

**Examining Citizen Participation in Local Policymaking:
An analysis of Nepal's participatory planning process**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the participatory planning process in Nepal which is a local level policymaking process organised by municipalities to make mid-term local public policies and small-scale development programs. The empirical analysis focuses on the structure and functions of the planning process, which were redesigned to be led by appointed officials when there were no elected officials from 2002 to 2016. Although the participatory governance literature in developing countries in general is substantial, so far the participatory processes under appointed officials has received only limited attention. This thesis aims to understand if and how citizens participated in the making of local public policies and small-scale development programs in the absence of electoral politics.

The empirical research undertaken for this thesis is designed as a qualitative case study, in accordance with the ideas of a single case focusing on the Butwal municipality in Nepal. The municipality has three different embedded organisational structures of planning: the *Tole Bhèla*, the *Ward Bhèla* and the *Integrated Planning Formulation Committee*, which are regarded respectively as informal, semi-formal and formal forums of planning for analytical purposes. A two-dimensional analytical framework comprised of the organisational structure and function of the planning process is devised to interpret the data. Data were generated through a total of 42 semi-structured interviews which were conducted between 2014 and 2016 together with the observation of several informal and formal planning forums in a specific ward in the Butwal municipality.

The analysis shows that, although all planning forums have similar functions, each varies significantly in terms of who participates and how decisions are made. These variances have four general implications for Nepal's planning processes. These include: (i) the planning process is structured in a hierarchical institutional design; (ii) bottom-level forums in the hierarchy are relatively more open than upper-level forums for citizens to participate; (iii) the more the participatory process progresses, the more formal they become; and (iv) compared with the formal forums, semi-formal and formal forums are more conducive to inclusive and representative citizen participation.

The broader scholarly contribution of this research is that it provides insights about a successful case of a municipal-level participatory process. The empirical analysis of Nepal's participatory planning process suggests that bureaucratic apparatuses which are generally not perceived as avenues for citizen participation can also be instrumental for participatory decision-making, though conclusions surrounding the accountability of participants and the legitimacy of decisions need further attention.

The findings provide three key messages to the scholars and practitioners focusing on participatory planning in Nepal. First, top-down local governance reforms introduced between 2002 and 2016 contributed to changing the institutional design and processes of planning. Secondly, such changes transformed the roles of appointed officials from managers to leaders in the planning process but it was unclear to what extent appointed officials were obliged to be accountable to local communities. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, both the changed institutional design of the planning process and the changing roles of appointed officials widened the scope for citizens of different types to actively participate in the local policymaking process in municipalities.

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Acronyms

CAC	Civic Awareness Centre
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CFUG	Community Forestry Users' Groups
DDC	District Development Committee
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
INGO	International Nongovernmental Organisation
IPFC	Integrated Planning Formulation Committee
LBFC	Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission
LBRMP	Local Bodies' Resource Mobilisation Procedures
LGCDP	Local Governance and Community Development Program
LSGA	Local Self Governance Act
LSGR	Local Self Governance Regulations
MCPM	Minimum Conditions and Performance Measures
MoFALD	Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development
NGO	Nongovernmental Organisation
NPC	National Planning Commission
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDW	Panchayat Development Workers
PLWD	People Living with Disabilities
PP	Participatory Planning
PSPC	Project Selection and Prioritisation Committee
RUPP	Rural-Urban Partnership Program
TLO	Tole Lane Organisation
TLOCC	Tole Lane Organisations' Coordination Committee
TLOCC-M	Tole Lane Organisations' Coordination Committee at the Municipal-level
TLOCC-W	Tole Lane Organisations' Coordination Committee at the Ward-level
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
VDC	Village Development Committee
WCF	Ward Citizens Forum

Chapter 1

Introduction

The subject of this thesis is Nepal's municipal participatory planning, an annual local governance process for formulating local public policies and short and mid-term development programs. The participatory planning process was introduced in the Local Self Governance Act (LSGA), 1999 of the central government with the objective of offering participation opportunities to citizens in the making of public policies and small-scale development programs at the local level. The law had said that the institution of planning was to be steered by an elected leadership, but, between 2002 and 2016, the government did not conduct local elections. This resulted in changes in the institutional design and processes of planning, among others. This thesis examines a municipal participatory planning process that was implemented in the absence of elected leadership to understand what contributions were made by the process in facilitating citizen participation in the making of local public policies and small-scale development programs.

This chapter introduces the research. It starts with a brief background to participatory planning at the local level in Nepal. Then it moves on to discussing how citizen participation has been sought through the planning process. The subsequent sections in this chapter show the aims, research questions, approaches to analysis, and the justification and limitations of the research. The final section shows the outline of the thesis.

1.1 Background

Since its introduction to local governance in the 1960s, the planning process has been an important decision-making mechanism at the local level. In the early years of its implementation, the planning process was used to inform citizens about forthcoming social and infrastructure development projects, so local authorities could *mobilise* ordinary people to implement such projects (Pant 1966). Local governance reforms initiated in the 1970s revised the institution of planning as a way of *consulting* local citizens about their collective problems though critics argue that the public input would hardly be heard in the local decision-making processes (Abullaish 1980; Wildavsky 1972). The planning process was further revised in the early years of the 1980s as a way of *collaborating* with local people to identify the problems at grassroots level and thereby implement small-scale

developmental projects jointly with stakeholders (Messerchmidt *et al.* 1983; Ojha & Adhikari 1982; Paudyal 1994).

Following the reintroduction of democracy in 1990, a number of political and administrative reforms were initiated to *empower* communities to activate their participation in the process of local governance (Administrative Reform Commission 1992; Government of Nepal 1990b). The planning process was particularly designed to offer opportunities to citizens for participating in the making of local public policies and developmental programs with the provision that its structures and process would be steered by elected local government leaders (Government of Nepal 1999b). However, when the government could not conduct local elections for over a decade between 2002 and 2016, the statutory provisions of participatory planning could not be implemented in accordance with their original intent (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013; Pandeya 2015).

In the absence of elected leaders, the central government took a decision in 2003 to temporarily handover certain roles, duties and powers of municipalities to appointed bureaucrats. The centrally appointed bureaucrats were made responsible for continuing to, *inter alia*, annually formulate local public policies and short and mid-term development programs through the implementation of the planning process. Although the central government had several instruments to facilitate the planning process in municipalities, local bureaucrats were given a relative degree of autonomy in designing the institution of planning as per their local circumstances. In other words, appointed bureaucrats were empowered to create structures for participation, select participants and specify ways for deliberation in lieu of the fundamental structure and process devised in the Local Self Governance Act (1999).

There were three different stages of the planning process through which local administrators were observed to be formulating local public policies in conjunction with small-scale development programs. Each stage was comprised of three different yet interrelated activities, making the municipal planning an annual process of nine different activities which would require local administrators three months to complete. The planning process would be completed with the promulgation of an annual handbook of local public policies and development programs.

