Practices of Good Governance in Budhanilkantha Municipality: Local Government Initiatives

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Article Info	**ABSTRACT**
	This article explores good governance practices and public service delivery by elected representatives and administrative staff in Budhanilkantha Municipality, Nepal. It examines local government initiatives and emphasizes key principles of good governance such as accountability, transparency, justice, and participation. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating surveys and interviews, to assess key governance indicators, including transparency, accountability, public participation, and service delivery. Likewise, a stratified sampling method was used to select 120 respondents from all wards of Budhanilkantha Municipality. The findings provide a comprehensive overview of governance practices in the Municipality, highlighting strengths and improvement areas. While awareness of governance principles is generally high, challenges such as limited public participation, delayed public service delivery, and varying levels of transparency persist. The research underscores the importance of citizen engagement and the proactive implementation of good governance mechanisms to foster trust, enhance service delivery, and support sustainable local development. The insights derived from this case study offer valuable guidance for policymakers, practitioners, and community stakeholders seeking to strengthen governance frameworks at the local level.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Good governance is essential for fostering sustainable local development and ensuring effective service delivery at the local government level. Governance practices that promote transparency, accountability, and participatory decision-making enable local governments to better respond to the needs of their communities [1], [2], [3]. This enhances service delivery, improves social inclusion, and supports sustainable development initiatives [4]. This study aims to assess the current state of good governance practices in local development initiatives within Nepal. By examining key indicators such

as transparency, accountability, participation, and integrity, this research seeks to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in governance mechanisms at the grassroots level.

As the constitution outlines, governance in Nepal aims to ensure equitable access to state services and fair, competent, transparent, corruption-free public administration. It emphasizes the need for a people-centric, capable, and accountable governance system that involves all sectors and communities [5]. This aspiration reflects the turbulent political history of Nepal and the desire for an accountable, responsive, inclusive, and rule-based political entity. The essence of good governance lies in establishing a federal system based on democratic principles and a people-centric approach to meet the diverse expectations of Nepali citizens [6]. Governance, as defined by the Our Global Neighborhood Commission, encompasses the process of decision-making and implementation involving formal and informal actors and structures to manage common affairs and accommodate diverse interests.

In Eastern Hindu-influenced societies, rulers historically adhered to the "Raj Dharma" principle, which emphasized good governance for the people. This concept transcended the ruler's authority, ensuring accountability and fairness [7]. The notion of good governance gained prominence in academic and policy circles in the 1990s, driven by efforts to spur social and economic progress. The World Bank, for instance, began promoting good governance principles as a condition for loans to developing nations. Scholars argue that effective governance, characterized by transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, attracts investment and fosters development. Governance encompasses decision-making processes and implementation, analyzing the formal and informal actors and structures. The World Bank defines good governance as a combination of transparent institutions, skilled leadership, and ethical conduct, which are crucial for effective service delivery [8], [9], [10]. Federalism, the division and sharing of power between national, provincial, and local governments, is a key governance model [11], [12], [13]. In Nepal, local governments wield constitutional authority, contributing to decentralized governance. Federalism fosters self-rule and shared governance, ensuring compliance with laws and constitutions. It provides opportunities for local autonomy, facilitating community participation in economic, environmental, and social development endeavors.

Good governance and federalism are closely linked, as both prioritize the well-being of the people through effective decision-making and power distribution. Federalism supports diverse organizational structures like NGOs and cooperatives, fostering a service-oriented approach [14]. The UN identifies eight key characteristics of good governance, including accountability, transparency, and inclusivity, all aligning with the principles of federalism. These characteristics, outlined by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, emphasize participation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, efficiency, equity, inclusivity, and adherence to the rule of law.

