as such organizations are also influenced by social classes and powerful groups tend to dominate these organizations (Shotton, 2004). In such a context, it is challenging to implement participatory and inclusive planning approach in the strictly hierarchical societies (Shotton, 2004).

Manor (2004) critically puts his arguments on the attitude of donors and central governments of promoting directly local community projects through users committees bypassing the local bodies. As he argues, the motives behind such tendency for donors is that they see more access of local people through the users' committees while for central government officials it becomes an opportunity at the wish of the donors to influence the forming process of the committees selecting members of own favour to maintain the holding of power. Further, he argues that such an approach of mobilizing community organizations for local development weakens the role of local governments which results in "destructive conflicts and the undermining of local government authority" (Manor, 2004, p. 184). Thus, there are self-interests of both the donors and central agencies to mobilize NGOs and users committees in local development; however, this act reduces the role of local government and its planning system.

In addition to the mobilization of NGOs in the centre led local projects, the role of NGOs in local development is widespread. It is viewed that with the

introduction of alternative development, the involvement of NGOs in the development sector increased significantly limiting the role of the state as a facilitator of development (Pieterse, 2001). Though there are various views on the role of NGOs, they have been powerful development actors globally mainly in developing countries. While talking about NGOs, I refer only to the development NGOs as there are several kinds of NGOs. According to Aldashev and Navarra (2014), development NGO is a medium that works for not profit-making for mobilizing the resources from the donors to the projects implemented in developing countries. Thus, it is clear that the mobilization of NGOs is a global affair with the interests of the donor agencies.

Since the 1990s, in Nepal, there was not only emphasis on decentralization, there was equally or more than that was on the encouragement of the state for NGOs' involvement in development. With the preference of donors to mobilize their development funding through NGOs government took policy measures to mobilize NGOs in the development sector of Nepal. As a consequence, all international development agencies in Nepal overwhelmingly implemented their programmes and projects mobilizing NGOs (Mishra, 2001). The Eighth Pan (1992-1997), the first five-year plan after the restoration of democracy in 1990, emphasized NGOs as development actors. As a consequence, policy and legal environments were made favourable for easy operation of NGOs (Shrestha, 2002). This liberal policy helped the mushrooming of NGOs all over the country. According to Social Welfare Council Nepal, there were 46235 NGOs up to July 2017 (Social Welfare Council, 2018) which were registered mainly for development activities. However, there is no data on the NGOs active in the development sector. According to NGO Federation of Nepal (2017), there are 6,154 NGOs affiliated with it which indicates that there is a possibility of a large number of NGOs that are registered with the SWC but not active

as there is much possibility that active and professional NGOs often do affiliate with the NGO Federation.

As I mentioned in Chapter IV, the LSGA had put special emphasis on the participation of NGOs in the district development planning process. However, in practice, the NGOs did not fully participate in the district development planning process though they carried out development projects of significant budget amount. One research participant responded that *"NGOs inform the DDC's sectoral committees about their projects that are to be implemented in the district but do not necessarily take the projects selected by the district development planning process"* *(Ramdhoj, Political party representative, DDC, male, 65).* According to him, the budget that NGOs mobilize in the district in the development sector is almost equal to that of the DDC. This implies that the DDC which had been facing a shortage of resources to finance the local needs identified from the communities is also unable to coordinate and facilitate the resources being invested in its own constituency.

Despite the prevailing practice of NGOs not working as per the planning needs of the local government, regulatory efforts have not been enforced by the central level. One research participant's view was in confirmation with Manor's view (2004) as discussed above on the self-interests of politicians and bureaucrats in mobilizing NGOs in local development. He commented:

> *It is difficult to regulate and mobilize NGOs at the local level as the powerful persons and people in senior positions at the centre level in government have connections with the NGOs through their relatives who are operating the NGOs. Further, NGOs coordinate at the central level with the Social Welfare Council without any coordination with the local level and we at the local level cannot regulate them. (Kedar Nath, Staff, District Education Office, male, 40)*

I found from my observations of the district planning workshops that the political party representatives themselves were divided in their opinions in supporting and opposing the programmes presented by the NGOs. It has indicated that there is favour of political parties, their representatives and bureaucrats on the NGOs that has allowed the NGOs to work ignoring the local planning process.

From the perspective of local self-governance, local bodies in Nepal are found weak in governing the NGOs. It is well known that NGOs' working culture is different than the government culture. However, it does not mean that there cannot be collaboration maintaining independency of each other as some authors argue "a strong civil society and a strong state go together" (Pieterse, 2001, p. 83). The LSGA though envisaged the concept of integrated planning to involve all development actors in the participatory planning process, it was not happening in practice which had weakened the self-governing of the local bodies. The central agencies instead duplicating and overlapping the functions of local bodies through the practice of local development projects particularly outside the decentralized planning policy have been creating parallel structure at the local level.

Political Parties: Positioning and Influence in Local Development Planning

Political parties are not only the main force of the society, they are also increasingly considered as the main stakeholders of development (Keefer, 2011). For the enhancement of democratic governance and better development policies, the role of political parties remains crucial (Amundsen, 2007). Hence, the role of political parties in decentralization and decentralized planning is crucial. In the context of developing countries, development has been a main thrust of politics. In the case of Nepal, development is in the central place for more than six decades of its journey for

development. Political parties in Nepal claim their role for the development from the national to the local level.

According to the LSGA, there is no direct involvement of political parties in the process of district development planning. But, their representatives participate as elected members of the local bodies. In addition to the elected members of the local bodies, they also hold important positions in their respective parties. In such a way, the influence of political parties reflects through their representatives in the local bodies. In addition, there can be political parties outside the local government who are defeated in the election. In the multi-party democracy, local government needs to listen to the concern of all political parties in local development planning. In absence of local election since 2002, political parties' involvement in district development planning remained high. For about 10 years, during the void period of elected local bodies, political parties formally participated in local governance through the All Parties Mechanism (APM). The APM which is formally led by a government staff included the representatives of the political parties and key government officials (Sharrock, 2013). At the VDC level, the VDC secretary and at the DDC, the LDO lead the APM. The position of political parties was influential in the district development through the APM (Sharrock, 2013) though the LDO was formally leading the DDC.

The APM was abolished in 2011 as there was widespread criticism of the misuse of power and resources in local development associated with it. Here, one can compare this case with the practice of CDF through the MPs. It is noteworthy that contrary to the termination of the APM, CDF is still increasingly practised in spite of widespread criticism of its misuse and its role against local self-governance. This reveals the level of power associated with different levels of institutions. The CDF

policy is associated with the central level authorities while the APM is limited to the local level politicians.

Though the APM was legally terminated, the role of political parties interestingly remained influential in the decision making of the DDC. I observed in the field that the political parties' representatives were participating in the district development planning meeting. This entails the hold of political parties at the local level in decision-making. Here, a question arises why the LDO and DDC consulted the representatives of the political parties while the APM consisting of the nominees of the same parties was abolished? Hence, the role of political parties cannot be undermined while dealing with the issues of decentralized planning as they hold all three dimensions of power as described by Lukes (2005) in the local level power dynamics.

Though the emphasis is given to the participatory planning process from the settlement level so that grassroots people including marginal groups can gain access to the process, decisions are influenced by certain organized groups mainly the major political parties. One research participant commented that clever people are getting benefits from the development planning process as he remarked, *"In all kind of gatherings we observe the same kind of people whether they are representing NGOs or political parties – the persons are almost same" (Harischandra, Executive Member, local body association, male, 47).* This indicates that certain organized groups dominate public gatherings organized for development planning. Further, the research participant clarified the situation as he articulated *"In the absence of elected bodies, local leaders of political parties with the support of LDO and VDC Secretary take the decisions in development planning in DDC and VDC respectively" (Harischandra, Executive Member, local body association, male, 47).* Thus, how

much the voices of general people are heard in the development planning depends upon the role of the political parties whether they act in favour of the needs of the local people or only favour the party related activities and support groups. In the absence of professional planners, there is a high possibility of limited access of general people to development planning who do not have affiliation with the political parties.

There had been some efforts to facilitate the planning process in favour of marginal groups. For this, the government-appointed social mobilizers under a project of MLD. It aimed to mobilize the marginal groups so that they could participate and raise their voices for their development needs and they would not be dominated by political parties and elite groups in the community. But what happened in practice, as a research participant opined, was contrary to this idea: *"The social mobilizers were appointed as per the recommendation of political parties in the VDCs as per their level of influence in the respective VDC. The social mobilizers then work in the favour of the political parties" (Narayan Dutta, Political party representative, DDC, male, 58).* He further commented on politicization and argued:

> *There is a standard norm for the formation of the users' committee. But we political parties debate on that and struggle for nominating own party member in the committee. So, the political parties as per their hold in a VDC form the users' committee but not as per the norms and the need of the community.*

Thus, politics is everywhere and the role of political parties is influential in the local development and planning process. Hence, it is challenging to facilitate the participatory planning process where there is one dominant actor among the various actors.

