

YOUTH'S PARTICIPATION IN THE GOVERNANCE PROCESS IN NEPAL

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Abstract

This study is based on assessment of the status of youth participation in the governance processes. As evidenced by primary data collected from six local units in Sunsari and Rupandehi districts of Nepal, the study mainly focuses on youth's participation precisely in policy making processes, electoral process and monitoring roles in governance. In spite of their numerical superiority in demography, youth are often found to be absent from decision-making and leadership roles. Hence this study identifies the economic, social and political factors affecting their participation. Many studies and observations state that lack of platforms for youth to bring forward their agendas or to share their insights while drafting and implementing policies significantly hinders their participation in policy making processes. As local elections 2022 has recently ended amidst great optimism in term of youth candidacy, it is still a far-fetched idea especially for youths from humble financial backgrounds or for youths from non-political backgrounds to stand as a candidate in the elections. Also, the caste/ethnicity based discriminations still dominate the voting pattern of youth and citizens and lack of proper structure and mechanism at policy-level to monitor the local institutions is an exiting barrier for youth to fulfil the roles of watch dog. This study hence pursues to understand such challenges faced by youth in the context of Nepal and explores a way forward.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Key Definitions

In a general sense, the concept of 'Youth in Governance' is often understood to refer to the loosely defined role of young people in setting the overall policy direction of organizations, institutions, coalitions, and key governance processes.¹ The youth are a significant segment of the population, not only because they hold a demographic majority, but also because they play a significant part in building nation's future. Their potential ideas and zeal can be channeled and mobilized to achieve long term development and sustainable social change.²

In the global context, many countries describe the youth or young people as individuals at the age when they are officially considered adults and thus entitled to equal treatment by the countries' law. This age is 18 in many countries. However, the operational definition and nuances of the term 'youth' often vary from country to country, depending on specific socio-cultural, institutional, economic and political factors.³

For instance, the United Nations (UN), defines the youth age range as 15 to 24 and 15 to 29 in the Commonwealth nations. According to the Commonwealth Secretariat report 2007, young people can be perceived through three different lenses i.e., through age categories, transitional stages, and a social construct. Hence, the age bracket defining youth ranges across countries varying from a minimum of 14 to a maximum of 35, or above.⁴ In Nepal, the National Youth Policy was the first document to spell out the age bracket of youth. That bracket withstands as 16 to 40 years.⁵ The age bracket that defines youth in the policy has been quite controversial as the wide range of age entails different life experiences hindering the planning of specific programs related to youth.

According to the CBS reports (2021), 40.3% of the total population in Nepal, approximately 10,689,842 people in Nepal are under the age of 30.⁶ This signifies that youth occupy a substantial segment of the nation's population, and hence exerts a need to focus on the ways young people are involved in decision making processes at all tiers of government.

1.2 The Role of Youth in Governance

Recognizing the role of youth as the driving force of change, bearing a blend of innovative ideas and vigorous energy, the Constitution of Nepal 2015⁷ has enshrined the provision of youth participation under Art 51 of the Directive principles. It has also allowed positive discrimination for youth groups under Art.18. Consequently, the idea of youth participation has attained a near

1 Mantooth, L. J. (2005). Youth in Governance: A Guide for Adults Involving Youth as Decision Makers on Boards and Committees, Extension Assistant 4-H Youth Development. University of Tennessee

2 Onyekpe, J.G. (2007). Managing the youth at election. Semantic Scholar

3 Bessant, J., Sercombe, H., & Watts, R. (1998). Youth Studies: An Australian Perspective. Melbourne: Addison Wesley Longman

4 Commonwealth Youth Programme (2007), 44–54 , <https://ebookbou.edu.bd/Books/Text/SARD/DYDW/module02.pdf>

5 National Youth Policy, Section 2(a), <https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/wpcontent/uploads/2018/09/national-youth-policy-2010.pdf>

6 Adhrit Shrestha | February 15. (n.d.). Key highlights from the census report 2021. Nepal Economic Forum. Retrieved April 2, 2022, from <https://nepaleconomicforum.org/key-highlights-from-the-census-report-2021/>

7 Constitution of Nepal 2015, https://www.mohp.gov.np/downloads/Constitution%20of%20Nepal%202072_full_english.pdf

mandatory status in policy documents in Nepal.

Recent research studies on youth and civic participation has emphasized the necessity of young people as political agents in their own rights, rather than citizens-in-waiting who become true political actors and active citizens only after reaching maturity.⁸ The available literature on youth civic engagement advocates for the recasting of young people as potential political players. In doing so, it emphasizes democracy as a continuous and intergenerational collaborative process.⁹

Youth have played a significant role through several, key political shifts in Nepal. Youth have been engaged in violent and non-violent movements in Nepal.¹⁰ The role of youth was crucial in the ten-year long insurgency period to dethrone the Monarch, they were also comprehensively engaged in the Madhesh movement and many other political protests, 'Enough is Enough' movement being a recent example. However, participation of youth in terms of decision making, monitoring, or involvement in other responsible roles has been observed to be scarce. Therefore, understanding and acknowledging the role of youth in the governance process from a holistic approach is necessary to strive towards the overall development of the country. This study aims to examine the status of constructive participation of youth in the governance processes at the local level.