1.2 Studies of local planning processes

The global literature on participatory governance in developing countries has been rapidly growing (Speer 2012). The successful empirical evidence generated in many developing countries shows that the scope of participatory programs both in their neighbouring countries and even in advanced countries has been expanding (Devika 2016; Peixoto 2017; Waheduzzaman *et al.* 2017). With this expansion, the literature suggests that three different types of institutional design for participatory processes are particularly popular at the local government level: *participatory budgeting*, *participatory planning* and *policy-specific participatory processes* (Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat 2005; Heller *et al.* 2007; Wampler 2012). *Participatory budgeting* refers to a local governance process that seeks to involve citizens in making the annual local budget. *Participatory planning* is also a local governance process that aims to involve citizens in identifying, deliberating, and shortlisting the problems with appropriate suggestions to address them. *Policy-specific participatory processes* are found to be organised both at the local and other levels of the government with the aim of involving citizens in either formulating or implementing specific public policies such as health, education, and natural resource management.

There is already a mature and voluminous amount of literature on both political and administrative decentralisation in Nepal covering the study of citizen participation (Abullaish 1980; Dhungel *et al.* 2011; Hasrat 1970; Huntington *et al.* 1999; Khadka 1986; Panday 1989; Phadnis 1981; Wildavsky 1972). The literature shows that citizen participation has been sought across a range of policy areas: community forestry (Schusser *et al.* 2016; Upreti 2013), community schools (Carney & Bista 2009; Khanal 2013) and healthcare services (Bhusal 2011; Dulal *et al.* 2016; Green *et al.* 2007). In principle, studies show that LSGA (1999) is the fundamental legislative source for all participatory processes at the local level. However, in practice, scholars often point out that participatory processes across different policy areas at the local level seem to have been independently organised outside the legislative requirement of the LSGA (Thapa 2014).

Although the planning process has remained one of participatory processes at the local level for over four decades, the existing scholarship on Nepal's participatory planning is limited (i.e. Acharya 2016; Adhikari 2006; Shrestha 1998). Moreover, it does not focus on this particular period of local governance when planning was organised by appointed

bureaucrats in municipalities in the absence of electoral politics from 2002 to 2016 (Pandeya 2015; Pandeya & Shrestha 2016).

1.3 Research aims and methodology

This research is primarily interested in studying whether and how the planning process in Nepal's municipalities helped facilitate citizens' participation in the making of local public policies. The subject of this study is a municipal planning process in Nepal that was implemented by appointed officials for some 14 years between 2002 and 2016. The following two sub-questions guide the research:

- How was the planning process organised in the absence of electoral politics?
- To what extent did the local planning process facilitate citizens' participation in the making of public policies?

A qualitative case study approach to the research design has been adopted to answer these questions. The sub-metropolitan city of Butwal in the western part of Nepal was selected to observe the planning process and conduct interviews with participants and local officials. This is one of the oldest municipalities in Nepal which gives an opportunity to observe how conventional forms of civil society organisations, if there were any, were evolving to participate in decision-making mechanisms at the municipal level. Tole Lane Organisations (TLOs), a form of civil society organisations in Butwal are said to have been effective in municipal governance in Nepal (Huntington *et al.* 1999). Another reason for selecting the Butwal municipality was that Butwal had been continuously named among the top five highly performing municipalities for the last five years, as measured by the Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission.

The philosophical underpinning of this research follows the ideas of interpretivism (Lowndes *et al.* 2017; Marsh & Furlong 2002), the epistemological position of a researcher who believes in the fact that the world is socially constructed and the role of researcher is to study social constructions. Following this as a theoretical underpinning, the analysis of the planning process is primarily divided into two different dimensions: organisational structures with the focus on studying what structures were available to citizens for participating; and functional aspects with the aim of understanding what specific functions were citizens performing while participating.

Alongside the observation of the planning process in a ward of the Butwal municipality between November 2014 and February 2015, 27 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants and organisers at various organisational levels of planning in one of the wards of the Butwal sub-metropolitan city, which were supplemented in 2016 by a further 15 interviews. Two focus group discussions were also organised: the first in February 2015 with the members of the municipal-level Tole Lane Organisations Coordination Committee (TLOCC-M); and the second in February 2016 with a ward-level Tole Lane Organisations Coordination Committee (TLOCC-W) in a ward.

In general, both the primary and secondary sources of data are rich in terms of providing knowledge about how the planning process was organised in the Butwal sub-metropolitan city during the absence of elected politicians. Specifically, the data explores three key themes about the planning process: institutional context, how and why appointed bureaucrats redesigned the organisation of planning; procedural elements, the types of participants, their selection processes and their roles in planning; and functional aspects, the processes of making decisions about local public policies, and short and long-term small-scale developmental programs. While the existing literature on citizen participation prescribes a range of analytical frameworks to analyse these major themes of participatory planning (Fung 2006b, 2015; Fung & Wright 2001, 2003b), one of the significant shortcomings of the available analytical frameworks is that the notion of public policymaking/formulation is not adequately embedded in the framework – irrespective of the recognition that many participatory processes are designed to produce public policies of some kind (Anderson 2010; Chindarkar *et al.* 2017; Michels & De Graaf 2010).

1.4 Thesis outline

This thesis is structured in three parts, each containing three chapters. Part 1 covers the literature review, the research context and the research methodology. Part 2 introduces the empirical material about how planning was implemented in informal, semi-formal and formal organisational structures in Butwal. Part 3 analyses the planning process through two different dimensions: institutional design for participation and policymaking as a function of planning.

The chapters in Part 1 are helpful in setting up the scene for this research. In *Chapter 2*, the literature on participatory governance, citizen participation and participatory policymaking is presented to clarify the concepts as well as the empirical research on types, methods and

processes of citizen participation programs in the developing world. This chapter also draws on the empirical literature about citizen participation in the context of Nepal to identify if there are any research gaps. *Chapter 3* presents the research methodology and data generation methods in detail. *Chapter 4* introduces the research topic by explaining what participatory planning is, how it has been evolving as an influential policymaking mechanism at the local level over the last four decades, and the extent to which reforms have been changing the institution and processes of planning, specifically in the period of the political vacuum between 2002 and 2016.

In Part 2, the three chapters examine how planning activities in the Butwal municipality were organised across the three interrelated planning forums: the Tole Bhèla, the Ward Bhèla and the IPFC. *Chapter 5* describes how Tole Bhèlas were organised in neighbourhoods; *Chapter 6* draws on empirical materials about a Ward Bhèla; and *Chapter 7* carries details on how the Integrated Planning Formulation Committee (IPFC) was organised as part of the planning process in the Butwal municipality.

Part 3 analyses the institution of planning and its functions. *Chapter 8* analyses the participation dimension of planning to get insights into the extent to which the institutional design offers participatory attributes. An assessment of the functions of each of the planning forums follows in *Chapter 9*. Citizen participation in policymaking is discussed in *Chapter 10*.

The conclusion in *Chapter 11* summarises the research. It re-emphasises the findings in terms of how the overall environment of non-electoral local governance facilitated the participation of citizens in the making of local public policies. It also brings out the methodological challenges of conducting citizen participation research in the fragile context of local democracy. The chapter concludes by presenting the key contributions of the study to the practice of participatory planning in Nepal with a clear identification of limitations that future research can address.