Nepal, a diverse nation in language, religion, and ethnicity, has implemented a federal governance system granting regional and local autonomy as per its constitution. Key factors promoting good governance in developing countries include the rule of law,

transparency, accountability, administrative efficiency, and structural frameworks. Federalism provides a framework for managing diversity and fostering harmony in pluralistic societies, aiming for unity without imposing uniformity [15]. Federalism promotes respect for geographical international development agencies, on their part, and emphasizes the framework of good governance as a pre-condition for granting aid and loans and extending technical services to developing countries [16].

Good governance is crucial for human development, practical rule application, resource utilization, and equitable development, with poverty reduction as a core objective. Conversely, bad governance is seen as a root cause of societal problems. Good governance is expected to bring efficient outcomes, better decisions, leadership, and results, meeting rising public expectations [17]. In multilevel governance, local governments are anticipated to drive local development and satisfy community needs. Watchdog institutions like parliament committees, judiciary, and constitutional bodies have been established alongside government bodies and NGOs. Despite Nepal's international commitments, governance indices remain unsatisfactory. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 outlines the state structure, emphasizing federalism and local governance. Village institutions, municipalities, and district assemblies operate at local levels, with powers distributed among federal, state, and local levels. The judicial review ensures laws' consistency with the constitution.

The study intends to provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of governance and service delivery at the local government level in Budhanilkantha Municipality. It seeks to identify key challenges hindering effective governance while highlighting opportunities for improvement and reform. By addressing gaps in transparency, accountability, and public participation, the study contributes to the broader conversation on enhancing governance practices in Nepal. Ultimately, it seeks to help local governments better serve their communities, promote sustainable development, and support efforts to strengthen democratic practices and improve public service delivery in the country.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study explores the effectiveness of good governance practices and public service delivery within Budhanilkantha Municipality, Nepal, by examining the perceptions of various stakeholders, including elected representatives, administrative staff, and service recipients. The key research questions are:

a. How effective are the current good governance practices and public service delivery in Budhanilkantha Municipality?

b. What are the perceptions of elected representatives, administrative staff, and service recipients regarding the implementation and impact of good governance practices in Budhanilkantha Municipality?

3. OBJECTIVES

a. To evaluate the effectiveness of good governance practices and public service delivery within Budhanilkantha Municipality, Nepal.

b. To examine the perceptions of elected representatives, administrative staff, and service recipients regarding good governance practices in the specified study area.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative interviews [18]. Using stratified sampling techniques, a sample of residents, government officials, community leaders, and development practitioners from Budhanilkantha Municipality was selected. The study employed a stratified sampling method to select 120 respondents from all wards of Budhanilkantha Municipality, including 25 elected representatives, 25 administrative personnel, 50 service recipients, and 20 local intellectuals. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of good governance practices by ensuring that each key group within the Municipality is adequately represented through stratified sampling, leading to a more balanced and accurate evaluation of governance and service delivery. Quantitative data were collected through structured surveys, while qualitative insights were gathered through in-depth interviews. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes related to governance practices.

5. DESCRIPTION OF STUDY AREA

Budhanilkantha Municipality, situated on the northern periphery of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal, is characterized by its strategic location amidst lush greenery and serene surroundings. With a diverse demographic composition comprising a mix of ethnicities, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds, the Municipality embodies the rich tapestry of Nepal's societal fabric. Despite its scenic beauty, Budhanilkantha grapples with typical challenges developing regions face, including issues related to governance.

Budhanilkantha Municipality faces several challenges in its governance practices. Limited public participation in decision-making creates a disconnect between governance actions and public needs. Transparency and accountability issues arise as public officials may not always provide adequate information or take responsibility for their decisions, leading to mistrust. Delays in service delivery, political interference, and resource constraints further undermine governance effectiveness. Likewise, inadequate training of administrative staff and local leaders affects efficiency, while corruption and favoritism hinder fair service distribution. Poor coordination among stakeholders also limits the ability of the Municipality to implement effective governance practices. Despite these challenges, Budhanilkantha has proactively implemented initiatives to improve governance. Efforts include enhancing transparency through better information dissemination, encouraging public participation in decision-making processes, and fostering accountability among local officials.