The role of political parties was found not free and fair in the participatory development planning process. One research participant revealed what had happened in practice as he articulated *"We three major parties and LDO sit together and decide the distribution of development projects and budget among the parties including some projects for the LDO. Then we forward it to the district council and get it to pass from them"* (Narayan Dutta, Political party representative, DDC, male, 58). Another research participant confessed over the prevailing practice as he expressed:

> *We dismantled the system. The political party did not allow bureaucracy to work independently and put them in own favour. And bureaucracy too inclined to the political party to fulfil own interest. Thus, there is a kind of alliance of politician – bureaucrats. (Harischandra, Executive Member, local body association, male, 47)*

According to Pfaff-Czarneka (2008), "politicians, bureaucrats, and entrepreneurs form coalitions'' at the local level to siphon the development resources which she has described as "distributional coalitions" (p. 72). Hence, the role of political parties in the local development determines the effectiveness of a participatory approach to planning.

Thus, it is well known that the active political parties in the district are the other major DDP's stakeholders. The role of the political parties has been increasingly recognized with the institutionalization of the multi-party political system in the country. However, the role of political parties varies according to their positions at the national level and particularly in districts. As some research participants commented on the role of central level which was discussed in the preceding chapter, the ruling party at the central government level retains much control compared to the non-ruling parties. The officials from the central government

posted in the districts are loyal to the ruling party which is reflected publicly in the Nepalese administration system of transfers of the bureaucrats with the changes of ministers in the central level government. Even the local representatives of political parties often act in accordance with the directions of the central level. But control at the local level is mainly through the bureaucratic structure in guidance of the political party at the centre which obstructs local bodies from working autonomously. The placement of officials from the central level like an LDO in the DDC and a secretary in the VDC has helped the ruling political party to exercise its power at the local level.

In such a context, after the termination of the APM, the Local Development Officer (LDO) became a more powerful authority of the DDC. However, the LDO worked in close coordination with major political parties for development planning including other issues of the district. It revealed that the APM was formally abolished but its role was continued informally. The political parties and the LDO worked mutually for district development planning. One research participant shared how they worked with the LDO:

> *We must satisfy the LDO as he is the chairperson of the council in the absence of the elected body. He has the responsibility of successfully completing the district council to pass the budget and plan. And there are not only three major parties, there are also a number of small parties and various interest groups. To deal with them, we allocate a certain budget for the discretion of LDO. The LDO deals with the small parties and various groups using his part of the budget. This way we are working which is not as per the principle of decentralization. (Narayan Dutta, Political party representative, DDC, male, 58)*

With the placement of elected local government, it will change the power dynamics among the various actors, but the politicians- bureaucrats can remain in practice with the effect of "distributional coalitions" (Pfaff-Czarneka, 2008). However, one of the research participants (political party representative, DDC, male, 65) argued that the involvement of representatives of political parties has played a contributing role in absence of the elected bodies to some extent as there was some kind of check and balance in the resource allocation due to the presence of political parties. According to him, interaction among political parties in the DDC had helped rational prioritization of the development projects to be included in the DDP. He further argued that even in the case of elections, the persons elected would come from the same political parties who are active now in local politics. Though this argument appears not friendly towards the election, people cannot benefit even in the election system if there is a hold of elites in politics. Now, as there are elected local level governments, it is the right time to discuss the transformation of political parties drawing lessons from the past.

The same research participant (Ramdhoj, political party representative, DDC, male, 65), therefore, emphasized the schooling of political parties to be people friendly and respect governance. He emphasized:

There is a severe necessity for schooling the state and political parties in decentralization and local self-governance so as to transform the existing planning system of local government". He further argued that "*In the absence of such schooling, even in the case of elected bodies, there would not be any significant change as the elected representatives would work for the self-interest of their own parties as it was experienced in the past.*

Hence, the transformation of political culture and attitudes of political parties is the issue in implementing decentralized planning. Since the political parties are essential institutions for democracy, their role affects the working of decentralization and decentralized planning.

Local Development Planning: Who Care the Planning Capacity?

Decentralized planning aims to have the wider participation of local stakeholders in the planning process. It is founded in the collaborative theory of planning which assumes free flow of communication and discussion in the planning process. The LSGA planning policy as a decentralized planning policy envisaged a participatory planning approach in formulating the District Development Plan. Formulation of the DDP was possibly the most important function of the District Development Committee as it was the basis to mobilize resources for the development of the district. Therefore, the DDP was the concern of all stakeholders in the district and the central level. At the same time, the external donors who were supporting and working in Nepal were also interested in strengthening DDP (ADDCN, 2001; Agrawal, 1999). Preparation of the DDP requires meeting numbers of technical and procedural criteria specified in the LSGA (HMG, 2000a). These all suggest the need for technical support in the planning process for the local stakeholders including the politicians to make decisions that respond to the local needs.

However, pursuing planning in a participatory way is a complicated task in view of both theory and practice (Listerborn, 2007). Nevertheless, the LSGA envisaged a participatory approach for district development planning to explore the needs of the communities themselves. There are wide ranges of stakeholders that participate in the planning process. They are political parties, community groups, VDC personnel, DDC personnel, Members of Parliament, NGOs, private sector,

social activist, line agencies and local people. The aim of planning for all
stakeholders in principle is to identify the local needs and their prioritization allowing
the local communities to make decisions themselves on these matters. For this,
facilitative as well as technical support become essential for the free and goal-oriented
participation of all stakeholders to enhance the quality of the plan.

With the above theoretical and policy context of local-level planning, now, I
share my reflection from the observation of the district development planning
workshop organized at the Ilaka level in my study district.

> *What I observed in the Ilaka level planning workshop was that there was the*
> *participation of people but the workshop was not participatory. The*
> *prioritization of the needs was not carried out at all. What was happening*
> *was only the listing of the projects that will accumulate in the Project Bank*
> *Book (list of all projects accumulated through the planning workshops) of the*
> *DDC. I did not see planners that were facilitating the process. There were no*
> *special efforts to hear the women and marginal members of the community.*
> *The staff from DDC were only listing the demands of individuals and groups.*
> *The workshop was like a formal speech program where representatives of the*
> *political parties speak in the beginning part of the workshop.*
> *Then the participants were divided into sectoral groups. During the groups'*
> *meeting, the list of the projects of different sector collected without any*
> *appraisal and prioritization. At the end of the workshop, there was again a*
> *short session of closing with speeches from the representatives of political*
> *parties. Even, one speaker had got time to give his speech on Yoga. Thus, the*
> *planning workshop was completed with the rituals of a formal program. One*
> *notable thing was that at the beginning of the workshop DDC staff welcomed*

the representatives of the political parties and Member of Parliament with

providing Khada, a special cloth to put on the shoulder like the garland to

honour one, as an honour to them. It shows the sensitivity of DDC staff

towards the political parties and the recognition of their roles in the

workshop. In addition, the concern of the DDC staff was found to take

attendance of all participants in the register which will serve them as evidence

of the participation. (Field Note, January 2016)

In the above context of planning, the workshop revealed certain features of the planning practice. Most significantly, it was a more ritual practice than a lively discussion in the planning process. The role of DDC staff was not like the facilitators to conduct the participatory workshop. Planning itself is such a participatory process, it seeks sound communicative and facilitative skills. It is argued that planning process embodies politics and the planners who need to have good knowledge and maintain impartiality (Listerborn, 2007). Here, the emphasis has been given on the ability of the planners to handle the planning process so that the domination of certain groups over the planning can be discouraged through a participatory communicative process.

However, with the DDC, there are no such staff and stakeholders that are aware of the complexity of participatory planning. The DDC has only general administrative staff. For the planning purpose, one research participant argued:

The capacity of the staff of DDC and other local bodies is not as per

requirement. The capacity as of now is only able to carry out the formal

process as stipulated in rules and regulations" (Harischandra, Executive

Member, local body association, male, 47).

Similarly, one research participant commented that *"We have a very low level of planning capacity in the district. We lack the skills, understanding, the planning process and prioritization of the projects"* (Kedar Nath, Staff, DEO, male, 42). Hence, it cannot be expected that the present mode of staffing and the planning capacity of the stakeholders can support the local development planning as envisaged in the LSGA. One of the problems of the local bodies in Nepal is "lack of institutional capacity in planning and resource mobilization" (Panday, 2009, p. 122). This implies that there is a need for providing planning education to build planning capacity at the local level.

Next thing that I observed in the Ilaka level planning workshop was that there were no efforts for the prioritization of the projects from the big list of the projects submitted from the respective VDCs of that Ilaka. Rather, in addition to that, individual projects from different individuals and groups were added to the list of the projects being collected. Of course, these were the local people's needs. However, the further process followed was the collection of list of the projects instead of prioritization of the projects. This suggests improving the technical skills essential in the planning process rather than only collecting needs with the participation of local people (Shotton, 2004). Moreover, one belief was found among the participants that registration of the projects in the list is essential to lobby for resources from the DDC in future. It has at least legitimized the planning process as such. But it has seriously limited the scope of the planning workshop mainly to the registration of the projects.