Part 1
Setting the Scene of the Research

Chapter 2

Literature review

This chapter reviews, critiques and summarises the current participatory governance literature with the aim of identifying the leading concepts, ideas, and themes necessary to carry out the research. The review has been based on the international literature on participatory governance, however, particular consideration has been given to the studies on participatory processes in developing countries. Two major areas of participatory governance literature in developing countries are synthesised: (a) citizen participation to gain an understanding of the aims of citizen participation programs; and (b) participatory institutions to expand and deepen the knowledge about the institutional design of citizen participation programs. The synthesis is used in identifying the organisational structures, methods, and the focus and assumptions of the participatory processes which are regarded as essential elements of the analytical framework to be adopted in this research (Chapter 3).

It begins with a review of the concept of citizen participation in the participatory governance literature. Next is an explanation of ideas of citizen participation in decision-making. In the third section, the institutions and processes of citizen participation programs in developing countries are explained. The fourth section provides critical assessments of the citizen participation literature which help identify the gaps in the literature.

2.1 Citizen participation in the participatory governance literature

Citizen participation refers to processes that are specifically designed to engage citizens in decision-making. The literature suggests that many such processes are either officially organised or sponsored by the government (Lowndes *et al.* 2001a, 2001b), although, in recent times, there has been an increase in citizen participation programs organised by civil society organisations and NGOs. Importantly, much of the literature asserts that participatory processes are found at the local government level. Lowndes *et al.* (2006, pp. 283-284) list some five different methods of government-sponsored participatory processes: consumerist methods focused on service delivery; traditional methods designed to share information both bottom-up and top-down; public forums organised to discuss with activists and stakeholders; consultative methods to consult with specific groups of people; and, deliberative methods to provide opportunities to citizens for discussing their problems with each other before making recommendations to decision-makers.

The concept of citizen participation has been evolving through two different approaches in the literature. The first is a normative approach discussed in democracy theories. This approach asserts that citizen participation in political decision-making is vital to renew the relationship between elected representatives and their voters. Some earlier thinkers about democracy have realist views about citizen participation in democracies, saying that democracy enables citizens to choose their leaders to make decisions on behalf of them (Schumpeter 1943 (Reprinted 2000)). However, this view of citizen participation in democracy has been increasingly challenged in recent times. Scholars working in the field of participatory democracy and deliberative democracy theories have been asserting that democracy must provide opportunities for citizens to participate directly in the political decision-making (Dryzek 2000; Pateman 1970).

The second approach is empirical. The focus of citizen participation is to bring citizens' voices into the decision-making that affects them. However, offering participation opportunities to citizens in decision-making is not as straightforward as it sounds because, as scholars and practitioners often point out, citizen participation requires the transformation of institutions that were institutionalised to operate in representative settings (Hendriks 2015; Pateman 2012; United Nations Public Administration Network 2008).

In recent decades, many developing countries have witnessed a proliferation of participatory processes to involve citizens in the making of local public policies and budgeting, small-scale short-term and medium-term development projects and (re)arrangement of local public services at the local level (Heller & Rao 2015). The participatory governance literature suggests that such a proliferation of participatory processes is, *inter alia*, a response to the failure of representative institutions to include ordinary citizens in public policy processes (Fischer 2016b; Fung & Wright 2003b; United Nations Public Administration Network 2008). Specific to the developing world, the literature shows that both donor-driven approaches to governance and leftist political movements supporting citizen participation in governance have contributed to the expansion of both new and conventional forms of participatory processes (Ganuza & Baiocchi 2012; Rees & Hossain 2013; Speer 2012; Wampler 2012).

For the last five decades, studies on citizen participation, which are specifically influenced by the ideas of participatory democracy, have consistently pointed out the limitations of conventional forms of citizen participation mechanisms such as voting (Pateman 1970,

2012). While most of the participatory processes in developing countries are being understood as alternatives to address the limitations of the conventional mechanisms of citizen participation, there does not seem to be any standard institutional design and process for citizens to participate in decision-making (Devika 2016; Heller 2013; Njogu 2013). There are a range of institutional design types across many developing countries, many of which are rooted in their history while some others are imitated from outside (Olsen 1997).

The literature claims that international aid agencies have been playing important roles in providing policy advice to recipient countries which has resulted in the proliferation of participatory development programs at the local level (Mansuri & Rao 2012). While international support to introduce or enhance the participatory process in developing countries is generally seen from the viewpoint of aid effectiveness, there seems to be a scarcity of perspectives as to whether embedding citizen participation as an aid conditionality is good policy advice (Mihaly 2002; Waheduzzaman & As-Saber 2015). In this vein, Hickey and Mohan (2004, pp. 6-8) assemble evidence on how citizen participation in developing countries has been historically evolving as part of international development cooperation and as endogenous pressure to introduce participatory management in small-scale local development projects.

Although the role of international aid agencies in promoting participatory processes in developing countries is significant, it cannot be denied that there were participatory mechanisms even before the politics of aid entered this debate. Devas and Grant (2003), for example, assert that participatory governance theories initially emerged in the decentralisation literature where the focus was on creating enabling environments for ordinary people to participate in local decision-making (see also, Pollitt 2005). Regardless of differences in understanding how participatory processes are evolving, it is claimed that citizen participation programs can have the potential to generate collaborative partnerships, mobilise wide and transparent exchanges of information, and thereby ensure fairer distribution of resources (Nabatchi 2014; Nabatchi & Amsler 2014). Not all participatory processes, however, can generate the same amount, type and scale of outputs mainly because they vary in their institutional design, operational procedures and contexts (Fung & Wright 2003b).

Two normative aspects of institutional design are ubiquitously explained in the literature: *organisational structures* on which participatory mechanisms are structured, and

operational procedures by which participants are selected and then given opportunities to make decisions (Fung & Wright 2001; Lovan *et al.* 2004). The literature further suggests certain principles to be followed in the institutional design. These include: (a) a more equal distribution of political power, (b) a fairer distribution of resources, (c) the decentralisation of decision-making processes, (d) the development of a wide and transparent exchange of knowledge and information, (e) the establishment of collaborative partnerships, (f) an emphasis on interinstitutional dialogue, and (g) a greater accountability of decision-makers (Arnstein 1969; Fischer 2016b). In other words, organisational structures designed to facilitate citizen participation adopt a number of principles as their guiding objectives. While these principles are understood as long-term objectives to be achieved through the participatory process, each participatory process can have its own goal such as co-optation (promoting participatory policymaking and service delivery) to engage citizens (Fagence 2014; Fischer 2016a; Speer 2012).

2.2 Institutions and processes of citizen participation in developing countries

As the adoption of participatory processes in decision-making increases in many developing countries, a common set of institutions and processes appear – most of which are, as the literature suggests, obviously imitated from, or inspired by, some of the successful neighbouring experiences (Baiocchi & Ganuza 2014; Ganuza & Baiocchi 2012; Krenjova & Raudla 2017). These include:

- Local governments are the sponsors or organisers of the participatory processes;
- Participatory processes are designed to supplement the mainstream policy making process at the local level;
- Decision-making is organised in multi-level settings of the participatory institution;
- A great emphasis is given to the participation of ordinary citizens; and
- Most of the participatory processes occur annually.