8 Gordon, H. R. (2008). Gendered paths to teenage political participation. *Gender & Society*, 22(1), 31–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124320731104>

9 Ibid

10 O'Neill, O. N., Paudel, B. R., & Maharjan, N. (2020). Youth Political Engagement and Democratic Culture in Republican Nepal. *Himalaya*, 39(2), 18–28. <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol39/iss2/6> o139/iss2/6

Chapter 2. Methodology and Conceptual Framework

This qualitative study explores the existing status of youth engagement in governance processes and the challenges that hinder their participation. Components of the research framework are described below:

2.1 Objectives

The major objectives of this study are as follows:

Provide an overview of youth participation in the general governance processes in Nepal

Examine the roles and challenges of youth in three key processes of governance: policy making, electoral processes (as voters and candidates) and as watch dogs

Propose evidence-based recommendations to address pertinent issues in order to encourage and uplift the status of youth participation in governance processes

2.2 Data collection

To fulfil the above stated objectives of this study, primary data was collected through:

- Focused Group Discussion (FGD)s
- Key Informant Interviews (KII)s
- In-depth stakeholder consultations
- In-depth interviews, and consultation meetings in the project areas
- Field observation

Additionally, secondary data was obtained through desk study of various governmental and non-governmental reports and other relevant publications. A thorough literature review was an integral part of this study. Various governmental and non-governmental reports, national and international policies, newspaper articles, journal articles and other relevant publications were reviewed to substantiate the arguments presented in the report.

2.3 Project areas

Project areas: Sunsari district (Koshi *gau palika*, Bhokraha nursing *gau palika*, Ramdhuni *nagarpalika*) and Rupandehi district (Sudhodhan *gau palika*, Tilottama *nagarpalika*, Butwal *upa mahanagarpalika*)

Sample size: 62

2.4 Significance of the Study

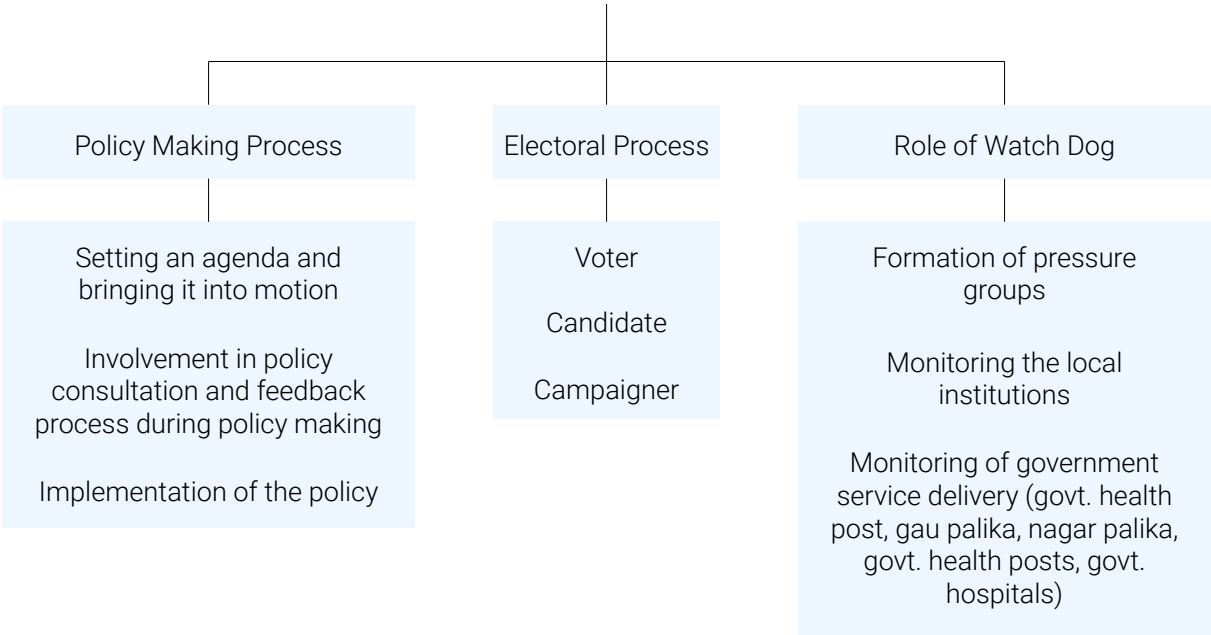
To the knowledge of this study's literature review, there is very little research done on the roles of youth in governance processes in Nepal. Despite bearing numerical proportional superiority in the population, the youth of Nepal is found often absent from major roles in governance. Frustrated by existing structural barriers to their development and engagement, they are questioning and

protesting the status quo and are increasingly turning away from traditional social development paths and platforms.¹¹ The topic of youth participation in governance has garnered wide attention over the last decade¹². Therefore, studying the factors affecting the participation of youth in governance and proposing sustainable solutions to bridge the gap is the need of the hour.

2.5 Data analysis

Since the purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the status of participation of youth in governance process and the factors that affect their participation, three key components of governance- policy making, electoral process and monitoring of public service delivery has been identified and deconstructed in this study. The participation of youth in the process of policy making was looked into through three components of policy making which were setting an agenda and bringing it into motion, involvement of youth in policy consultation and feedback process and the implementation of the policies. Youth participation in the electoral process was analyzed through their involvement as voters, candidates and campaigners while the role of youth as watch dogs in the process of governance was observed on the basis of formation of pressure groups, monitoring of local institutions and monitoring of service delivery of government institutions.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE



The conceptual framework and methodologies adopted in this study assert that in order to understand and analyze the status of youth participation in governance, it is important to understand the factors that affect it and provide evidence based recommendations. Thus, the remainder of this report will focus on first sharing the findings in Chapter 3, analyzing it in Chapter 4, and discuss relevant recommendations in Chapter 5.