Therefore, in the absence of prioritization, influential can lobby with the DDC in the further process to gather resources from the big list of the projects for the projects of their interests. One research participant commented on the lack of prioritization of the projects as he opined:

We do not plan projects as per the need of a certain area. If one place is good

in vegetable production and another place is good in orange production, we

need road there for the easy transportation of these goods. But, we do not act

in that way. We, Nepalis are not oriented to identify the local needs logically

in that way. Unless such thinking does not develop within us, I think the

facility cannot reach to the grassroots people. (Narayan Dutta, Political party

representative, DDC, male, 58).

Though there was also the participation of some line agencies'staff, their role was only for the formality of attendance. "The fact that projects identified through VDC planning processes are not screened at Ilaka and sector levels is a clear weakness. This limits cross-sectoral co-ordination" (Shotton, 2004, p. 80). My observation of the Ilaka level planning workshop confirmed that there was no any prioritization of the needs.

After the Ilaka level planning workshop, the planning process enters into the DDC level where various committees work out on the projects received from the Ilaka level. But the LSGA has envisaged the district development planning process which starts from the settlement which is below the ward level. The practice so far was that the DDC staff are present only in the Ilaka level workshop. One research participant shared what happens in practice:

So far, staff from DDC are only involved in the planning process at the ILka

level and DDC level. Below the Ilaka level at VDC, ward and settlement, the

DDC staff do not participate. The planning process at these levels, where, the

grassroots people participate, there is no facilitation of the DDC staff. The

process is carried out only by the general staff of the VDC and political

parties' representatives. (Ramdhoj, Political party representative, DDC,

male, 65)

From the point of view of the participation of grassroots people, the planning process at the lower levels (i.e. from the settlement to the VDC levels) is more important where local needs of the community are articulated. This is where prioritization of the local needs is subject to prioritization which provides direction in realistic planning. One research participant revealed:

We could not carry out prioritization of the projects right at the lower level

where there is good participation of people. When there is no prioritization

list of projects as a whole submitted to the DDC. Then DDC selects projects

from that big list in the influence of political parties and influential persons.

(Harischandra, Executive Member, local body association, male, 47).

Thus, there was no facilitation support from the beginning of the planning process that starts at the community level. Even at the Ilaka level, as I described above, there was no discussion on the prioritization of the projects to match with the available resources.

Therefore, it can be said that there is a need for technical capacity with the local governments to facilitate the planning process involving all stakeholders in order to develop the plan technically sound. To argue for such technical capacity at the local level is not to undermine the ability of the common people to take decisions at their own but to facilitate them providing technical inputs and collaboratively organizing the planning process. In lack of such capacity, the conventional practice was found dominated and influenced by certain individuals and groups. In such a context, it is highly possible that in absence of the technical capacity for adequately

facilitating the planning, influential individuals who are quick to get information and to understand the process grab the benefit of participatory planning.

Further, the traditional methods of planning do not equally encourage the participation of people, so there is a need of collaborative planning that urges for direct interaction among the stakeholders who have concerns with the results (Innes & Booher, 2000). To make the collaborative planning participatory and interactive, the role of professional planners becomes essential. It is to note that the role of planners is facilitative while the stakeholders make the decisions. To reach the appropriate decisions, the planners help the politicians and other stakeholders by providing technical information, priority areas, and viability of certain projects. Thus, with the support of planners, the plan that the politicians envisage can be technically sound.

Planning with planners helps stakeholders to translate the raw forms of people's needs into a technically and financially implementable prioritized plan. Such a role of the planners was found essential in the context of district development planning as it was collecting shopping list of projects creating 'project book bank' rendering the planning process into a mere ritual. It is viewed that "Most local governments appear incapable of serious planning, beyond assembling project wish lists" (Blair, 1998, p. 10). From such a practice only, the influential can put the projects of their interest from the project book bank into implementation accessing to resources. This suggests a need for planners to facilitate the planning process in a participatory way so that all stakeholders can participate in the process with free access to information and without domination of any actor which was lacking in the practice of decentralized planning policy in Nepal.

Conclusion: Motive of Power Holding Through Development Resources

The role of local bodies in practising district development planning was found highly squeezed with the encroachment of various actors in the premise of local development. Since the ultimate destination of the flow of development resources is the community level, it increased the interest of various actors namely the politicians, bureaucrats, and NGOs in the resources of local development. These actors worked with their own strategy bypassing the decentralized planning system. Though the local government is assumed principally to govern local development, the central agencies in Nepal have interfered largely in the premises of the local bodies. As a consequence, the local development planning as it was practised as District Development Plan by the District Development Committee had been limited in ritual as the central level was not considering its outputs as envisaged in the LSGA. The local bodies though were collecting local needs through the process of district development planning as prescribed in the LSGA. However, the central level was not accountable to the local needs.

At the local level, the NGOs and political parties were found powerful in holding development resources. NGOs were acting for this purpose not participating in the local body's planning process while the political parties were capturing the development resources participating and controlling the planning process as per their relative strengths practising factional politics and distribution of resources as per the quota system ignoring the real needs of the local people. There is a lack of a strong institutional mechanism to implement the planning process for the benefit of common local people.

As a whole, the prevailing practice had weakened the credibility of the local bodies in supporting the local needs of people reflected through the local development

planning. The attitude of the central level holding development resources is to exercise its positional power over the local bodies as the local bodies have to rely upon the central level for financial support. At the local level also, the concept of elite capture (Cerovac, 2017) has worked which has been illustrated well by Pfaff-Czarneka in the context of Nepal through the concept of "distributional coalitions" (Pfaff-Czarneka, 2008). Though there was decentralized policy, the centre was holding significant power of the local body through various means as explained above. Indeed, the central level was found using all three dimensions of power – power over decision making, power over agenda-setting and power over interests as Lukes (2005) has explained. By taking a decision unilaterally on the issue of local bodies, for example of termination of the APM, and the DDP, the central level was using the first dimension of power – power over decisions.

Similarly, by providing directives and instructions to the DDC for the formulation of DDP, the central level was using the second dimension of power – power over agendas (Lukes, 2005). Finally, the central level allowed NGOs and introduced other centre-led projects by influencing other stakeholders that the local bodies cannot manage all local-level projects, which is the use of the third dimension of power– power over interest. In the case of Nepal, it is evident that the central level remained unwilling to devolve power to the local level in practice.

CHAPTER VII

DECENTRALIZED PLANNING: ISSUES FROM THE PAST AND

REFLECTIONS ON RECENT PRACTICE

In this chapter, I first synthesise the past practice of decentralised planning in Nepal that I have discussed in the previous chapters, especially in Chapters V and VI. As I mentioned in the first chapter, this study began when there was decentralized planning guided by Local Self-governance Act, 1999 under the unitary governance system. Explored from the practice of LSGA, 1999, in this chapter, I discuss two emerging issues of decentralized planning namely – the autonomy of the local level and capacity of the local level to prepare an integrated local plan.