First, as Cornwall (2002) synthesises, the term participation was initially adopted by the international development community in the mid-1970s to denote the involvement of local level stakeholders in developmental programs. Since then, participatory processes have been grouped mostly at the local level with the *rise and fall* of different phrases such as community participation, citizen engagement, public participation, and beneficiary participation in development (Hickey & Mohan 2005). In many locations, elected local governments have been the organisers although specific decision-making boards of the

concerned development projects, or policy institutions, have also been seen as organisers or sponsors of the participatory processes (Stoker 1988).

Second, the literature on participatory governance provides evidence that most of the participatory processes are operationalised in representative settings (Fischer 2016b; Fung 2006a; Fung & Wright 2001). As the boundaries of policy making are increasingly expanded to include citizens in the process of making local public policies, operationalisation of such processes in representative settings has brought opacities as to whether participatory processes are only the supplementary efforts or whether they are actually complementing the existing mechanisms of public policies (Pateman 2012). Although some critiques argue that participatory processes can be lengthy and costly, there has been a constant call for making participatory processes mainstream public policy mechanisms at the local level (Clapper 1996; Irvin & Stansbury 2004; Waheduzzaman *et al.* 2017). While the advantages of citizen participation programs are well recognised and appreciated in praxis in almost all the political and economic contexts in developing countries, the international aid community and leftist political movements in particular are seen at the frontlines to demand wider and deeper citizen participation in decision-making (de Sousa Santos 1998; Heller & Rao 2015; Mansuri & Rao 2012).

With regard to these efforts, initiatives carried out by civil society organisations (CSOs), NGOs and other similar groups or campaigns need to be considered. Two aspects of their contribution in making participatory governance effective should be distinguished. The first refers to those participatory processes such as mini publics, citizens juries and community mobilisations which are independently organised mostly by CSOs and NGOs with the hope of producing meaningful policy and programmatic options for the wellbeing of their communities. These sorts of initiatives are specifically researched in the deliberative governance community (Boswell *et al.* 2016; Dryzek 2009, 2012). The second aspect relates to those participatory institutions and processes that are not directly organised by the government, or the formal sector, but, instead, CSOs and NGOs are delegated certain responsibilities and resources for hosting participatory deliberations across different areas in the community. Scholars often criticise this way of carrying out participatory governance, mainly with the fear that handing over responsibilities for organising participatory decision-making processes to non-formal sectors might weaken the process, and thereby increase the

uncertainty of the fate of the proposals that are developed by such processes (Font *et al.* 2016; Rondinella *et al.* 2017).

Although initiatives for building participatory processes as mainstream decision-making functions in several policy and polity contexts have expanded in recent years, there does not seem to be a strong case for institutionalised decision-making mechanism in any of the developing countries. Instead, evidence suggests that participatory processes have merely been utilised to share information between the government and societies, obtain inputs from citizens in regard to the making of local public policies, enable the participation of stakeholders in the implementation of small-scale projects, and thus seek to enhance the legitimacy of the decisions (Fung 2006b; Yang & Pandey 2011).

Third, many of the participatory processes are designed in such a way that they involve citizens of different types at multilevel settings of the participatory decision-making, at the local level (Bua 2017; Kuhlmann 2006). The most celebrated cases of participatory governance in the Indian state of Kerala and the Brazilian municipality of Porte Alegre are two examples where the institutional design involves multilevel arrangements for citizen participation (Heller *et al.* 2007; Smith 2009). A common feature of these arrangements is that they are available at neighbourhood, ward and municipal level. Importantly, they feature the attributes of formal, semi-formal and informal forums of participation (see Lauth 2000), though such a typology is not exclusive. Drawing upon the theories of neo-institutionalism (Hall & Taylor 1996), formal forums represent official political institutions with a set of coded values, rules and norms that shape the behaviour of actors who are involved in the processes of such institutions. Informal forums, on the other hand, are understood as those processes and entities which may not have any obligatory institutional and procedural rules to follow, hence their existence depends on their effectiveness in the community where they belong. Obviously, semi-formal forums consist of a mixture of both formal and informal forums.

The aforementioned cases of participatory processes feature all three of these types of forums, although they are different in name. In Porte Alegre, as Wampler (2012) shows, Regional Popular Assemblies and Thematic Popular Assemblies represent informal forums while Regional Budget Forums and Thematic Budget Forums feature the attributes of semi-formal forums. The Council of the Participatory Budget works as a formal forum, which connects the entire participatory budgeting process with the core decision-making authority

in the municipality (see also Smith 2009 p. 36). In Kerala, the participatory planning campaign involves three different levels for citizen participation: Gram Sabha, as informal forums to identify the 'felt needs' of the people; Development Seminars as semi-formal forums to assess the resources and problems; and the elected municipal council as the formal forum to approve the plan (Isaac & Heller 2003).

Fourth and perhaps the most significant common feature of the participatory processes in developing countries is the objective of involving ordinary citizens in the decision-making. This is significant in terms of giving priority to the participation of ordinary people, which many of the conventional institutions of decision-making would not do, as Smith (2009) argues when defining democratic innovations, "... institutions that are specifically designed to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process."¹ The literature on participatory governance in developing countries clearly suggests that participatory processes aim to increase, deepen and widen the participation of ordinary people in the decision-making, though there are differences in terms of the extent to which the multilevel arrangements are open to all, and the degree to which organisers of such processes are influenced by ordinary participants (Font *et al.* 2016; Irvin & Stansbury 2004; Kangas *et al.* 2015; Lafont 2015).

This dimension of participatory governance is important, especially in the context of developing countries where many, if not all, decision-making processes are supposedly dominated by elite participants of different types (Andersson & van Laerhoven 2007; Dasgupta & Beard 2007; see also Grindle 2017). Nevertheless, evidence suggests that many developing countries have introduced several measures to minimise the interference of elites such as the appointment of a facilitator in the participatory process, adoption of random selection methods to select participants, and provision of equal speaking opportunities in the meetings, pre-arranged sets of project selection criteria, and the setting up of a policy-specific budgetary ceiling in advance (Fung 2003; Fung & Wright 2003a).

Fifth and the final common feature is the timing of participatory processes in terms of when, and for how long, they are organised. The majority of the local level participatory processes obviously reoccur annually and are organised as one-off consultative meetings (as explained above) hence they tend to be organised anytime throughout the cycle of a fiscal year and can vary from a few hours meeting to a few days workshop. However, those participatory processes which are relatively more institutionalised than one-off consultations take more

than three months in general. For example, as de Sousa Santos (1998) reports, the participatory budgeting in Porte Alegre commences in April and runs for about nine months while the planning campaign in Kerala runs for about six months (Isaac & Heller 2003).