Similarly, the Municipality is working towards more efficient and effective service delivery to meet the needs of its residents. These initiatives reflect a commitment to upholding principles of good governance, which are essential for driving local development and ensuring sustainable progress. By continuously evaluating and improving its governance practices, Budhanilkantha Municipality aims to build a more inclusive, just, and democratic local government.

6. RESULTS

In this chapter, the researcher presents, analyzes, and interprets collected data on various indicators of good governance in Budhanilkantha Municipality. Primary data assesses key aspects such as accountability, transparency, rule of law, participation, corruption control, and effectiveness. Additionally, evaluations are made on public service delivery conditions, information transparency, and public attitudes toward local government participation based on responses from duty bearers, service receivers, and local intellectuals.

6.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The research focuses on socio-demographic characteristics, encompassing variables directly or indirectly influencing scientific investigations. Variables such as gender, age, education, ethnicity, occupation, religion, and marital status are considered. Respondent categories serve as vital factors influencing responses to research questions, as each category represents a variable with diverse attributes impacting social scientific research. Table 1 illustrates the types of respondents.

Table 1. Types of Respondents

SN	Respondents	Frequency	Percent
1	Elected Representatives	25	20.83
2	Administrative Personnel	25	20.83
3	Service Recipients	50	41.67
3	Local Intellectuals	20	16.67
	Total	120	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The table above provides a breakdown of respondent types in this study. The majority (41.67%) consists of individuals receiving public services who visit the Budhanilkantha Municipality Office and its surrounding wards in Kathmandu [17], [19], [20], [21], [22]. Administrative staff (20.83%) from both the municipal office and these wards follow this group. Elected representatives, including municipal executives and ward members from the same five wards, comprise 20.83% of respondents. Local intellectuals comprise the smallest portion (16.67%) of these five wards. Recognizing that different respondent types may have diverse attributes impacting their responses, attitudes, perceptions, levels of understanding, values, and norms, the researcher categorized respondents into four groups to ensure more accurate and dependable information.

6.2. Practices of Good Governance in Local Government

Good governance is a normative standard for legitimate, accountable, and effective methods of exercising public power and managing resources to achieve widely accepted social goals. It provides guidelines and a roadmap for governments to ensure stability and performance within their nations. The role of good governance varies significantly depending on the practices of accountability, transparency, and political and cultural dynamics present in each specific context.

6.2.1. Accountability in Local Government

Accountability is a cornerstone of good governance, encompassing office-bearers' obligation to justify their actions, conduct, and performance to those with the authority to expect such behavior. It involves responsibility, transparency, liability, control, and responsiveness [22]. This multifaceted concept is defined and perceived in various ways across literature, ranging from narrow to broad interpretations. Accountability is a proactive process in which public officials justify their actions. In this dynamic, the actor is tasked with explaining and justifying their conduct, while the forum holds the authority to question and judge, potentially leading to consequences. Accountability is vital in cultivating trust and effectiveness across various domains, including social, educational, institutional, and bureaucratic realms [21].

Table 2. Perception Regarding Accountability

Items	Category	Frequency	Percent
Do you know about the concept of accountability?	Yes	100	83.33
	No	20	16.66
Do you think accountability contributes to maintaining good governance?	Yes	110	91.66
	No	10	8.33
Can citizens access accountability documents and get an answer to their questions from municipal offices?	Yes	80	66.66
	No	30	25
	I do not know	10	8.33
Has the organization conducted public hearing timely in accordance with law?	Yes	75	62.2
	No	25	20.83
	I do not know	20	16.66
Is there code of conduct for people's representatives and administrative personnel?	Yes	90	75
	No	10	8.33
	Yes but not it very effective	20	16.66
If yes is it complied by all?	Yes	60	50
	No	30	25
	I have no Opinion	30	25
Is there any remedial mechanism against the violation?	Yes	70	58.33
	No	30	25
	I do not know	20	16.66
Did you expect that elected representative would be accountable to the people	Yes	100	83.33

Items	Category	Frequency	Percent
Governance would improve before federalism came into force?			16.66
	No	20	
Did your expectation came to be true or matched with reality now?	Yes	50	41.66
	No	70	58.33
	Total	120	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Understanding accountability is pivotal for comprehending good governance within local government. In a recent survey, 83.33% of respondents demonstrated awareness of accountability, encompassing most elected leaders, administrative staff, and intellectuals. However, 91.66 % recognized its direct contribution to fostering good governance.