Then, in the next section of this chapter, I reflect briefly on the present practice of planning carried out by the local governments as per the new federal governance over the past two years. After the elections of local levels in 2017, local governments have been operating under the federal governance system introduced by the new constitution of Nepal. Finally, I conclude the chapter in light of the past experience highlighting the relevancy of the emerging issues as learning for federal Nepal and present practice of decentralised planning. While discussing the themes of this chapter, I found the view of Draper (1979) very relevant as he claims that any ideas for the future need to be based on the analysis and learning from the past and on the recognition of contemporary agendas and situation.
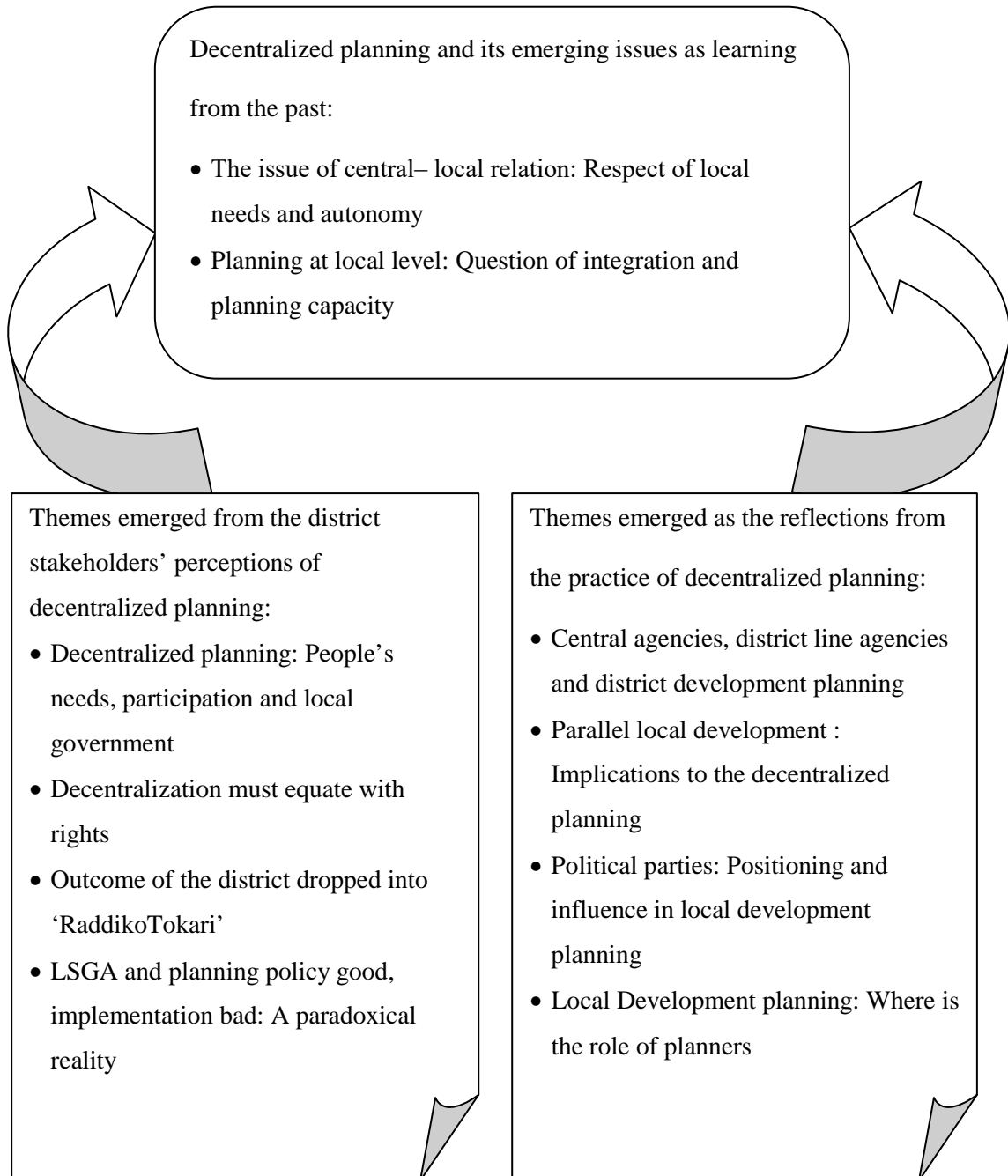
Emerging Issues From the Past Experience

I have discussed the findings pertinent two research questions of this study in Chapter V and VI. Here, in this section, I have synthesized the findings of the study

to draw the emergent issues. Of the two issues, the first one is the issue of central-

local relationship that stemmed while practising the decentralized planning in

Figure 4

Emerging Issues of Decentralized Planning Policy and Practice in Nepal

Decentralized planning and its emerging issues as learning

from the past:

- The issue of central– local relation: Respect of local
  needs and autonomy
- Planning at local level: Question of integration and
  planning capacity

Themes emerged from the district
stakeholders' perceptions of
decentralized planning:

- Decentralized planning: People's
  needs, participation and local
  government
- Decentralization must equate with
  rights
- Outcome of the district dropped into
  'RaddikoTokari'
- LSGA and planning policy good,
  implementation bad: A paradoxical
  reality

Themes emerged as the reflections from

the practice of decentralized planning:

- Central agencies, district line agencies
  and district development planning
- Parallel local development :
  Implications to the decentralized
  planning
- Political parties: Positioning and
  influence in local development
  planning
- Local Development planning: Where is
  the role of planners

relation to considering the local needs and respecting the autonomy of the local

bodies. The second issue I discuss is the integration of all the sectors of local

development into the local development plan. This study revealed that there were

various individual programmes and projects of different stakeholders practised in a

disjointed manner instead of their integration into the development plan of the local

body.

The Issue of Central-Local Relation: Respect for Local Needs and Autonomy

The practice of decentralized planning that was discussed in the preceding

chapters (i.e., Chapters V and VI) of this thesis reflects well the problematic

relationship between the central level and the local level. It does not mean that there

can be no problem in governing different levels of government's bodies. Past

experiences suggest that it is not prudent thinking to take decentralization as an ideal

governance system without considering the complex relationship between the central

and local levels. Decentralization undergoes contradictory interests of various actors

in a continuous manner (Eaton et al., 2010).

However, the issue emerged from this study is that the problem is more due to

the poor implementation of the decentralization policy and less due to the

shortcomings in the policy. It is because shortcomings of the policy can be improved

in the course of implementation if there is no attitudinal problem. The attitudinal

problem is of the centralist mentality that is deeply rooted in the higher-level

authorities as a cultural problem expanding further with the increasing development

resources in local development and interests in mobilizing the resources to

consolidate the existing power base. I have considered the issue of not implementing

the policy as the problem of governance that lacks accountability on the part of the

responsible authorities, namely the central-level authorities. Since Nepal's

decentralization reform has followed the top-down approach the implementation

becomes challenging (Shah & Thompson, 2004) which has been reflected in the practice of decentralized planning policy as explored in this study.

Thus, possibly, the central-local relation is the most challenging problem of decentralization that has crept into the implementation process, and thus, the success and failure of decentralization largely depend upon how the countries define and mediate the centre-local relation. It is argued that centralization tendencies are inherent characteristics which are reflected in various activities during the implementation of decentralization reforms (Poteete & Ribot, 2011). Hence, the concern is how these two actors, centre and local, mainly the centre mediates the situation without hampering the autonomy of the local levels.

The issue of implementation problem as this study has explored was in the consideration of local needs identified through a participatory planning process and respect of the autonomy of the local bodies in the spirit of local self-governance was found associated with this, which has shaped the centre-local relationships. When the local needs do not get the attention of the central level, it creates frustration with local governments while it erodes the trust of the local people to the local governments which ultimately weakens local self-governance. It is strongly argued that local governments are best to identify the local needs as they are very close to the local circumstances and to find common solutions to the local problems (Murray, 2014). Further, Murray argues that local government is the best option to address local needs that cannot be done by the private agencies and voluntary organizations and almost impossible by the central authority.

However, in case of Nepal, it is reported that there was a domination of the central level ministry over the local level development works that turned the local level planning as a functionless act (The Asia Foundation, 2012). It is different that

there can be weaknesses in the planning process of the local government but it does not mean that development agencies working far from the local level can identify the local needs better than the process of local bodies conducted at the community level. The planning process can be more participatory, interactive and transparent when all stakeholders of local development participate in the planning process of local government and take the projects of their respective sector integrating them into the integrated local development plan. For this, the planning process needs to reach the lowest level of community and facilitate the ordinary members of the community in a participatory way to help them to articulate their voices. This process becomes meaningful when all stakeholders are involved in the process and be accountable to the local needs.

Respecting the local needs is one of the major issues of local governance that emerged from the practice of decentralized planning in Nepal. Evolved from the long practices, the LSGA institutionalized the decentralized planning process which legally connected local bodies and central authorities following the bottom-up planning approach. Indeed, the bottom-up approach was to be a great help for the central level to know the local needs and to support them in fulfilling them. While for the local levels, it had to increase their ownership in the local projects supported by the central level. This was the concept of decentralized governance and development which assumes that local government is the closest institution of the local people and can identify the local needs more efficiently and distribute the services more equitably (White, 2011).

However, there appeared a gap in considering the local needs identified through the planning process. Particularly from the perspective of district stakeholders, it was revealed that the centre did not respect the local needs. One study

confirms this as it reports that sectoral ministries pay very low attention to the local

plan and do not coordinate with the DDC in the planning process (World Bank, 2014).

It is, therefore, argued that it is essential to have determined commitments of the line

agencies of the central level departments and ministries to decentralization reforms

(Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007). But, in case of Nepal, as this study has explored, it

was not only that the central level authorities did not consider the local needs came up

through the planning process but the centre also introduced centrally conceived

different projects outside the district planning process which largely weakened the

local body's planning exercise.

Therefore, why the centre did not act as per the LSGA raises the question of

policy implementation. It is argued that the implementation of decentralization faces

problems if the decentralization scheme is not equally acceptable for both the central

and local levels (Kulipossa, 2004). It means policy implementation relies upon the

stakeholders both at the central and local levels. But, in the case of decentralization,

much of responsibility goes to the central level since it owns power and resources.

Thus, as discussed in the preceding chapters, the question of distribution of power and

resources plays a role in the implementation of the decentralized policy. The central

level government agencies often show their unwillingness in giving up their control

(Martinez-Vazquez & Vaillancourt, 2011), which has been the main obstacle in

implementing decentralized policy.