Practitioners and scholars have been consistently pointing out the need to conduct large-scale, national level and cross-country research to enrich the understanding of the effectiveness of participatory processes (Selee 2004; Wampler & McNulty 2011). Nevertheless, the literature on participatory governance in developing countries suggests that three similar institutional design types can be extracted: *participatory planning* with maximum focus on formulating short-term and mid-term development plans; *participatory budgeting* with significant reference to distributing local resources to the needy areas/communities; and *policy or sector specific participatory decision-making* with the aim of strengthening the participatory environment in the making of local public policies (Bardhan & Mookherjee 2006; Fung 2003; Hickey & Mohan 2004; Sheely 2015).

Participatory planning

In the age of complex governance (Fung 2006b), planning has increasingly become an important strategy to deal with the most pressing public policy problems both at the national and subnational level (Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat 2005). Planning, comes from the literature of development economics where the focus is on formulating short and mid-term plans on, for example, setting targets for economic growth and development, identifying areas of investment, and developing policy and program options to improve the economy for a specific level of government (Leigh & Blakely 2017). A number of other disciplines such as regional and urban planning also discuss planning but their focus is more on developing land use planning and city planning (i.e. Burke 1979; Dent & Dalal-Clayton 2003).

The planning exercises in many developing countries have increasingly shown the incorporation of ordinary citizens and their representatives. Although there are differences in the objectives of planning, institutional design and participation methods, a common feature in terms of the objectives of planning is that most of the planning processes aim to formulate annual, short and mid-term local public policies for a particular level of government in a participatory manner (Isaac & Heller 2003; Sheely 2015; Smith 1973; Yan & Xin 2016). Both in advanced and developing countries, local level planning processes, thus, are evolving as local level participatory policymaking mechanisms, a process

specifically designed to involve citizens in the cycle of policy formulation (Gastil *et al.* 2016; Michels & De Graaf 2010). A policy formulation cycle typically involves three different stages: identification of problems, development of alternatives, and selection of best suitable alternatives (Anderson 2010; Howlett *et al.* 2009; Jann & Wegrich 2007; Johnson 2017).

Participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting offers several opportunities to ordinary citizens in local decision-making where citizens and their representatives explore, develop and decide the most pressing issues to be solved through municipal budgetary intervention (Fung & Warren 2011; Peixoto 2017). Participatory budgeting was initially considered as one of the excellent empirical cases to justify the practicality of participatory governance, which since has gained a momentum to the extent that, as Smith (2009) notes, "... typically we assume that the direction of learning about democratic practices will be one way – from the advanced industrial to more recently established democracies. ... participatory budgeting offers one celebrated example of where learning has reversed." Since then, it has been evolving as a quickly expanded participatory mechanism for engaging citizens in budgetary decision-making at the local level (de Sousa Santos 1998; Ganuza & Baiocchi 2012). From the end of the 1980s onwards, the case of participatory budgeting in the city of Porto Alegre in Brazil attracted the attention of both scholars, particularly the political and administrative scientists, and practitioners especially those working for the international development community.

One of the main functions of participatory budgeting is to develop policy and programmatic proposals which are then implemented by the utilisation of the available municipal budget. From this viewpoint, the function of participatory planning and participatory budgeting sound similar especially given that both of the processes' institutional designs and processes look alike. However, there is a significant difference between the two as participatory planning focuses on developing a combination of policy, program and service-delivery related proposals which, as suggested by the evidence from the Indian state of Kerala's planning campaign, may go beyond the allocated budgetary ceiling (Devika 2016; Isaac & Heller 2003). Evidence about participatory budgeting, on the other hand, suggests that although citizens in the budgetary processes exercise adequate roles in the distribution of the budget in the concerned municipality, the entire process is limited by the scope of the municipal budget (Ebdon & Franklin 2006; Wampler 2012).

Irrespective of such limitations, what is important about participatory budgeting is that it opens up avenues to ordinary people through which citizens influence the making of municipal policies and programs (Cabannes 2004). It is argued that participatory budgeting has the potential to establish and enhance the relationship between participation, democracy and development (Cornwall & Coelho 2007; Hickey & Mohan 2004). Scholars, however, argue that any generalisation about the effect, or the impacts, of participatory budgeting comes only from those situations where democracy is relatively matured and stable, the economy is growing, public sector institutions are fairly competent, and civic competency is remarkable (i.e. Pogrebinschi & Ryan 2017). Little is known about citizen participation in participatory budgeting and the fate of the intended outcomes in situations where the political and social order are relatively fragile (Font *et al.* 2016; Sancton & Zhenming 2014).

Policy/sector specific participatory decision-making

The developing country experience of participatory decision-making has been evolutionary and incremental rather than systematic, though many countries have systematically introduced participatory decision-making mechanisms through the implementation of broader public-sector reforms (Rees & Hossain 2013). In some circumstances, reforms in the public sector have changed conventional organisations and processes at the local level with the injection of internationally successful institutional designs (Ganuza & Baiocchi 2012), while others have nurtured the historic platforms that best suit their national political systems (Madsen & Triantafillou 2016; Yan & Xin 2016).

Citizen participation in policy or sector specific programs is perhaps the most mature participatory experience in developing countries. Many developing countries had their own organic forms of participatory local governance programs in the past, as Alderfer (1964) points out, many of which were eroded, mixed up, and remodelled firstly as part of the colonisation process, and then alongside that of international aid. Today, there is not a single country in the developing world where we cannot find any participatory decision-making process. Variations in terms of who organises such processes, what objectives they aim to achieve and who is involved in the key decision-making mechanisms are obviously there, but there is no scarcity of evidence to claim that (a) most of the participatory processes are embedded in their local governance, (b) the majority of such initiatives are introduced combined with decentralisation reforms, and (c) participatory decision-making mechanisms are designed to regulate the communication flow between bottom-up and top-down channels

(Bardhan & Mookherjee 2006; Cheema 2005; Conteh & Huque 2014; Mudacumura & Morçöl 2014).

Two different approaches to implementing participatory decision-making within policy/sector specific mechanisms need further explanation. The first is the one-off consultation which is generally organised by the agency responsible for implementing the specific public policy. Participants in such consultations are selected based on their expertise, stake and interest although evidence shows that such exercises generally fail to gain the participation of ordinary citizens both intentionally and unintentionally (Arnstein 1969; Irvin & Stansbury 2004). While one-off consultations, if designed properly, can provide important citizen inputs to the policy/sector specific decision-making, there are criticisms as to what extent citizens can actually influence the process and outcomes (Dalton 2017; Kaase 2007).

The second approach is rather comprehensive in terms of how it is organised. This can be interpreted as the opposite of the one-off consultation where the institution for participation is systematically designed so people of different types (lay people, stakeholders, activists, experts, professionals and the like) can participate in the most appropriate ways as often as they are required. Citizen participation in development projects, as evidenced by Hickey and Mohan (2004), is an example where many internationally funded development programs in developing countries involve citizens from the very beginning of the project cycle up until the evaluation phase (see also, Mansuri & Rao 2012). Following this trend, as we shall see in the next section, many developing countries in recent times have introduced a number of ways to involve citizens in the making of local public policies that include citizens in the, *inter alia*, identification of problems, development of alternatives, and in a few cases, selection of the most suitable alternatives (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2016; Yan & Xin 2016).