11 World Youth Report: Youth Social Entrepreneurship and the 2030 Agenda (2020) - united nations. (n.d.). Retrieved April 4, 2022, from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2020/10/WYR2020-Chapter2.pdf>

12 Bessant, J. (2003). Youth Participation: A new mode of government. Policy Studies, 24 (2-3), 87-100

Chapter 3. Findings

3.1 Participation of Youth in Policy Making Process

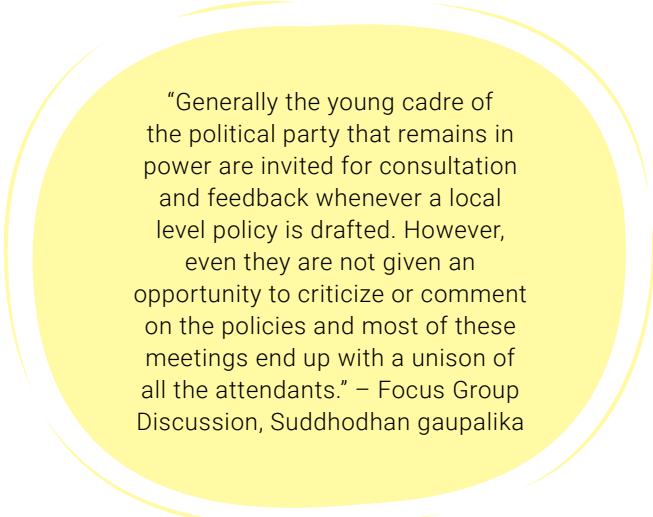
The Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration intimated the local government to draft the 'Procedures for Youth Participation in the Local level Planning Process 2078' on 15th July 2021.¹³ However, according to the study findings, none of the local level governments in the six local units (*palikas*) had drafted such procedures until March 2022. The process is likely to be delayed due to the upcoming local level elections scheduled for 13th May 2022.

Looking into youth-centric policies, the National Youth Policy 2010 has enlisted seven objectives which are focused on the overall development of youth and their duties and responsibilities to the nation and highlights the importance of youth participation in policymaking and implementation. The policy strongly endorses and provides the theoretical rationale of youth participation in policy making processes, however the practice of constructive engagement of youth was found to be minimal and politically biased in most of the *palikas*.

It was observed that a few youths who bear a membership to the political party ruling the local government are often invited for feedback and consultation when a local level policy is drafted while the remaining youth remain alien to such opportunity of engagement. One of the *palikas* governed by the coalition of two different political parties included an inclusive panel of youth who were actively engaged in consultation and feedback process whenever a youth related program was designed. The youth who participated in these discussions were members from different child clubs and youth networks.

In summation, it was observed that there was little to no youth participation in the policy making process in most of the *palikas*. Provided the youth from one of the *palikas* expressed contentment in terms of engagement in the policy making process and decision making roles and acknowledged the crucial role of child clubs and youth networks to create a platform for inclusive and constructive participation.

Despite their active participation in development, and meaningful efforts on the parts of governments, youth still have less access than adults to formal decision-making processes, and to influencing policy. Translating good intentions into practical action has often been hindered by capacity and political constraints. This has resulted in a poor reflection of young people's rights and interests in planning.¹⁴



"Generally the young cadre of the political party that remains in power are invited for consultation and feedback whenever a local level policy is drafted. However, even they are not given an opportunity to criticize or comment on the policies and most of these meetings end up with a unison of all the attendants." – Focus Group Discussion, Suddhodhan gaupalika

3.2 Participation of Youth in Electoral Process

Election is the pivotal feature of democracy that enables people to exercise

13 <https://mofaga.gov.np/news-notice/2444>

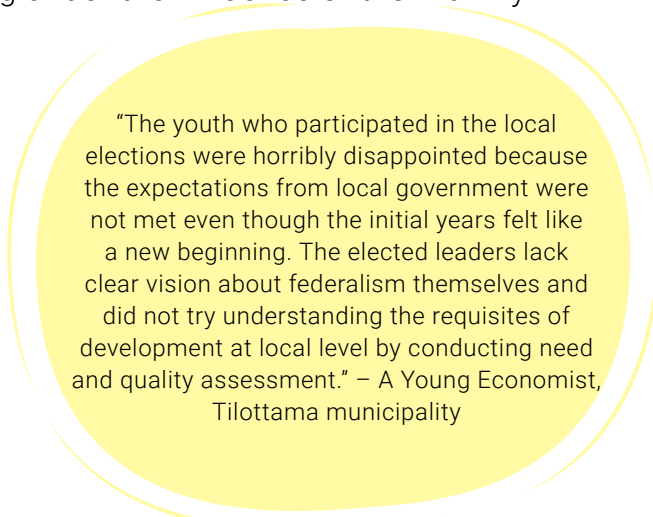
14 Commonwealth Secretariat. (2017). (publication). Youth Mainstreaming in Development Planning: Transforming Young Lives. London.

their power or sovereignty by choosing their leaders and representatives.¹⁵ The process includes a series of key election-related undertakings encompassing, inter alia, formulation of legislation and its delimitations, conflict prevention and management initiatives, civic and voter education, registration of voters, development and implementation of codes of conducts, nomination of candidates, campaigning, voting, tabulation, results and announcements and election adjudication.¹⁶ To understand the status of youth in electoral processes, this study has hence attempted to examine the status of youth participation as voters, campaigners and candidates.

The local elections of 2017 witnessed a voter turnout of 73.8%¹⁷. It was the first ever local election after the promulgation of the Constitution in 2015. The election was able to amass a total of 8,071,369 voters aged between 18 and 40, which was 52% of total registered voters. Within that group, the largest number of voters were in the 25-40 age group.¹⁸ Many first time voters participated in the local elections with brimming hope that the centralized services will be accessible and reachable at their doorstep.

The notion that 'politics is a dirty game' was widespread within the clusters of youth. Hence, they become apolitical by not taking interest in the political avenue. They either refrain from voting or end up voting under the influence of their family or community without pondering over the skills and capacity of the candidate. 24% of the Nepali population lack citizenship certificate which is the primary document for registration in voters' list.¹⁹ The population that is unable to register in the voters' list are forced to refrain from voting during the elections. Many of them also lack necessary knowledge because school curricula do not cover voters' education.