One important issue as emerged in this study is the practice of the

Constituency Development Fund (CDF) which is the disrespect of local needs and

autonomy of the local bodies and one of the reasons of tensions between central and

local level. Arguably, the essence of the tensions is the lust for power to mobilize

development resources and thereby strengthening the hitherto positions of power

holders. The implication of such practice lies in the autonomy of local government. Thus, the policy on decentralized planning and its practice over the years have raised the issue of autonomy most significantly. In such a context, the future depends upon how political leadership and policymakers learn from past experience and implement the constitution. This is the right time to consider the experience from the past. It is argued that formulating good policies is not sufficient. It is important to develop the right institutions (Nadeem, 2016). This study argues that the main thrust of decentralization is the autonomy of the local level to respond to the local needs.

**Planning at Local Level: Question of Integration and Planning Capacity**

As this study revealed, in spite of the LSGA's emphasis on the integrated district development plan, all of the development sectors were not integrated into the district development plan. This reflects that decentralization reforms have been failed not due to the poor design but due to the implementation problem (Shah & Thompson, 2004). The district development planning was not able to bring all actors and sectors of local development into it. For this, there were problems both at the central and local levels. I discussed in the preceding chapters about the interference of the central level and its attitude to bypassing the process of district development planning. At the district level, there was the problem of capacity (The Asia Foundation, 2012) to undertake the planning process to make it comprehensive and integrated.

The discussions made in the previous Chapters V and VI had shown that many agencies were working in local development. However, the local development programmes and projects of these agencies were not integrated into the district development plan. This revealed that the district development plan was not an integrated plan of the district but only the plan of the DDC which itself was a small

part to respond to the needs of local people. The situation that was reflected in

practice has been presented in Figure 5 above. The outer circle in Figure 5 represents

the whole premise of local-level development. Inside the circle, there are various

stakeholders involved in local development.

Figure 5

Agencies Active at the Local Level
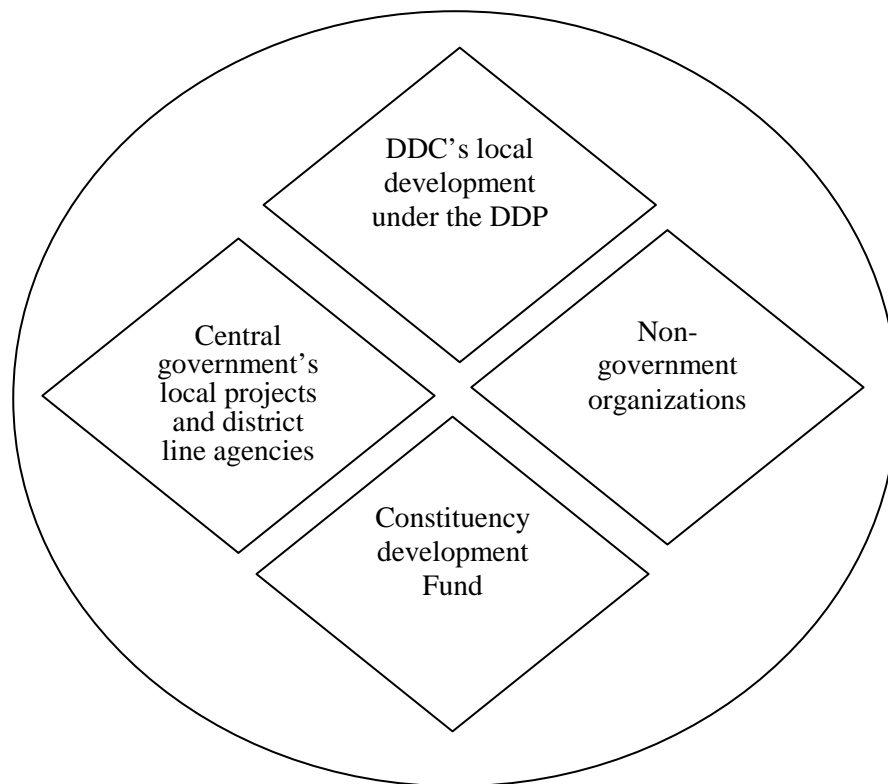
The DDC which was responsible to prepare the district development plan for

the whole district has remained only one small part of local development. This means

that the district development planning process which starts from the settlement level

and collects local needs from the people did not seek the involvement of other

stakeholders to cover all of the local needs that were related to various sectors of local

development. Such a practice cannot be treated as decentralized planning as it must

prove as an interactive thoughtful articulation of the local people to address their

problems and integrated with the national planning process (Bevir, 2013). Thus, in the absence of proper integration of all the sectors of local development in the DDP, the DDC could not play its role in the spirit of local self-governance. It needs to be noted here that integration into the DDP does not mean that all development work must be carried out by the DDC. Rather, it is only for a coordinated plan based on the local needs identified by the local people participating in the planning process which helps local bodies to manage the scarce resources avoiding duplication and overlapping and directing the resources to priority areas of the district.

Therefore, the issue of integration of local development is the issue of coordination and collaboration among the stakeholders. It is often reported that coordination among the various stakeholders is one of the chronic problems at the local level. Principally, it is the responsibility of the local body to bring all stakeholders in the district development plan. The DDC had made efforts to coordinate with line agencies when there were elected local bodies. But after that different stakeholders worked in their own ways. For this, the capacity of the DDC was very weak (The Asia Foundation, 2012) while the line agencies tended to bypass the process. It reveals that collaboration among the key stakeholders has been a serious issue (Local Development International, 2013).

Hence, the lack of integration of local development activities has been a challenging issue in the practice of decentralized planning. Why local development efforts are not integrated into the plan of local government? Similarly, why CDF is continued in spite of widespread criticisms? Likewise, why the central level introduces local level projects bypassing local government and activates the district line agencies without devolving the sectors like education? Furthermore, why NGOs do not work under the development framework of local government? As I explored in

this thesis, these all are in practice mainly due to the desire of holding the power of central level and other stakeholders using the local development resources.

But the local bodies could not address the local needs as the powerful politicians and bureaucrats were not willing to transfer development resources to the local level to address the local needs (Manor, 2011). There are different motives of different stakeholders to hold development resources. For instance, political parties seek the support of the voters taking credit of providing the development projects to certain groups of local people. NGOs protected by the politicians and influential bureaucrats create lucrative jobs for themselves and support politicians implementing projects of their interests. Association of NGOs with certain political parties and political ideologies (Ismali, 2017; Tamang & Malena, 2011) reveals such possibility in Nepal's context. Hence, the desire of seeking power through resource mobilization prevents various actors to get involved in the formal planning process of local government.

There were various kinds of centrally implemented local projects which were against the spirit of local self-governance. There remains always a possibility that the higher levels for the sake of mobilizing resources using all the three dimensions of power (Lukes, 2005) create such projects to implement them at the local level. In the name of operational efficiency, donors take interests in conducting such projects and the central level strongly desires for such projects for the mobilization of development resources (Eaton et al., 2010). As the discussion made in chapter VI shows, to formulate integrated development plan and to institutionalize it in the local governance process, both the support of the central level to protect the autonomy of the local governments and the planning capacity of the local government are the important aspects.

In the section that follows, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I discuss the preliminary practice of decentralized planning of local governments under the federal governance system.

Reflections on Recent Practice in Federal Governance

The issue raised at the beginning of this study 'whether the *Singhadurbar* has reached the villages?' is still in public discourse even after the implementation of the new constitution with federal governance. Though it was political rhetoric carried by political parties and publicized by the media during the local level elections in 2017, it reflects, among various aspects, the issue of power transfers to the local level through the implementation of the new constitution. A comment from one research participant was "*Though it is said that rights will be transferred from the Singhadurbar to villages, we are not allowed even to hire the junior level staff like office assistant*" (Dharmabir, elected Ward Chairperson, male, 68). After the elections, the local governments have been operating under the federal governance system introduced by the new constitution of Nepal. It is essential to note here again that with the promulgation of the new constitution, Nepal's decentralization has shifted from unitary to the federal governance system. The difference in these two systems is that in the former it takes the form of "discretionary decentralization" where central authority decides the distribution of power to sub-national levels while under federalism it is termed as "constitutionally guaranteed decentralization" where the distribution of power is ensured by the constitution itself (Osaghae, 1990, p. 84). Obviously, the constitutionally guaranteed decentralization as in federal system is institutionally more powerful than the discretionary decentralization under the unitary system.

However, as I have argued in Chapter V, the success or failure of any decentralization policy depends upon how it is implemented in the real world. Implementation, on the other hand, depends upon the role of the leading agency – the central level and then upon the capacity of the local level to perform itself as well as to negotiate with the central level in the decentralization process. Indeed, policy implementation in Nepal has been a major issue in the past. Particularly there is "lack of political and bureaucratic will to see power devolved from Kathmandu" (Brand, 2015, p. 239). The problem is such that authorities accept the policy but fail to implement.