The citizen participation literature takes account of a large amount of evidence about involving citizens in sector-specific policymaking and implementation in developing countries (Baiocchi & Ganuza 2016; Cohen & Wiek 2017). These include, but are not limited to, citizen participation in *community forestry* and *community education* in Nepal (Acharya 2002; Carney & Bista 2009; Schusser *et al.* 2016), *natural resource management* in Uganda and Ethiopia (Hassenforder *et al.* 2015) and *service delivery governance* in South Africa, the Philippines, India and Malaysia (Gurtoo & Williams 2015). What these stories commonly emphasise is that most of the sector-specific participatory mechanisms in

developing countries are designed as one-off consultations with the aim of getting public feedback on the contents of decisions. Although some evidence suggests that such initiatives can be influential in terms of the process of decision-making, there is scant evidence to claim that citizen participation in such processes can actually make an impact on the contents of the decisions (Font *et al.* 2016; Fung 2015).

2.3 The idea of citizen participation in decision-making

The underlying logic of citizen participation in decision-making is, as iterated by Irvin and Stansbury (2004, p. 55), that if citizens actively participate in decision-making processes, the political system that builds upon this process will be more democratic and effective. Enhancement of the quality of democracy, and the effectiveness of governmental programs are a few (but often cited as the most beneficial) aspects of citizen participation programs (Fung & Wright 2001). New forms of institutional designs are emerging across different parts of the globe, most of which are described as part of providing opportunities for citizens and their representatives to take part in the decision-making that affects them (Urbinati & Warren 2008). Moreover, technological advancements have transformed the use, efficacy and effectiveness of citizen participation in many advanced democratic countries with notable developments in e-participation in developing countries (Zheng & Schachter 2016). However, as Wengert (1976, p. 28), although in the US context, pointed out a long time ago technological advancements (in communication technology in particular) in citizen participation have the potential to exclude many citizens from the decision-making process due to the technological complexity and issues of its accessibility.

In recent times, the participation of citizens in decision-making has become a norm in almost all countries. These norms are advocated in the literatures of public administration (Peters 2014), democratic governance (Haque 2014), participatory governance (Fung 2015) and public sector management and reforms (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff 2015). However, not all countries have similar approaches to citizen participation. Different governments introduce participatory mechanisms for different purposes, but the essence is to encourage a participative environment by *transforming* traditional non-participatory institutions into more citizen-centric platforms as well as by *empowering* citizens to make decisions which are more robust and practical (Pateman 2012 p. 10). The institutional transformation has gained a momentum in recent decades, ranging from the introduction of participatory budgeting in the city of Porte Alegre in Brazil (Smith 2009) to participatory planning in the

Indian state of Kerala (Isaac & Heller 2003). Empowering citizens for better decision-making has been consistently advocated in all forms of democracy (Dahl 1971; Dryzek 2009; Pateman 2012) for long time, and participatory processes are being increasingly used as a way of empowering citizens in both advanced and developing countries alike (Fung & Wright 2003b).

One of the key ideas of introducing participatory mechanisms at the local level is to enable the residents to participate in identifying problems, developing alternatives and, in some cases, selecting suitable alternatives (Michels 2012; Michels & De Graaf 2010). Local level participatory processes are increasingly seeking citizen engagement mostly in the *formulation* of local public policies and small-scale development programs, though a considerable amount of the literature suggests that attempts have also been made to enable the participation of people in the *implementation* of public policies at the local level (Emerson *et al.* 2012; Nabatchi 2014; Nabatchi & Amsler 2014; Nabatchi *et al.* 2017). Scholars like Heller (2013); Heller *et al.* (2007); Isaac and Heller (2003) argue that processes like the participatory planning in Kerala have shown the possibilities of including citizens in the *evaluations* of local public policies.

2.4 Policymaking as a function of citizen participation

The review of the literature on the institutions and processes of citizen participation in the preceding sections signal that citizen participation programs are generally available in diverse policy areas. While the literature shows that citizen participation in public policy is generally focused is formulating public policies (Michels 2012; Michels & De Graaf 2010), the objectives vary ranging from (a) increasing democratic accountability (Fischer 2016b; Pandeya *et al.* 2016) to (b) effectively distributing resources (Heller *et al.* 2007; Isaac & Heller 2003) to (c) bringing social justice and program effectiveness (Fung 2006b, 2015). And as discussed in the previous sections, different types of methods can be utilised to engage citizens in attaining the stated objectives of the participatory program. Whatever engagement method is adopted for whatever purpose, most of the government-sponsored participatory programs are designed to contribute to public policy, though there could be variations in terms of engagement in either one, or more than one aspects of public policy: formulation, implementation, and or evaluation (Bingham *et al.* 2005; Foster 2016; Prosser *et al.* 2017).

Each of these aspects of public policy has its own expectation and requirements when it comes to engaging citizens. For instance, engaging citizens in formulating healthcare policy can be an expected strategy in public policy while, at the same time, it might require information, knowledge and expertise on the subjects of public health. Similarly, not all policy areas such as national security policy can be inappropriate for citizen engagement, given that some public policies are politically sensitive. In this context, it is necessary to distinguish which policy area citizens can actually contribute to, and what particular aspect of public policy can benefit from citizen engagement (Birkland 2007, 2010).

Scholars often point out various methods of engaging citizens to, inter alia, (a) identify the issues that they think are the most pressing policy problems, (b) develop possible solutions to solve such problems, and (c) in many circumstances, select alternatives as actual policy decisions (Jann & Wegrich 2007; Michels & De Graaf 2010; Pogrebinschi & Ryan 2017). There are three types of citizen engagement methods in policymaking: consultation, deliberation and a combination of both (Gaventa & Barrett 2010; Kasymova 2017). The consultative process in policy-making refers to an institutional setup in which one-off public meetings are organised to get feedback and the opinion of the general public, or other stakeholders (Friend & Jessop 2013; Lovan *et al.* 2004); the deliberative process in policymaking, on the other hand, stresses providing participation opportunities to citizens with adequate power and resources to make decisions about their most pressing collective problems (Hendriks 2009, 2015); and a binary of both of these methods features a mixture of both consultative and deliberative approaches to decision-making (i.e. Floridia 2017).

There is a growing recognition in the literature that participatory policymaking methods (consultation, deliberation and a combination of both) facilitate the roles of ordinary people as contributors in formulation, partners in implementation and experts in evaluation (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2001a, 2001b). Specific to the formulation of public policies, the literature on public policymaking suggests that three interrelated activities of policy formulation can be conducive to citizen participation: problem identification, development of alternatives, and to some extent, selection of alternatives (Howlett *et al.* 2015; Johnson 2017; Thomas 2012). The assumption is that engaging citizens in these functions of policymaking increases the chances of having people's voices heard in policy decisions and thereby raises the potential for collaborative policy implementation, a mechanism in which citizens – mostly the stakeholders, join with

the government to implement certain projects (Gustafson & Hertting 2016; Healey 1997; Julian 1994; Purdy 2012).