Additionally, the research findings show that youth in Nepal become political through youth organizations mobilized by political parties that are keen to spread their power and influence over the electorate in anticipation of victory in the general elections. Concurrently, many youths appear to be suspicious of normative institutions such as political parties, constituent assemblies, parliaments, and constitutional governance—through which social antagonisms are mediated. They share this skepticism with many contemporary scholars, who argue that parliamentary democracies fail to empower citizens because dominant elites monopolize such institutions for their own interests.²⁰



"The youth who participated in the local elections were horribly disappointed because the expectations from local government were not met even though the initial years felt like a new beginning. The elected leaders lack clear vision about federalism themselves and did not try understanding the requisites of development at local level by conducting need and quality assessment." – A Young Economist, Tilottama municipality

15 Human rights. (n.d.). Retrieved April 2, 2022, from <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Human-Rights-and-Elections.pdf>

16 <https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/electoral-process>

17 Nepal Election Commission

18 The Kathmandu Post. (n.d.). Elections 2017: 18-40 age group makes up over half of voters. The Kathmandu Post. Retrieved April 21, 2022, from <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2017/11/11/18-40-age-group-makes-up-over-half-of-voters>

19 The Kathmandu Post. (n.d.). 'over 5 million people without citizenship'. The Kathmandu Post. Retrieved May 17, 2022, from <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2018/04/26/over-5-million-people-without-citizenship>

20 O'Neill, O. N., Paudel, B. R., & Maharjan, N. (2020). Youth Political Engagement and Democratic Culture in Republican Nepal. *Himalaya*, 39(2), 18–28. https://digitalcommons.maclester.edu/himala.edu/himalaya/vol39/iss2/6_ol39/iss2/6

The elections also bring a festive atmosphere where candidates are found to be making public appearances and conducting door-to-door programs accompanied by their supporters. The group of supporters generally comprises of youth who seek for opportunities of employment and are attracted by the promises of such opportunities by the candidates. Many youths claim that they are used as baits to attract more voters a few months before elections and their time and energy are exploited by party leaders and candidates for campaigning.

Looking back to 2017, the candidacy of youth seemed to be a far-fetched idea in the local elections. Their lack of experience and mistrust among voters towards their decision-making abilities are the key obstacles for youth to stand as candidates in the elections. However, the scenario has changed in the local elections 2022 where 41% of the candidates were under the age of 40²¹. The frustration of youth over the performance of conventional leaders and appointment of the same key political players time and again has brought about a new wave of change in terms of candidacy in the local elections where 59,402 individuals under age 40 have been nominated. Many of these nominees are independent individuals who do not have any alliance with any conventional party.

3.3 Youth Participation in Monitoring and Watch Dog Role

Monitoring the government institutions and power holders and is an integral aspect of good governance. It helps to evaluate whether systems and practices produce intended positive impacts on citizens' lives. In the context of this study, the National Youth Policy 2010 defines its own monitoring and evaluation framework. According to the policy, the Ministry of Youth and Sports serve as an overseer to monitor and evaluate whether the planned outputs and objectives have been achieved or fulfilled in full or in part. The policy also addresses the issue of adopting a participatory system for monitoring and evaluating, as well as regularly reviewing, revising, and improving the policy every five years. Monitoring of public services, goods and even construction of development infrastructures at local level has attracted youths wanting to volunteer.

Public participation also requires a proper monitoring and evaluation system to develop a learning culture about initiatives that address citizens' needs and answer their demands.²² This watchdog role should be played by youth since they are affiliated with different political parties. However they have limited engagement beyond political parties. There were no pressure groups in the study areas where youth were engaged in the monitoring of the service delivery of local institutions. The youth groups would rather take the streets to protest against the actions of governments in order to draw attention of the concerned authorities. These protests would also get violent at some instances and lead to destruction of public property when the peaceful protests were ignored for a long time.

It was observed that the provisions of the monitoring roles of youth is limited to the policy. Youth in the study areas claim that they lack a proper platform where they could express their complaints and concerns about the service delivery of the government institutions. Each local institution has a complaint/suggestion box which is made to collect feedback from the citizens and then address them, however the youth respondents were skeptic if this box was even opened once in a year.

21 <https://english.onlinekhabar.com/local-elections-young-and-old.html>

22 Hilhorst, T. & Guijt, I.M.. (2006). Participatory monitoring and evaluation : a process to support governance and empowerment at the local level : a guidance paper. BMC Infectious Diseases - BMC INFECT DIS. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254910806_Participatory_monitoring_and_evaluation_a_process_to_support_governance_and_empowerment_at_the_local_level_a_guidance_paper

3.4 Factors affecting Youth Participation

Economic factors

- Poverty and Financial Responsibilities:

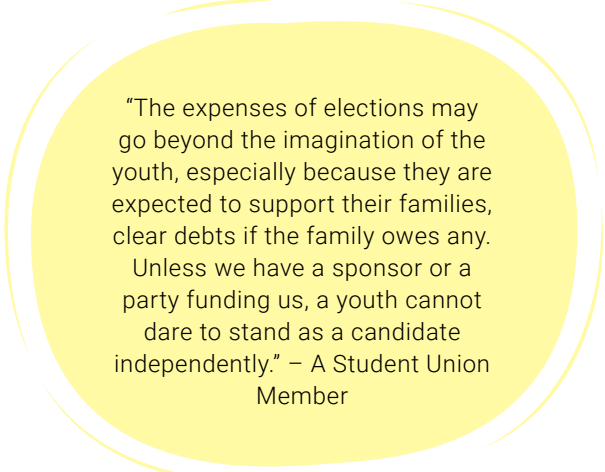
The general trend for a youth from an average financial background is that they take up a job right after completing their education to support their families. Also, the youths whose families owe debt are expected to pay it back. Therefore, they are often driven by their responsibility to fulfill the financial needs of their families and are diverted from committing to a political career which requires a lot of time and does not provide any financial stability. According to Nepal Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2021 Report, in 2019, 17.4 percent of Nepalese are multidimensionally poor – just under five million persons, and the MPI is 0.074. In a global comparison, Nepal's 2019 MPI value of 0.074 is below Bangladesh's 2019 MPI of 0.104, which is also computed from a similar survey, and is lower than the MPI values for all South Asian countries except the Maldives.²³ Poverty-struck families are generally concerned about their day to day survival and look for means to uplift their standard of living rather than engaging in different aspects of governance. Youth specially are looked upon as the bread winner of their families or as a hope for those families which are deep in debt.