Hence, in such a context of policy implementation, it is imperative to discuss the federal-local relationships drawing from the initial practice over the past two years. As it has just been two years of practising federalization in Nepal, it would be too early to arrive at any conclusion on its functioning. Nonetheless, I intend to explore the issues of self-governance and decentralized planning that prevailed in the initial period of the implementation of the new constitution. While discussing the federal-local relationships, the position of the province comes into consideration since federalism in Nepal has three levels of the governing system – federal, province, and local level. In this section, I argue that the local levels, though empowered through constitution, are not enjoying the autonomy in the spirit of self-governance to formulate and execute their local development plan due to the non-cooperation of the federal level on one hand and inadequate planning capacity of the local levels on the other.

Here, the most fundamental issue is the implementation of the constitution to make the local levels function autonomously by exercising the powers incurred by the constitution. Over the past two years, the provinces and local levels were found

dissatisfied with the federal government for not creating an enabling environment for them in the spirit of the constitution (Democracy Resource Centre Nepal [DRCN], 2019a). One research participant commenting on the difficulties of delayed laws formulation argued that "*It has been essential to conclude the case of the concurrent powers of different levels. The lack has created difficulties to initiate many things at the local level*" (Gopal, elected Mayor, male, 57). He further provided an example of dual management as he stated "*we are managing school teachers appointed by us. But there are also teachers appointed by the federal government. Thus there are two types of teachers in our schools.*"

As per the constitution, the laws of the local levels should follow the laws of the federal and province, and likewise, the laws of the provinces should follow the laws of the federal level. However, "The federal government delayed the enactment of laws necessary for the provinces" (DRCN, 2019b, p.18). Further, a study reports that local levels and provinces waited for the federal legislative frameworks to avoid the contradictions with the federal law and the confusion to prepare laws in case of concurrent powers provided to all three levels of government as per the constitution still lingers (DRCN, 2019a). Along with the delays in introducing new laws, the laws which are enacted so far do not truly match the spirit of the constitution providing autonomy to the local governments as the laws were formulated at the federal level without consulting the local levels (The Asia Foundation, 2017). Constitutionally, it is the responsibility of the federal level to develop mutual trust and cooperation among the three levels of government (DRCN, 2019a).

Like the central government in the past unitary system, the federal government has created its extended wings at the district or local levels in the present federal system, too. Constitutionally, the local levels in Nepal are considered powerful.

However, some activities initiated by the federal level agencies are intended to curtail the autonomy of the local level. For example, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) has created the Education Development and Coordination Unit (EDCU) in the districts. Similarly, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development has created its separate wings at the district level in the name of Agriculture Knowledge Centre and Veterinary Hospital and Livestock Service Expert Centre. This reflects the centralist tendency of the past as there were District Education Offices. There has been rising conflict between the central and the local levels in the management of school teachers (Upreti & Parajuli, 2019) as it is the constitutional right of local level but the central level is holding this as its own. One research participant commented that

> *The provisions of different wings of central level like the Agriculture*
> *Knowledge Centre are not essential to establish at the local level. Such*
> *services come under the rights of the local level. We have observed their*
> *activities as misuse of resources and have complained about it.* (Gopal,
> elected Mayor, male, 57).

The local governments consider such activity as intended to interfere upon their rights that lead to the weakened local level power. All this reflects that the tendency of centralization for mobilizing resources to strengthen the power-holding position is still prevalent in federal Nepal.

One of the pertinent longstanding unresolved issues of decentralization and self-governance in Nepal is the issue of staff deputation to the local level from the central level. I have discussed this issue in Chapters V and VI in the past context. In the present federal system too, there is the practice of federal level deputing their staff to lead the office of the local governments. One research participant commented that

the power of the local level, particularly the rights of hiring required staffs at the local level was not allowed as he articulated "*We need an Architect Engineer. This is an approved position. The situation is such that neither the federal government sends staff nor allow us to hire on our own*" (Gopal, elected Mayor, male, 57). Further, another research participant argued that:

> *Because of deputing of Chief Administrative Officer at the local level, the federal government, in essence, has created three factions within local level administration. Of them, one is the elected political wing, another is a group of locally appointed staffs and the final one is the staffs deputed from the federal level. This has generated conflicts among the three wings rather than harmony in work. (Prakash,* Senior Municipal Level Staff*, male, 52).*

Such a practice has continued the conflict between centrally deputed bureaucracy and elected local governments (DRCN, 2019a). In essence, this is the curtailing of autonomy of the local level by the central level. Such an act does not recognize the constitutional role of the local governments as they do not have the rights to manage their own human resources. The federal level indeed seeks controlling arm over the local level deputing the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) at the local levels and exercises the power of decision-making, agenda-setting and ideological influence (Lukes, 2005) through the CAOs.

Thus, it is much akin to the past practice of sending Local Development Officers (LDOs) from the central level to the local bodies. There was a prevalent tendency among the bureaucrats at the local level to enjoy power over the elected representatives as the bureaucracy is working with the same mentality as they were when there were no elected local bodies over the past two decades (The Asia Foundation, 2017). The bureaucracy which should be primarily the means of local

government appears as a strong power exercising stakeholder itself. The power exercise has taken place between the elected local representatives and the chief bureaucratic staff deputed from the centre. So it indicates the strong presence of centre within the local level as to control rather than cooperate as the economic and administrative powers lie with the Chief Administrative Officer. Further, frequent transfers of staff sent to sub-national levels without consulting the province and local governments had created difficulties (DRCN, 2019a). All this does raise the pertinent issue also whether Nepal has federalism "based on the principles of cooperation, coexistence and coordination" (Government of Nepal, 2016, p.150).

Like the domination of the central level over the local level in the past, there was a state of very poor coordination among different levels in federal Nepal. It is viewed that with the federal governance, the problem of coordination among three levels of government in planning (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2019) has been more problematic. In particular, the overlap in resources allocation for development projects entails poor coordination between the province and the local level. And even with all three levels of government as a whole in the planning process, there were increasing cases of allocation of budgets from all three levels (DRCN, 2019b) causing overlapping of limited resources.

The fifteenth plan's approach paper of Nepal has pointed out that one of the major problems of planning in the newly introduced federal system is the lack of clarity about the projects that associate with the different levels of government as there is no clarity of the concurrent rights of the three levels stated in the new constitution (NPC, 2019). In addition to such a problem, there is the continuity of distribution of development budget through parliamentarians in the federal governance system. Thus, in spite of its overwhelming criticism in the public, the

CDF is getting continuity in the new federal system of governance with some

modifications in its model (Ministry of Finance, 2018). However, this cosmetic

modification does not address the principal issue of autonomy of local governance on

one hand and it establishes the wrong practice of legislatures' involvement in the local

development projects on the other hand. Recently, the government has continued the

CDF in the name of Local Infrastructure Development Partnership Programme with

the decisive role of the Member of Parliament, as in the past through the budget

speech (Ministry of Finance, 2018). This is a contradictory practice in view of power

devolution to the local level for local development. Such a practice as argued is the

act of votes buying targeting and influencing certain groups of citizens (Khemani,

2010) which adversely affects the local democracy and decentralization reforms.

Further, it is also viewed that there is weak capacity within the three levels of

governments and it is a challenge to improve their capacity for the development of

proper planning (NPC, 2019). The planning capacity was found weaker with the local

levels as it was found that "insufficient technical and administrative capacity led some

local governments to allocate funds to projects without adequate research and cost

estimation (DRCN, 2019d, p. 5). One research participant viewed that "*Our staff are*

of traditional thinking. They do not have new skills. Certainly, this skills gap has

affected our planning work" (Gopal, elected Mayor, male, 57). Another research

participant viewed that "*though we are working hard for the planning of the*

municipality, in view of the volume of work and required process it is essential to

have a Planning Officer to look after the planning process" (Prakash, Senior

Municipal Level Staff, male, 52). Similarly, one research participant expressed that

"*a team of five people from Ward Office visits the local communities to select a few*

projects from the list of more than hundred projects" (Dharmabir, elected Ward

Chairperson, male, 68). It was reported that there is no practice of allocating resources with the local governments by establishing a planning procedure but there was a tendency to scatter resources (Parajuli et al., 2020). It was also reported that there was less participation of people in the planning process and lack of transparency in the selection of the projects and budget allocation (DRCN, 2019a). Similarly, there was no coordination in planning between the province and the local levels and the bottom-up planning process was no more in practice.

In addition, it is reported that the elected local representatives often felt restricted when they could not plan the development activities as per the local needs as the bureaucratic staff aligned the planning decisions as per the executive orders of the federal government (The Asia Foundation, 2017). At the same time, it is viewed that the self-interests of elected representatives largely dominate the planning process (DRCN, 2019d). As a consequence, the local level planning is facing the challenges in terms of quality and accountability (DRCN, 2019c). This indicates that the new federal governance did not learn from the past long practice of development planning and put fewer efforts in establishing new institutions to strengthen the coordinated planning system to suit the federal governance.