The survey also revealed varying degrees of interaction with accountability mechanisms. Approximately 66.66% of respondents reported receiving accountability documents from the Municipality, while 62.20% believed public hearings were conducted promptly and rule-based. Concerning the existence of a code of conduct for public authorities, 75 % acknowledged its presence, though opinions diverged on its enforcement, with about half disputing its efficacy. Responses regarding remedial measures for code violations were also diverse, with 25% expressing doubts about their effectiveness. Despite elevated expectations from the public, over 70% conveyed dissatisfaction with the actualization of these expectations. Nevertheless, a notable 16.66% expressed optimism for improvement.

Interestingly, there were discernible differences in viewpoints among different groups. Political leaders and administrative staff exhibited more positive perceptions than intellectuals and service participants.

6.2.2. transparency in the Local government

Transparency stands as an indispensable tool in the fight against corruption, the improvement of governance, and the cultivation of accountability. It is a foundational pillar of good governance and democracy, enabling the unrestricted dissemination of information to all involved parties. When information is readily available, it bolsters the efficacy of local self-governance, thereby rendering officials more answerable and receptive to the populace's needs. Moreover, accessible information empowers citizens, enabling them to actively engage in societal and governance matters actively, thereby influencing governmental responsiveness. Despite legislative efforts like the RTI Act in Nepal, which grants citizens access to information, many at the local level have yet to harness this rightfully [20].

The assessment of people's awareness regarding transparency and the right to information unveiled significant findings. A staggering 91.66 % of participants were aware of the concept of transparency, while a commendable 87.5 % acknowledged the constitutional guarantee of the Right to Information in Nepal. Notably, a majority (83.33%) recognized the presence of Right to Information officers in both municipal offices and ward offices. However, only 125 % had actively sought information despite the legal provisions, revealing a prevailing culture of silence and a lack of proactive

engagement among the populace. While 50 % of participants acknowledged proactive disclosure of information by local governments, 33.33 % denied its existence.

Table 3. Citizens' Awareness of Transparency

Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
Do you know the concept of transparency in local governance system?	Yes	110	91.66
	No	10	8.33
Do you know the concept of right to information specified by Nepalese constitution?	Yes	105	87.5
	No	15	12.5
Is there information officer appointed to provide information to the stakeholders and general public the Municipality?	Yes	100	83.33
	No	10	8.33
	I do not know	10	8.33
Have you ever sought information of public concern from the Municipality?	Yes	30	25
	No	90	75
Is there proactive disclosure and update of information in every three months of the Municipality's activities?	Yes	60	50
	No	40	33.33
	I do not know	20	16.66
Is the information provided informative, understandable, accurate, valid, accessible, and portable?	Yes	90	75
	No	10	8.33
	I do not know	20	16.66
Are there cases of hiding of any information which should not be kept hidden?	Yes	45	37.5
	No	55	45.83
	I do not know	20	16.66
Is there use of information technology to provide information to the people?	Yes	105	87.5
	No	5	4.16
	I do not know	10	8.33
Are the procurement procedure publicly disclosed?	Yes	75	62.5
	No	25	20.83
	I do not know	20	16.66
Are vacancies announced within the institution or publicly in simple, clear and easily understood?	Yes	100	83.33
	No	10	8.33
	I do not know	10	8.33
Is there public review of budget and financial reports?	Yes	95	79.16
	No	15	12.50
	I do not know	10	8.33
Are municipal structure, rules, regulations and performance standards of various services, product etc. published?	Yes	70	58.33
	No	30	25
	I do not know	20	16.66
	Total	120	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Transparency within local government procedures is paramount for ensuring accountability and preventing corruption. Although a concerning 37.5% admitted to instances of information disguise, the majority acknowledged the pivotal role of

technology in augmenting governance. Furthermore, opinions varied regarding public scrutiny of budgets, financial reports, and the publication of laws, rules, and performance standards, with approximately 58.33 % expressing support for these practices. These findings underscore the significance of promoting transparency and proactive citizen engagement to foster good governance and accountability within local communities.