However, the work of participatory policymaking seems to be still evolving, as policymaking is often regarded as the work of elected officials and bureaucrats (Lasswell 1971; Rosenberg 1958; Stoker & Evans 2016). It is generally argued that involving citizens in the making of public policies is inherently a questionable practice because citizens may not have adequate ideas for formulating policies while governments may be unable to address all the concerns of citizens (Cupps 1977; Day 1997). In the context of the developing world, as Mansuri and Rao (2012) summarise, many countries in recent decades have introduced participatory ways of making policy decisions at the local level though the focus of such endeavours is on small-scale development projects (Hickey & Mohan 2004).

To sum up, there has been a reassertion in the literature that local governance processes are increasingly seeking citizen engagement mostly in the formulation of local public policies and small-scale development programs, while a considerable amount of literature suggests that attempts have been made to enable the participation of people in the implementation of public policies (Emerson et al. 2012; Nabatchi 2014; Nabatchi & Amsler 2014; Nabatchi et al. 2017). Although, scholars in the field of deliberative governance are particularly interested in engaging citizens in the formulation of local public policies and small-scale development programs, the public administration and public policy scholarship is equally vocal about this notion though the latter field of study is notably lagging behind (Fung 2015; Head & Alford 2015).

2.5 Identifying key themes in participatory policymaking processes

Citizen participation as a subject of study has been pervasive across a range of disciplines for the last four decades: development management, participatory governance, natural resource management, and public policy (Agrawal & Gupta 2005; Baiocchi & Ganuza 2016; Cornwall & Coelho 2007; Hickey & Mohan 2005). Although each of these disciplines conceptualise citizen participation differently, institutional design features, procedural elements, and policy functions are a few but the major dimensions that the literature identifies as common themes. These themes in turn make the study of citizen participation as multidisciplinary subject.

Institutional design features

Much of the participatory governance literature in developing countries has analysed the institutional design of citizen participation programs as crucial for citizen participation (Fung & Wright 2003b). The most dominant discussion in this vein can be found in the deliberative governance literature (Dryzek 2012; Pogrebinschi & Ryan 2017) though participatory governance scholars continue to claim that institutional transformations are needed to open up opportunities for citizens to participate (Pateman 1970, 2012). What is common in both of these discussions, as Fung (2003, p. 340) summarises, "... the values they [participatory institutions emphasised on deliberative processes] [aim to] advance ... depends upon the details of their institutional construction."

Two interrelated orientations of institutional design seem to be crucial in the literature. The first is the vertical structure of participatory institutions that mainly aim to bridge a formal decision-making institution – the government, with citizens – the society. This particular institutional design is also explained as hierarchical organisational decision-making (Bingham *et al.* 2005). Following what Arnstein (1969) labelled the institution of citizen participation as a ladder, the lower rungs seem to be clearly linked to the mass of ordinary people, or communities while the most upper rung exclusively relates to the decision-making, or the government. The objective of such an institutional design, as she claims, is that the bottom rungs aim to transform citizens to be participants from non-participants whereas the upper rungs aim to empower citizens with full decision-making power. The empirical literature based on Arnstein's typology shows that many developing countries seemed to be following this path for a long time, though there are ambiguities as to what extent a vertical institutional design for organising the participatory process was able to bridge communities with the government (Johar 2017; Quick & Bryson 2016).

The second orientation of institutional design is related to its horizontal structure. The horizontal institutional design is often found as a medium to connect local communities, interest groups, and beneficiaries of certain projects or programs (Nabatchi 2012b). Unlike the hierarchical institutional design, horizontal institutions are explained in the literature as having the potential to encourage inclusive citizen participation (Devas & Grant 2003; Hong 2015; Njogu 2013). Although the role of decision-makers in citizen participation processes designed in accordance with the principles of horizontal institutional design seems to be unclear, scholars identify the evolution of horizontal institutional design as new governance (Rhodes 1996), empowered participatory governance (Fung & Wright 2003b), new public

governance (Osborne 2006) and democratic network governance (Sørensen & Torfing 2016). The aim seems to be, as Pateman (2012) emphasises, to create participatory societies.

Procedural elements

The citizen participation scholarship is concerned with the procedural elements of citizen participation programs. Within this concern, scholars seem to be focusing on three different processes of participatory processes. The first group of scholars are specifically concerned about participant selection methods (Dean 2017; Golden 1998; Irvin & Stansbury 2004). Because participation of all citizens in any decision-making at any level of the government is almost impossible (Day 1997), there must be some form of participant selection method to select individuals as participants. The concern is twofold: the extent to which selected individuals are capable of making impacts; the degree to which participants represent their communities and interests.

The second group of scholars are more concerned with how participants make decisions. The deliberative governance scholarship is particularly attentive to this concern (Florida 2017; Hendriks 2005; Johnson 2017). The literature on deliberative decision-making entails the notion that participants must be given adequate information and resources, provided with sufficient opportunities to explore and develop their preferences, and empowered to influence ultimate decisions (Fischer 2006; Hajer & Wagenaar 2003; Hendriks 2009; Hoppe 2011).

The third group of scholars point to the need to combine both elements of participatory processes: who participates and how participants make decisions (Fung 2015). Without an appropriate arrangement that devises who is selected as a participant and how participants can make decisions, the purpose of any participatory process can be difficult to achieve. A range of analytical tools have been developed and tested by both practitioners and scholars, that combine both elements into one (Carpentier 2016; Fung 2006b; Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation 2013; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2001a, 2005).

Policy functions

The third common theme in the citizen participation literature is the function. While participatory processes are organised to achieve certain functions mostly at the local level, each process seems to have some form of policy implications (Ahmed 2009). For example, the participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre which is one of the most celebrated cases of

participatory process is organised to make local budgets (Wampler 2012); and, the participatory planning campaign in India is organised to make annual public policies and development programs in municipalities. In other words, participatory processes at the local level are organised to achieve certain administrative objectives, and, as Ahmed (2009) summarises, help legitimise the policy role of the local bureaucracy.

2.6 A critical analysis of the literature: institutions, processes and functions

The underlying argument of citizen participation projects is, as Dalton (2017, p. 214) puts it, "... the more people who participate in a democracy, the more democratic it becomes." Scholars who have contributed to the citizen participation literature in developing countries also assert that participatory mechanisms are designed to bring public policy benefits that include higher accountability and greater responsiveness from government officials (Speer 2012). In the development management literature, the participation of ordinary people in managing development works is claimed to help achieve sustainable development goals, aid effectiveness and control corruption (Holden *et al.* 2017; Huther & Shah 2000; Mawdsley *et al.* 2014). While most of the academic and empirical literature on citizen participation shows positive implications for democracy (Dalton 2017), there are some caveats which need to be acknowledged. Fung and Wright (2003b), for example, warn that (a) participatory processes can be the victims of elites or special interest groups (Dasgupta & Beard 2007; Sheely 2015), (b) external agencies can impose serious conditions that limit the potential of participants to make decisions independently (Waheduzzaman & As-Saber 2015; Waheduzzaman *et al.* 2017), (c) due to unaffordable demands raised by citizens and thus a perceived failure to respond to citizens' demands, there can be a danger that participatory processes are not sustained for long (Font *et al.* 2016).