In view of local governance, as per the new constitution, there are some changes in the government structure. Mainly the new federal constitution of Nepal has tried to address the problem of parallel working structures of the district level line agencies providing the power of these agencies to the local level. Except this, how the other stakeholders and their respective sectors will be coordinated and integrated into the local development plan is still not clear. In spite of the constitutional powers provided to the local level, the establishment of some district-level offices as

mentioned in the previous chapters might create difficulties in formulating integrated development plans of the local governments.

Thus, perceptions and experiences of elected local governments portray a paradoxical situation about the workings of the local governments as they were found optimistic in view of the constitutional provisions for local governments whereas it is doubtful in view of the support of the federal level to create enabling environment for the autonomously functioning of local governments (The Asia Foundation, 2017). The main doubt is in true implementation of the policies. It is argued that such a central-local tension is an emerging issue in most of the countries that are pursuing the decentralization reforms whether they are a federal or a unitary system of governance (Manor, 1999, 2011; Ribot, 2002).

Such doubt is deeply rooted in the centralist mentality which I have discussed in the preceding chapters, Chapter V and VI of this study. Hence, the implementation is the most crucial issue as good polices often face hurdle during implementation due to weak political commitment and lack of willingness on the part of the bureaucrats. According to a research participant,

> *There is a domination of traditional thinking towards the local level. So, there are comments in a negative way rather than to improve the local level taking positively that the local governments are thereafter the gap of 20 years. The fact is that the government closest to the people is only the local government. I do not say that there have not been any faults or weaknesses among a few local governments. But, here negative comments are made for all local governments though they are working well. (Gopal, elected Mayor, male, 57).*

It is argued that the democratically elected government has an inherent bottom-up relationship while the bureaucratic system is accustomed to the top-down

culture (The Asia Foundation, 2017) which consequently brings conflict between elected local representatives and bureaucratic staff deputed from the central level. As discussed above, at the local level, bureaucratic staffs exercise parallel power with the elected local representatives. It does not mean that there is no need to educate elected representatives as they also lack experience of working in the federal set-up (The Asia Foundation, 2017) and are largely guided by interests of party politics. Nevertheless, the role of political parties is crucial to implement any reforms. However, in the case of Nepal, the structure of political parties is highly centrally controlled which creates a contradictory culture for federal governance. This indeed does not create an enabling environment for locally elected officials to make decisions at the local level (The Asia Foundation, 2017).

It is viewed that within the federal system, there remains a possibility of changes in power distribution in course of its practice which is explained as "intergovernmental volatility" and the patterns of centralization and decentralization of power changes depend upon changes in political, social and economic contexts of a country (Conlan, 2014). This suggests that what has been written in the constitution cannot be truly implemented. Indeed, the implementation of the federal constitution largely relies upon the role of the federal government whether it positively transfers powers to sub-national levels or negatively holds power without altering the old legislations (UNDP, 2008). Further, even if there is political will, the bureaucracies at the central level jeopardize the process of transferring power to new federal structures that they were enjoying hitherto (UNDP, 2008).

Further, Nepal's power structure has always been interpreted in terms of the center located in Kathmandu versus other parts of the country. It is generally perceived that the state's power was monopolized by Kathmandu while different parts

of the country were marginalized. This is the reason that power transfer is viewed as whether the power reached to the villages from the *Singhadurbar* – the central administrative office located in capital Kathmandu. Indeed, the tendency of centrality still remains due to the perpetual greed of holding power and resources. Overall, the initial practice of federalism shows indication of deviation from the principles of federalism– cooperation, coexistence and coordination as envisaged in the constitution. In such a context, the local levels face the challenge of enjoying autonomy for self-governance while they are creeping with a low level of administrative and planning capacity.

Policy Is Not Enough, Implementation Matters

The practice, both in the unitary and federal system, faces the issue of implementation of the decentralization policy. Particularly, such tendency emerges with the motive of the central authorities which leads to controlling of the resources and undermining the autonomy of the local levels. Even though the powers of the three levels of governments are determined constitutionally, such tendency prevails in practice. Particularly, the 'centralist mentality', popularly termed as '*Kendrikrit Manashikata'* in Nepali with the initiation of discourse on federalism, has obstructed the natural course of decentralization and decentralized planning in Nepal. The centralist mentality is used to mean the attitude and behaviour of people and groups that favour holding of power at the centre level instead of supporting its transfer to the lower levels as per policy. This type of behaviour of the central authority results in poor policy implementation which weakens the integration of local development planning with coordination of all agencies working at the local level under the leading role of the local government. Along with this, at the same time, inadequate planning capacity of the local governments to facilitate the planning process in a participatory

way with prioritization of local needs also affects the planning process. Given the deep-rooted centralist mentality, the role of informal institutions needs to be considered along with the role of formal institutions. In federal Nepal, even after the constitutional provisions, there are some indications that decentralization reform is not over mainly in terms of implementation and there can be a struggle between the federal, province and local level's forces and interests as conflicts are surfacing even in the initial phase of implementation.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

This final chapter of my thesis intends to give an overview of the whole report including its implications. The summary section briefly recapitulates the report. Then I present the discussions of the findings pertinent to the two research questions posed in Chapter I. This follows the conclusion section where I draw the essence of the study. Finally, implications indicate the contribution of this study to the field of policy, practice and research.

Summary

The research idea emerged when I saw the vigorous role of decentralized planning as an important means for the implementation of decentralization reform for local development and local self-governance. However, I sensed that the decentralization policy in Nepal was not put into practice effectively (Pandey, 2009, The Asia Foundation, 2012). This led me to explore the various facets of decentralized planning policy and its practice in Nepal over the decades. While I was completing my study, though the LSGA, 1999 was in practice, the country got the new constitution, elections were held at three levels and new governments were established at all levels. This new development, a constitutionally guaranteed federal system of governance, provided a strong rationale for this study. This was because the study can provide lessons and insights for the new local governments in Nepal and for the similar context in other developing countries that are pursuing decentralization reforms.

With the above concept of the problem, purpose and significance, I reviewed the conceptual and theoretical literature relevant to the research problem. Decentralized planning being a multidisciplinary phenomenon draws from a wide range of concepts and theories. It is founded in the concept of the devolutionary form of decentralization. Decentralization in its later stage is closely associated with the concept of governance and advocates decentralized governance instead of centralized governance. I have discussed power theories and institutional analyses. Particularly, the three-dimensional theory of power postulated by Lukes (2005) has been adopted in this study. The three dimensions of power influence the planning process though in varying degree depending upon the context. Power and institutions are closely related concepts as the institutions are the sources of power. Institutions refer both to the formal and informal institutions. I have discussed planning theories from a traditional rationalist perspective to the present collaborative planning. Drawing from the above-mentioned concepts and theories, I finally conceptualized decentralized planning as an important function of the local government to be practised autonomously and collaboratively to address the local needs.

Methodologically, a subjectivist ontology which believes in socially constructed realities guides this study. Likewise, the epistemology of this study is interpretivism that allows exploring multiple realities. With these ontological and epistemological stances, this study has followed the interpretive paradigm. Thus, I employed qualitative case study inquiry as it is increasingly in use for policy study which I found useful to study decentralized planning policy and its practice. For my fieldwork, I selected a mid-hill district of Province Three considering this to be an illustrative case for the study of the practice of decentralized planning policy. Within

the framework of a qualitative case study, this study generated data and carried out data analysis.

The review of the historical context reveals that decentralization has been an integral part of the governance system for a significant period in the political history of Nepal. However, the modern notion of decentralization took place only after 1950. Of the various efforts of decentralization reforms, the Local Self Governance Act that remained into practice from 1999 to 2017 was considered important in view of decentralized planning policy. Amid such a context of decentralization, Nepal promulgated the new constitution of Nepal in 2015 structuring federal governance system delegating substantial power to the local level. Since planning by the newly elected local governments as per the new constitution is yet to be practised in full-fledge, the policy and practice of planning that were practised so far as per the LSGA 1999 at the district local level have been discussed in this study.

Of the two research questions of this thesis, the first sought to know the perceptions and experiences of the stakeholders of decentralized planning policy and practice in relation to the district development planning in Nepal. The perceptions and experiences of the research participants suggest that local stakeholders have appreciated the decentralized planning process as a good policy as it had envisaged the concept of self-governance. However, as this study explored, the practice of decentralized planning was not along this line. One stance is the deployment of the staff from the central level which is a question of accountability as the employee deputed from the central level are accountable only to their central level administrative and political authorities (Manor, 2010). Further, I found from the discussion of perceptions and experiences of stakeholders on the decentralization and decentralized planning that these were the constructs of central level which were

deliberately not implemented with the vested interest of the central level, particularly to hold development resources to sustain the existing power base.