6.2.3. participation in local government

Participation empowers local communities by involving them in decisions that impact their lives, promoting responsibility and effective governance. This process emphasizes the importance of building new connections between citizens and government bodies. Active civic involvement is essential for good governance, as it fosters trust and order, while a lack of engagement leads to distrust and disorder. Good governance depends on increased public participation, which ensures accountability, transparency, and credibility in development programs.

Table 4. People's Participation in Local Government

Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
Is there a provision to include people in decision-making regarding matters affecting their lives?	Yes	100	83.33
	No	15	12.5
	I do not know	5	4.17
Are there mechanisms of citizen consultation for formulating and implementing policies and programs?	Yes	95	79.17
	No	15	12.5
	I do not know	10	8.33
Have you ever participated in a Public Hearing program organized by the Municipality?	Yes	80	66.66
	No	40	33.33
Have you ever participated in discussions and consultations on development projects and programs conducted by the Municipality?	Yes	90	75
	No	30	25
Do you think the Municipality involves people in the decision-making process regarding matters of public concern?	Yes	90	75
	No	20	16.66
	I have no idea	10	8.33
Is there a problem of authority encroachment (interference) on the authority of other officials?	Yes	35	29.17
	No	45	37.5
	I do not know	40	33.33
	Total	120	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2023

Legal provisions exist in local government to involve people in decision-making, but their practical implementation depends on various factors. A survey revealed that 83.33% of respondents affirm the existence of participatory mechanisms in decision-making, though opinions vary among different groups. Service recipients, in particular, show less agreement with this assertion. Nearly the same percentage of respondents acknowledge consultation mechanisms, policies, and programs.

Despite this, participation in public hearing programs remains low, with 66.66 % of respondents not involved. This poses challenges for achieving participatory and inclusive local governance. There is strong support for involving people in local government

projects and addressing public concerns, with 75 % believing in the importance of public involvement. Regarding interference in administrative jurisdiction, administrative personnel and political leaders have contrasting views, as highlighted by cross-tabulated data.

6.2.4. Corruption Trends in Local Government

The United Nations Convention against Corruption criminalizes bribery across various sectors, including national and foreign public officials and the private sector. The Prevention of Corruption Act 2002 aims to maintain peace, financial discipline, and morality, extending its jurisdiction to non-Nepalese citizens and public servants abroad. The Good Governance (Management and Operation) Act 2008 focuses on achieving good governance through corruption-free public administration. According to Section 47 of the Civil Service Act 1991, civil employees are prohibited from accepting gifts without government approval.