- Election Expenses:

The general tactics used to attract youth involvement in the campaigning process include lavish meals, fueling their motorbikes used during the process and give them Nrs. 500-1000 per day. Extravagant expenses of the election which begins from securing a ticket from the party until the day of election may cost crores regardless of the win or loss of the candidate. A young person may not be able to cover the expenses of the election unless they have a sponsor, a strong financial background or financial inheritance that would enable them to bear the cost of the election.

- Economic Inequality:

Inequalities fuel poverty, undermining the impact of economic growth on poverty reduction. Age itself is a vector of inequality, excluding millions of young women and men from access to financial resources, work opportunities, social welfare mechanisms and decision-making spaces, despite their right to all of these.²⁴ The youth from well-off financial background can bear the expenses of the elections however most youth sustain their lives trying to attain their basic needs and election or a political idea could be a far-fetched dream for them. Youth burdened with financial responsibilities have a hard time to become change



“The expenses of elections may go beyond the imagination of the youth, especially because they are expected to support their families, clear debts if the family owes any. Unless we have a sponsor or a party funding us, a youth cannot dare to stand as a candidate independently.” – A Student Union Member

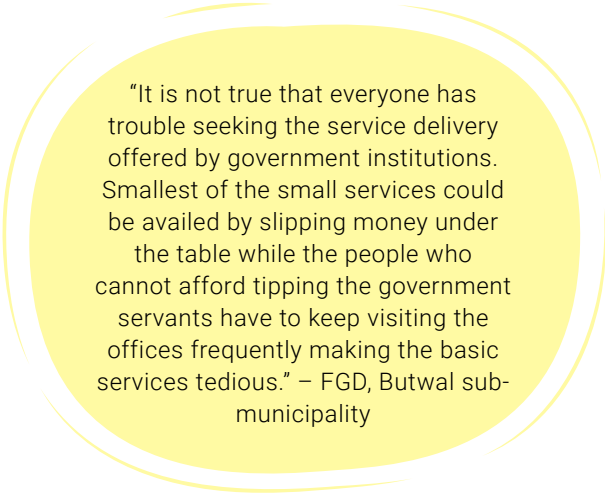
23 OPHI, UNDP, UNICEF (2021, September 1). *Nepal Multidimensional Poverty index 2021: Report*. UNICEF Nepal. Retrieved June 16, 2022, from <https://www.unicef.org/nepal/reports/nepal-multidimensional-poverty-index-2021-report>

24 ODI (2013), 'Youth and International Development Policy: The Case for Investing in Young People', Project Briefing No. 80, May 2013, available at: http://www.youthpolicy.org/library/wp-content/uploads/library/2013_ODI_Project_Briefing_Youth_International_Development_Policy_Eng.pdf

makers or participate in different aspects of governance as their financial responsibilities happen to be their priority.

- Corruption:

Most of the youth involved in this study stated that corruption is the biggest challenge they face. Addressing social corruption is linked to the promotion of individual and social integrity. Many everyday situations challenge integrity and ethical judgment, from skipping a line to using a position to gain undue advantage.²⁵ Young people also tend to be particularly affected by corruption which affects employment prospects and a decent future, and impedes access to basic services, education, health care etc.



“It is not true that everyone has trouble seeking the service delivery offered by government institutions. Smallest of the small services could be availed by slipping money under the table while the people who cannot afford tipping the government servants have to keep visiting the offices frequently making the basic services tedious.” – FGD, Butwal sub-municipality

Social factors

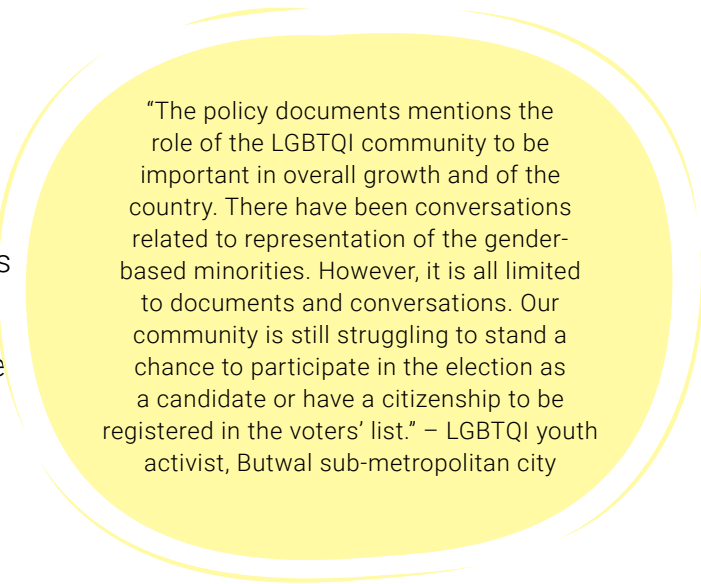
- Trend of Immigration

Many youths choose or are forced to migrate to escape poverty, violence, conflict, or are displaced due the effects of war or climate change.²⁶ Many youth who go abroad for education, often do not return to their country because of the lifestyle and the pay a foreign country offers. The absence of a significant mobile population of the country heavily affects the degree of youth participation in the governance process.

- Gender roles

The patriarchal institutions and social relations have created inferior or secondary status for women. It was found that even women who go ahead by their merit faced different obstacles created by deep-rooted patriarchal system.