The second research question sought to explore the reflections of the practice of district development planning on decentralization and decentralized planning in Nepal from the perspective of local-self governance. The emerged themes from the field data revealed that local bodies in Nepal were not self-governing and autonomous entities as they were said to be in the LSGA. The central level interfered in the role of local bodies not devolving the certain sectors that were expected to be devolved to the local level. Instead, the central level carried out its development activities without coordinating with the local bodies. This had weakened the credibility of the local bodies in supporting the local needs of people reflected through local development planning.

Further, the implementation of local-level programmes and projects from the central level agencies with no linkage to local development planning distorted the notion of decentralized planning. More importantly, the role of politics and political parties is vital in local governance and decentralized planning. However, the role of political parties, though remained at the centre-stage in decision making, was limited in serving only for the parties' interest than the general local people. The political parties and their connections were found holding decision making power.

As a whole, the practice of decentralized planning had not aligned with the spirit of local self-governance as envisaged by the LSGA. From the local perspective, the central level was reluctant to implement the LSGA in its full spirit. Rather it introduced various measures that were unfriendly to the autonomy and local self-governance. However, the above-explored issues can be learning for the new federal governance system as the new constitution of Nepal has constituted local

governments providing governing rights to the local level. However, initial practice in federal governance reflects the tendency of poor implementation of the policy as guided by the constitution. The paradoxical reality is that in the decentralization reform, the central authorities have to implement the decentralization reforms losing the powers they have been exercising (Shah & Thompson, 2004).

Conclusion

The practice of policy at the local level reflects more closely whether the policy has been implemented as it is intended. In this research, I explored the emergent issues based on the perceptions and practices of decentralized planning policy from the local stakeholders' perspective. I have drawn three key conclusions from the discussions of the emergent issues that I present in this section.

My first conclusion is that the central level has been obstructing the full-fledged implementation of the decentralization policy. This policy – practice gap that often exists due to the motives of the central level in mobilizing local development resources at their discretion limiting the role of the local level can be considered a governance issue that emerges due to the lack of accountability of the leading institution, namely the central level government. As a consequence, local governments enjoy less autonomy in exercising decentralized planning. An argument often made in favour of a certain level of interference of the central level in the local level is the low level of capacity of the local governments. However, the capacity of the local level is embedded in the whole governance system which ultimately relies on the efforts of the central level in building the capacity of the local governments. While talking about the capacity of the local level, there is a tendency to ignore the attitude of the centralist mentality of the central level that reflects in the exercise of

multiple forms of power that does not create enabling environment for the workings of the local government, even the rights mandated in the policy.

My second conclusion is that the decentralized planning process though institutionalized legally at the local level as an essential process is largely a ritual practice in the absence of enabling environment for exercising a collaborative planning process. Mainly, the local governments' low level of capacity constrains them to practise decentralized planning in a fully participatory way and to provide technical support and priority criteria to check the domination of certain influential groups, particularly, political parties and their connections. This is an important aspect of decentralized planning to be discussed. Principally, the character of the political parties reflects in practice as to work for self-party interests rather than addressing the common needs of the local people. This political culture has hampered the participatory or collaborative essence of decentralized planning. In addition, there is a low level of planning capacity with the local level to facilitate collaborative planning and develop a comprehensive local development plan integrating the sectors like education, health, agriculture and so on. Hence, the low level of technical capacity for planning and unhealthy party politics are the issues that have emerged from the practice of decentralized planning at the local level.

Finally, my third conclusion is that the implementation of the decentralized policy depends upon the struggles of the local levels with the central level. In the absence of such a struggle from the local levels, the central level enjoys its monopoly over the self-governing autonomy of the local levels. The monopoly of the central level expands in the absence of legitimate elected local governments to put pressure against the monopoly. The past practices also reveal that the association of local level governments can advocate and pursue the struggle for the implementation of

decentralization policy. Hence, the empowerment of local governments through their organizations and networks can raise their voices against the centralist mentality of the authorities and play a role in promoting local self-governance. Indeed, decentralization and decentralized planning are the dynamic concepts that exist in public discourse along with the struggles between the central and the local levels.

Implications

The findings and insights of this study that were drawn from the perspective of stakeholders entail certain implications in various facets of decentralized planning. Mainly, they imply in the field of policy, practice and research. For the policymakers and practitioners, this study provides insights through the lessons as learning from the past experience as I discussed in Chapter VII. Particularly, this study explores the attitude of centralist mentality and urges to respect local autonomy while designing policy and programmes related to local development and local governance. This study reveals the essentiality of the integrated local development planning.

There are also some practical implications of this study. Mainly, recognizing the need of planning capacity at the local level to pursue participatory planning is imperative, particularly, in view of present confusions of newly elected local governments integrating the sectors like education, health and so on. Similarly, this study provides the insights into the workings of political parties; mainly for their schooling for the transformation from the self-interests centric politics to people-centric. For this, this study urges the concerned stakeholders to employ fully participatory planning practice and enhance the planning capacity to make the plan technically sound. Though the change in the attitude of political parties is a difficult task, it becomes essential to promote democratic governance through cultural transformation, particularly through the process of educating people. Hence, cultural

transformation seeks innovation in the academic curricula not only to enhance the technical capacity for planning but also to develop collaborative planning culture among the stakeholders, particularly the political actors who play the leading role in the planning process.

Finally, this study is from the perspective of district-level stakeholders with a focus on the LSGA that may articulate the perspectives of present rural municipality and municipality's stakeholders. It is imperative to have further research from the perspective of central level and province level stakeholders to get insights into the failure of the implementation of decentralized planning policy that can help understand the present chaos of local government under the new federal system. In addition, this qualitative research triggers further academic research in the role of education for collaborative planning at the local level.

Reflections

While reflecting upon my long journey of this study, I felt that the qualitative research itself is a transformative process that helps a researcher to interact with the context and understand it. But, as I understand, for this, a researcher needs to be aware of the fundamental philosophical concepts, namely ontology and epistemology. I was involved in different kinds of studies and research in my professional life but without acknowledging the role of philosophical questions that informed and shaped the process of research. Indeed, the academic community that I lived with during my study helped me to come out of the limited technical trap of knowledge. It does not mean that now I am knowledgeable. But it is my learning that to know what you don't know is the highest level of knowledge for an academician or a scholar or a researcher. One of my understandings that I acquired from this research is that the

transformative process is a matter of feeling, acknowledging and acting accordingly rather than merely claiming it.

In addition to the above-mentioned philosophical understanding, another remarkable thematic insight I derived from this study is the role of education in policy implementation, particularly through the institutionalization of any reforms. It is interesting to reflect that until the main part of my research process, I was unable to recognize the vital role of education in the institutionalization of policy implementation imparting cultural values. What I learned from this experience is that the why part of the research is a fundamental aspect that seeks a deeper level of exploration of any phenomenon. Only by dealing intensively with the why part of a research issue, it is possible to explore the deep-rooted phenomena embedded within society. At the same time, I saw the strength of qualitative research in responding to why and how questions.

Finally, my learning from this study has empowered and motivated me to undertake qualitative research. It would be highly useful for me to undertake evidence-based research to inform policy and programmes in the field of education and development and any development related issues. In this sense, my research-based academic journey has begun. Based on my learning from this study, I intend to contribute further to educating people on collaborative planning for sustainable local development. This is a major shift for me from the thinking of technical and structured planning process to the collaborative and democratic process of planning that helps empower people. Though there are challenges in such a process which seek transformation at the societal level, it is a highly appropriate time for Nepal which is currently adopting federal governance with constitutional powers at the local level.

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APPENDIX

LUKES' THREE DIMENSIONS OF POWER AND ITS RELEVANCY IN

PLANNING

Type of Power Dimension	Key Features
1st dimension: Decision-making power	It can be observed in planning and political decisions that affect different people. It is revealed through political action and very often it is seen in conflicts between these actions and the actors or people that are affected by them. These conflicts can sometimes be observed in planning documents or debates about decisions, for example, through protests and public debates.
2nd dimension: Non-decision-making power	It can be observed in discussions between planners, politicians, and other actors about, for example, agenda-setting, which provides some control over what is decided. This is typically one of the ways that planners exert power in general because they quite often do not have the right to make certain decisions (for example budget decisions). Therefore, planners exercise power through agenda setting and discussions with other decision-makers.
3rd dimension: Ideological	It is not behavioural as are the two others. The third dimension points out that power can work through ideology embedded in

Type of Power Dimension	Key Features
power	social institutions and economic structures. Ideology can shape desires and beliefs, and the third type of power may be at work despite apparent consensus between strong and weak parties. This means that planning decisions might be affected by ideologies embedded in the planning organization or society as a whole and affects other actors and agencies without planners being aware of those issues in their own work. This makes the third dimension of power very effective.

Source: (Koglin & Pettersson, 2017, p. 3)