Table 5. Trends of Corruption

Corruption forms	Category	Frequency	Percent
Nepotism in the employment of officials	Yes	40	33.33
	No	80	66.66
Irregularities in the award of tenders and contracts	Yes	35	29.17
	No	85	70.83
Misuse and maladministration of public funds, property, and resources for personal advantage	Yes	50	41.66
	No	70	58.33
Taking extra money in cash for providing services or speedy services	Yes	90	75
	No	30	25
Misappropriation and allocation of budgets, funds, and Grants	Yes	95	79.17
	No	25	20.83
Asking for unnecessary documents for compelling to provide grafts	Yes	30	25
	No	90	75
Have you heard or read about corruption cases in your Municipality in the past year?	Yes	80	66.66
	No	40	33.33
Impunity or lack of punishment for the corrupt person	Somewhat likely	20	16.66
	Very likely	40	33.33
	Most likely	60	50
Expensive election	Somewhat likely	15	12.5
	Very likely	55	45.83
	Most likely	50	41.66
Working culture by breaching the law	Somewhat likely	25	20.83
	Very likely	40	33.33
	Most likely	55	45.83
Inflation and increasing market price	Not Likely	10	8.33
	Somewhat likely	30	25
	Very likely	40	33.33
	Most likely	40	33.33
The increasing involvement of middleman	Somewhat likely	20	16.66
	Very likely	70	58.33
	Most likely	30	25
Corrupt consumer groups.	Somewhat likely	10	8.33
	Very likely	50	41.66
	Most likely	60	60
Doing work for a high amount of money through consumer groups	Not Likely	40	33.33
	Somewhat likely	50	41.66
	Very likely	20	16.66

Corruption forms	Category	Frequency	Percent
A culture of showing off high prestige by means of wealth	Most likely	10	8.33
	Not Likely	10	8.33
	Somewhat likely	80	66.66
	Very likely	20	16.66
	Most likely	10	8.33
Lack of awareness in people	Not Likely	20	16.66
	Somewhat likely	50	41.66
	Very likely	30	25
	Most likely	20	16.66
Total		180	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2023

Transparency International defines corruption as the misuse of entrusted power for personal gain, which detrimentally affects economic development. In developing countries, local governments often grapple with issues like lack of transparency, elite capture, and corruption, resulting in a weakened economy. Survey respondents identified various forms of corruption, such as nepotism, irregularities in awarding contracts, misuse of public funds, and demands for additional service payments. However, the overall perception of corruption remains below 50%, possibly indicating minimal corruption or biased responses influenced by respondents' potential involvement. Despite recognizing corruption, most have not reported it. Respondents evaluated factors contributing to corruption, universally acknowledging impunity and lack of punishment. Expensive elections emerged as the most influential factor, followed by a culture of lawbreaking. Market inflation, the role of middlemen, and corrupt consumer groups were also significant contributors. Lack of ethics and morality and a culture of flaunting wealth were rated as highly likely to foster corruption. Public unawareness was considered another strong factor, while family needs were seen as having a weaker association. Nepotism and favoritism were widely believed to fuel corruption significantly.

The assessment of corruption caused by respondents highlighted various contributing factors. Impunity for corrupt individuals was universally acknowledged with minor differences in perceived strength. Political protection received mixed ratings. Expensive elections were the most influential factor, closely followed by a culture of breaking laws. Market inflation and price hikes were also seen as motivators. The involvement of middlemen and corrupt consumer groups was strongly linked to corruption. Lack of ethics and morality was cited as primary causes, along with a culture of flaunting wealth. Lack of public awareness and family needs were seen as weaker contributors. Nepotism and favoritism were widely considered significant drivers of corruption.

7. FINDINGS

The study on Socio-Demographic Profiles revealed a diverse range of respondents, primarily comprising public service recipients, administrative personnel, elected representatives, and local intellectuals. Most respondents were 31 to 50 years old, exhibiting a slight gender imbalance skewed towards more male participants. Education levels varied, with administrative personnel and local intellectuals showing higher levels of education. The majority identified as Hindu, belonging mainly to Janajati and Chhetri

ethnic groups, while occupations ranged from teachers and politicians to farmers and private business owners. Interestingly, most respondents were not affiliated with any political party.

Regarding accountability, respondents showed awareness of related concepts, although knowledge of public hearings and adherence to codes of conduct varied. Expectations from officials were high, yet satisfaction with accountability mechanisms varied, indicating room for improvement. In terms of transparency, while awareness of concepts was high, knowledge of Right to Information laws was lacking, and there was reluctance to seek information from public offices. Proactive disclosure of information was claimed but met with skepticism.