The National Youth Policy 2010 was the first policy document that acknowledges the role of third gender in the youth belonging to marginalized minority community²⁷ to be as important as male and female, however the representation and participation of the LGBTQI community was found to be minimal when it came to taking decision-making and other roles in governance.



“The policy documents mentions the role of the LGBTQI community to be important in overall growth and of the country. There have been conversations related to representation of the gender-based minorities. However, it is all limited to documents and conversations. Our community is still struggling to stand a chance to participate in the election as a candidate or have a citizenship to be registered in the voters’ list.” – LGBTQI youth activist, Butwal sub-metropolitan city

25 Special session of the General Assembly against Corruption 2021 (UNGASS 2021). : Special session of the General Assembly against corruption 2021. (n.d.). Retrieved March 13, 2022, from <https://ungass2021.unodc.org/ungass2021/index.html>

26 Youth and migration issue brief 2016 - United Nations. (n.d.). Retrieved May 21, 2022, from <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-migration.pdf>

27 National Youth Policy, 2(g)

- Caste/ Ethnicity dynamics

The institutionalized caste/ ethnicity cleavage heavily influences the voting pattern of youth. It was observed that during the elections the differences between different communities becomes more vivid. A person from the hilly background may find it quite challenging to win an election in the Terai and vice versa. Many youths claimed that it was a norm to vote the candidate belonging to the same caste/ethnic group. The caste of the candidate is a huge factor that dominates voting. For instance, it is rare for a voter from the upper-caste to vote for a Dalit candidate. The potential and the vision of the candidate does not influence the voter but their ethnicity and does.

- Family obligations

Youth are considered as the primary resource of their families when it comes to sustaining the family financially. The societal norms, usually expect them to get married and start a family within the age of 20-30 on an average. Youth during this phase of life are so driven by their social and financial obligations that they lack the interest in taking part in different governance roles.

“The peak years of the youth is consumed by the family to maintain a societal status, when the responsibilities of the family are dumped on the shoulders of the youth. It comes to the point of sustaining and supporting the family and new born children, eventually their education, all of which require finances. The priority of the youth changes from becoming a change maker to collecting resources for their families.” – Youth activist, Sunsari district

- Nepotism

Many youths in Nepal are victimized by nepotism because groups of elite youth from strategic connections to favorably penetrate the party system and other roles in governance process. This could be a reason that a huge number of youth are found to be engaged in the campaigning process with the hope that the time and energy that they invest into these process would secure a better future for them.

“The practices of nepotism and favoritism is an open secret in Nepal. Most of the youth who have connections manage to secure jobs even if it is temporary in nature through their connections. You will find that most people working in government institutions are related to each other in one way or the other. This trend is unfair to the youth who are more deserving and youth from marginalized communities.”- A Dalit youth

Political Factors

- Intergenerational Influences

Youths are often driven by ideologies and principles that their families believe in and stick to it when it comes to practicing their political rights. The failure in practicing handover responsibilities and roles from one generation to another is a major structural and societal barrier for youth participation.

- Skepticism towards youth decision making abilities

An inevitable skepticism exists when youth take decision-making roles due to

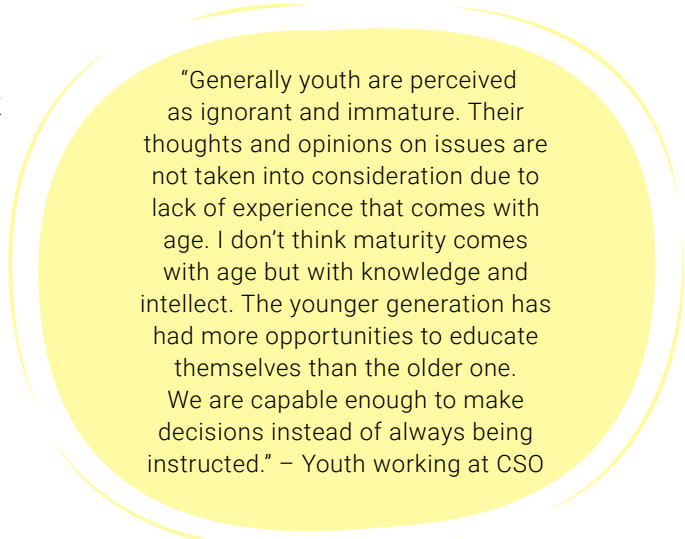
the lack of experience which comes with age. This consequently denies them necessary analytical skills for critical thinking or problem-solving through participatory and active learning. Moreover, the youth are not able to access direct institutional systems and structures in the government and therefore unable to meaningfully participate in public policy formulation process.

- Political knowledge and awareness

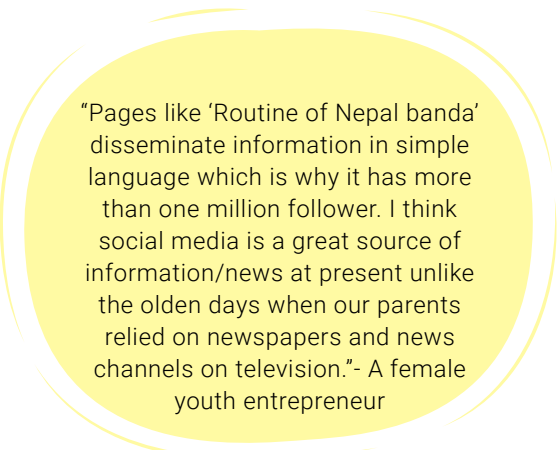
Youth who are driven by their social and financial responsibilities get so indulged in fulfilling their basic needs that they lack political knowledge and awareness. The primary or even secondary education in Nepal does not educate students about the basic principles of governance. The indifference of youth towards politics due to lack of knowledge and awareness also affects youth participation in Nepal.

- Polarization of social media

Social media is an important source of news for young people and plays a symbolic role in creating networks of solidarity amongst young people via the liking or sharing of particular posts. However, many young people massively rely on it without any fact-checking. Every time an incident takes place, a divide is observed within the cluster of youth. The narrations created by different pages on social media may not always be true. Blindly believing the posts on social media and forming opinions and making decisions on the basis of those posts as well as arguing over comments on social media was found to create a divide within the cluster of youths.



“Generally youth are perceived as ignorant and immature. Their thoughts and opinions on issues are not taken into consideration due to lack of experience that comes with age. I don’t think maturity comes with age but with knowledge and intellect. The younger generation has had more opportunities to educate themselves than the older one. We are capable enough to make decisions instead of always being instructed.” – Youth working at CSO



“Pages like ‘Routine of Nepal banda’ disseminate information in simple language which is why it has more than one million follower. I think social media is a great source of information/news at present unlike the olden days when our parents relied on newspapers and news channels on television.”- A female youth entrepreneur

Chapter 4. Analysis and Discussions

One of the most common questions that we put across to all our respondents asked them to rate youth participation on a scale of 0-10 in the process of governance, precisely in three key components mentioned in our research framework in reference to their municipalities.

The answer obtained from this question from all our working districts was then brought down to an average and further converted to the scale of 1-8. 'R. Hart's Ladder of Participation' was used as a tool for analysis. Spread through eight rungs, this tool helps to analyze the degree of participation from tokenism to meaningful participation. Hart's ladder of participation has eight levels which reflect who drives the development initiative.²⁸ The first three levels are classified as non-participatory. Hart argued they serve adult purposes in reality affording no real opportunity to participate. The top five rungs of the ladder represent increasing degrees of participation.

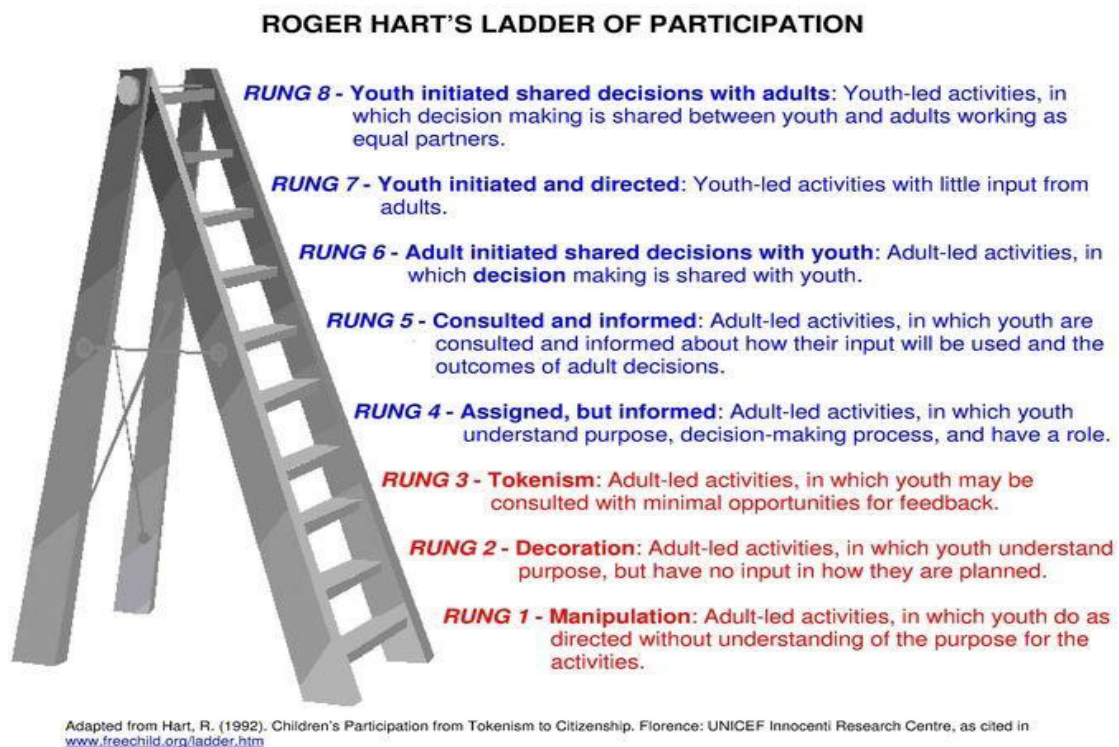


Figure 1: Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation

The first three levels are classified as non-participatory. They serve adult purposes in reality affording no real opportunity for youth to participate. The top five rungs of the ladder represent increasing degrees of participation.

The average number we obtained from our study was 3 which suggests that the degree of participation of the youth in Nepal in the process of governance lies on Rung 3 where the youth are being tokenized in terms of participation. It suggests that youth are engaged with minimal opportunities while the adults lead

28 Hart, R. (1992). Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship (No. 4). Florence, Italy: UNICEF International Child Development Centre.

the activities. As discussed individually in all three components of governance that we have looked into this research, most of the respondents expressed their dissatisfaction in terms of constructive participation.

Exploring further into the backgrounds of the youth who fall within the third rung of Hart's ladder, it was found that the youth who are engaged in the process of governance in several ways mostly come from financially well-off backgrounds or from upper-middle class backgrounds. The youth who had the opportunity to stand in the forefront of politics were generally linked with families that had a strong political grip in their areas. The youth belonging to a comparatively low economic background were found to be engaged in the campaigning process of the political parties during elections as the amount ranging from 500-1000 per day and fuel expenses were immediate source of income for them while the extravagant promises made by the leaders to provide them employment opportunities in future was another driving factor. When it came to stand as a candidate in the elections, again it was mostly the youth who came from established political and economic backgrounds. The participation of youth from low economic background without any political ties was seen to be rare.