The evaluation of Budhanilkantha Municipality's governance practices revealed strengths and areas needing improvement. Respondents showed a high awareness of accountability and transparency, but satisfaction with accountability mechanisms was mixed, suggesting that their effectiveness could be enhanced while these practices are acknowledged. Similarly, while there is knowledge of governance principles like participation and rule of law, actual engagement and implementation were inconsistent. This aligns with assessing the effectiveness of governance practices, highlighting the positives and areas where further improvements are needed, such as proactive information disclosure and reducing bureaucratic delays in service delivery.

The study also sheds light on the perceptions of elected representatives, administrative personnel, service recipients, and local intellectuals. While respondents exhibited awareness of governance concepts such as accountability, transparency, and participation, their perceptions varied. For instance, the lack of knowledge about Right to Information laws and reluctance to seek information from public offices reflect a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation. Similarly, concerns about political interference and evasion of responsibilities among public officials suggest that while governance practices are in place, their execution is sometimes hindered by external factors. These findings consistently examine perceptions, highlighting stakeholders' expectations and challenges concerning good governance practices in the Municipality.

8. DISCUSSION

The findings from the study on the socio-demographic profiles and governance practices in Budhanilkantha Municipality reveal significant insights into the interplay between citizen perceptions and governance mechanisms. The diverse demographic composition of respondents, including public service recipients, administrative personnel, elected representatives, and local intellectuals, underscores the multifaceted nature of public engagement in governance. The predominance of individuals aged 31 to 50 and a slight male skew suggests that the demographic profile may influence governance, accountability, and transparency perceptions. This aligns with existing literature highlighting how demographic factors can shape citizen satisfaction and engagement with public services [23], [24].

The study's findings regarding accountability and transparency indicate a notable awareness among respondents about these governance principles. However, the mixed

satisfaction levels with accountability mechanisms suggest a disconnect between awareness and effective implementation. This phenomenon is echoed in the literature, which posits that while citizens may recognize the importance of accountability, their satisfaction is often contingent upon the perceived effectiveness of governance practices [25]. Furthermore, the lack of knowledge regarding Right to Information laws and the reluctance to seek information from public offices reflect a broader trend where citizens may be aware of their rights yet feel hindered in exercising them due to bureaucratic barriers [26], [27]. This gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application is critical, as it highlights the need for enhanced communication and education regarding governance mechanisms to empower citizens [28].

Moreover, evaluating Budhanilkantha Municipality's governance practices reveals strengths and weaknesses. At the same time, respondents are highly aware of governance principles such as participation and the rule of law; the inconsistency in actual engagement points to systemic issues that require attention. The literature suggests that effective governance is not solely about the existence of policies but also about their implementation and the public's active participation in governance processes [29]. The findings regarding political interference and evasion of responsibilities among public officials further complicate the governance landscape, indicating that external factors can significantly impact the effectiveness of governance practices [30].

9. CONCLUSION

Good governance is essential for keeping democratic values, ensuring effective service delivery, and maintaining governance quality at the local level. The study highlights that while key indicators of good governance, such as transparency, accountability, participation, and the rule of law, are practiced in Budhanilkantha Municipality, areas require improvement. The evaluation of governance practices and public service delivery revealed that while citizens and officials are aware of governance principles, challenges such as limited proactive information disclosure, difficulty in accessing public information, and persistent corruption need to be addressed. The perceptions of elected representatives, administrative staff, and service recipients also reflect a gap between expectations and actual governance outcomes, especially in accountability and transparency.

The study recommends improving public information's proactive disclosure, improving citizen participation mechanisms, and addressing bureaucratic delays and corruption through stricter enforcement of anti-corruption laws. Providing capacity-building programs for local officials and increasing awareness of the Right to Information laws is crucial to ensure greater citizen engagement. Political interference and favoritism must be tackled by promoting impartiality in decision-making processes and reinforcing accountability mechanisms. Achieving effective, transparent, and inclusive governance in Budhanilkantha Municipality will require a holistic approach that integrates these recommendations with the ongoing commitment to strengthening democratic principles and public service delivery.

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