During youth engagement in policy making process, the connections come into play again. It was found that many youths were deprived of the opportunity of consultation and feedback while drafting local level policies because they were not involved in the campaigning process of the political party that holds power at the *palika*. It was also found that the *palika* where the government was formed by coalition between two different parties had diverse panel of youth who were invited to take part in consultation and policy making process.

As for the monitoring roles, it was observed that the youth who evolved from the engagement in child clubs and youth networks were concerned about the service delivery of government institutions. However, most of them complained about the lack of a well-structured platform to voice their queries and concerns. A significant number of youth chose to use their right to protest in order to draw the attention of the concerned authorities. The 'Occupy Baluwatar' and 'Enough is Enough' movements in Kathmandu are examples of such protests which had active participation of youth to call out government for their actions. According to some youth engaged in protests outside Kathmandu, they choose destruction of public property on rare occasions as the last resort to draw attention of the authorities when their silent protests are neglected for a long time.

Comparing the degree of participation between the aforementioned three aspects of governance process, it was found that youths are most active as campaigners in the electoral process. The short term benefits like daily stipend varying from Rs. (500/- to 1000/-), cost for vehicle fuel, lavish meals were found to be the major attractions for the involvement of youth in the campaigning process. The lack of proper structural framework in order to engage youth in policy making process

and monitoring role was found to be the major barrier.

Chapter 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis from the previous sections, it can be concluded that youth participation is tokenized in governance processes in Nepal. The National Youth Policy 2010 has not been well implemented. The youth are hence deprived of a platform where they can actively participate in policy making and monitoring roles. The local elections 2022 has been an optimistic approach to youth participation in terms of candidacy. However, the idea to stand as a candidate in the elections is still afar for youth from economically and socially backward backgrounds. Power dynamics, nepotism, caste/ethnicity-based advantages, and financial well-being hugely affects youth participation. The wide age range of youth defined in the policy is another obstacle that hinders to design specific plans and programs for youth.

As a way forward, it is important to revise the age range spelled in the National Youth Policy or to design programs for dividing groups within the cluster of youth. Boosting unity within youth groups will also play a significant role in the overall growth and development of youth in governance processes in the future.

Following are key recommendations that can be extrapolated based on the findings and analysis of this study:

5.1. Recommendations for Policy Making Process

- Engaging youth in policy drafting process:

There must be a panel of youth appointed during the process of drafting and implementation at each local unit. The appointment of such panel must be fair and inclusive. When youth will be allowed to bring new agendas into motion at local level according to the requirements of the place, they will be able to draw the attention of the concerned authorities over the issues that requires immediate attention.

- Defining a proper structure and mechanism for constructive participation:

A proper structure and mechanism must be established for formal participation in institutional decision-making processes to ensure systemic, rather than random, participation. A well- defined system will provide a platform to youth to provide their input in a wider range of issues and their concerns.

- Creation of mandatory Youth Councils in all palikas :

Each palika must consist of a Youth Council that elect or appoint a group of young people to discuss and advise policymakers on particular issues existing at their local unit. The Members could be appointed through a democratic process. The Members of the Youth Council can also be assigned the responsibility to raise awareness and lobby for desired policy outcomes.

- Creation of forums for model parliamentary debates:

It was observed that in Butwal Sub Metropolitan City, model parliamentary debates were organized by different NGOs for high school students where they discussed the existing issues and drew policy-level agendas during mock parliamentary sessions. These agendas were later presented to the elected

government representatives. Such practices could be replicated, or similar models can be adopted by other local units to engage more youth in policy-making process.

5.2. Recommendations for Electoral Process

- Mandates of youth quotas in all the political parties

Every political party must ensure minimum 10% youth membership compulsorily so that their representation in political parties will pave an easier path for them to step into the elections as a candidate in future.

- Encouragement of youth to vote and choose candidates on the basis of their vision

The Election Commission of Nepal and political parties must take the responsibility to educate and aware young people about their crucial role in the elections as voters. The youth must be encouraged to vote candidates by pondering over their potential regardless of their intergenerational influence.

- Self-awareness among youths regarding their role during the campaigning process

Youths must be self-aware regarding the short term benefits of the campaigning process and must demand for accountability for the return of their time and energy invested during the campaigns from the political leaders after elections are over.

- Creation of an enabling environment for youth to stand in election as candidates

The decision-making and leadership skills of youth must be accepted by public at large as they could strive towards development with their fresh perspective and vigorous energy. An enabling environment where youth are provided platform to engage in the politics at an early age and are encouraged for standing as a candidate in the election either through political parties or independently must be created.

5.3. Recommendations for monitoring roles

- Establishment of proper complaint/ feedback mechanisms

A proper structure must be spelled out at policy level that facilitates youth to provide complaint/feedback regarding the activities of the local institutions. The structure must also define a proper mechanism to address these complaints and feedbacks and appoint a government staff who regulates it.

- Creation of monitoring groups/Youth Ombudsman

The Youth Council must take up the responsibility to create monitoring groups of youth or create target groups of Youth Ombudsman who observe the service delivery of different government institutions like government schools, health posts, services at local units. These groups will provide compliance with the complaint mechanism related to youth intervention.

- Support for effective use of Right To Information Act 2064

The Right to Information Act 2064, under Section 7 allows citizens to file a to file an application in order to seek accountability and transparency of government institutions. Use of this provision could be an effective way of monitoring local institutions.

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About Centre for Social Change

Centre for Social Change (CSC) is a non-profit making social think-tank based in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Since its establishment in 2015, CSC has been actively working to bring positive transformation in the socio-political dynamics of Nepali society through involvements in the fields of research, development practice, education, advocacy, and community mobilization. CSC's current works are focused on issues surround conflict transformation, peacebuilding, democracy and governance, migration, labor and employment, civic space, civil society development, public policy, climate change, and social development.

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