Three critical issues about the institution of participatory mechanisms were observed in the literature. The first and perhaps the most important criticism is related to its location. It is evident in the literature that the majority of the participatory processes are located at the local level (Baiocchi & Ganuza 2014; Hassenforder *et al.* 2015; Krenjova & Raudla 2017; Wampler 2012). This raises the question of the degree to which participatory processes can be implemented beyond the local government level. Although the literature draws on a few national projects such as the citizen's assembly on electoral reform in British Columbia in Canada (Warren & Pearse 2008), there is clearly a gap in terms of whether and how participatory processes are being implemented beyond the level of local government.

The second criticism of the institution of citizen participation is related to its organisers. Although the government machineries in both advanced and developing countries increasingly appeared to be in favour of creating, sponsoring, organising and even campaigning for participatory processes to be adopted in the decision-making process, the literature suggests that a considerable growth in enabling the participation of ordinary people is facilitated by the non-government or civil society sector (Fung & Wright 2003b; Heller & Rao 2015). In light of the widening gap between participatory processes organised by civil society organisations or NGOs and formal decision-making mechanisms in government, scholars seem to be questioning the relevancy of participatory processes organised outside government mechanisms (Hendriks 2009, 2015). Even within the government, the question is who should be responsible: elected politician; or appointed bureaucrat? In spite of this, deliberative governance scholars show the advantages of citizen participation programs to both citizen participants and government officials even if they are organised outside the government machinery (Rondinella *et al.* 2017).

The final criticism of the institution of participatory process is its adaptability. On the one hand, participatory processes are organised as a separate activity; while on the other, participatory decision-making is promoted as the mainstream mechanism. This indicates that the key decision-making mechanism and participatory processes are different although there is some form of interconnectedness between these two (Renn *et al.* 1993). Scholars from deliberative governance are particularly cautious about this missing link and therefore assert the need to design institutions that can better connect participation and decision-making (for example, Ercan & Hendriks 2013).

In terms of criticism of the process of citizen participation programs, the literature asks whether participatory processes are financially viable if all affected citizens are to participate. Day (1997), therefore, claims citizen participation as inherently a contested concept. All citizens cannot participate in a given organisational setup of a participatory process nor can organisers afford the participation of all affected citizens. Questions emerge as to who should participate, and to what extent she or he represents others who cannot or do not participate in the process.

Finally, participatory processes are criticised for not having any specific answer to the question: where do they fit in the broader landscape of public policy problems? The literature suggests that many of the participatory processes are organised around fringe

problems to be solved at the local level (Baiocchi & Ganuza 2016; Ganuza & Baiocchi 2012). It is not clear whether citizen participation programs are best suited to policy formulation, or implementation or evaluation, or all of these functions of participatory policymaking (Lord *et al.* 2017).

2.7 The participatory governance literature in Nepal

Literatures in the field of participatory governance in Nepal can be distinguished in terms of their focus of study. The focus of the research in Nepal's participatory governance seems to be either on different levels of the government or on policy areas and issues. These literatures provide important insights on different forms of participatory institutional designs and processes introduced at various levels of the government with the aim of obtaining specific policy objectives. This section reviews these literatures by classifying them into two broad categories: levels of the government-centric research that studies citizen participation across the central and local government level; and policy/issue-specific research that examines citizen participation across diverse policy areas.

Given that the country introduced federalism only in 2015, literature on participatory governance at the provincial/state government level has not appeared on the scene, though scholars have pointed out various prospects for and possible limitations to practicing participatory decision-making in the federal structure of the government in Nepal (Middleton & Shneiderman 2008; Thapa & Sharma 2011). However, there has been a growing body of literature on citizen participation in Nepal that examines both participatory processes at the national and local government level.

At the national government level, the research primarily focuses on the executive part of the government. For example, the majority of the available studies on participatory governance in Nepal focus on how national development plans are formulated, implemented and evaluated, and the degree to which each of these functions incorporate citizen participation in the development planning process (Pandey 2000; Stiller & Yadav 1979; Wildavsky 1979 pp. 137-138). Interestingly, however, the literature is generally sceptical about the participation of people in the national development planning process because, as Gellner (2015) points out:

Development practice [in Nepal] has responded to numerous critiques and dissatisfactions by evolving towards much greater involvement of beneficiaries in determining targets and deciding how to achieve them, and much greater emphasis

on targeting the poor and the disadvantaged in development initiatives Yet, despite all the emphasis on pro-poor policies and on empowerment, on democratic modes of organising as an integral part of development, development [process] is still a relationship between the powerful and the rich, on the one side, and those who are in a much less powerful position on the other.

Beyond the research on citizen participation in the national development planning process, there are other institutions and processes at the central government level which have been analysed from participatory governance perspectives. For instance, as Williams (2015) examines, the constitution-making process from 2008 and 2016 sought to incorporate direct citizen participation on a range of issues, although some scholars have questioned the efficacy of citizen participation in the constitution making process in Nepal (Acharya 2013).

At the local government level, the research seems to be concentrating around both government-sponsored and civil society-based participatory processes with the aim of understanding how citizens participate in different purpose organisations. With the proliferation of NGOs and other civil society initiatives following the introduction of democracy in 1990, it seems that the majority of the participatory processes have been organised by NGOs and civil society organisations (Gellner & Karki 2008; Hachhethu 2008). This indicates that government-sponsored participatory processes at the local government level are relatively few, though the research shows that there are some important decision-making mechanisms such as the Planning Process (PP) (Adhikari 2006; Paudyal 1994).

Until 2016, local governments in Nepal were categorised into three broad groups: municipalities covering urban areas, village development committees in rural areas, and districts combining both municipalities and village development committees. The focus of the extant literature on Nepal's participatory governance does not seem to be adequately covering participatory processes within these institutions. Instead, the decentralisation literature seems to be examining these institutions from a range of perspectives (Agrawal & Gupta 2005; Dahal *et al.* 2001; Dhungel *et al.* 2011; Thapa 2014). In other words, there are diverse perspectives to study participatory process within the institutional framework of local governments in Nepal.

In comparison to the polity-specific research, studies on participatory governance in Nepal have been extensively focused on examining policy-specific questions at the local level. A large body of the literature in this vein relates to community forestry (Acharya 2002;

Schusser *et al.* 2016), public schools (Carney & Bista 2009), healthcare services (Bhusal 2011; Green *et al.* 2007; Regmi *et al.* 2010), and natural resource management (Agrawal & Gupta 2005). While each research differs in terms of its objectives, scope and method, what is common across these policy fields is that most of the research aims to understand how citizens participate, deliberate and make decisions. However, there does not seem to be any cross-disciplinary research which has compared institutions and processes of participatory processes across diverse policy or issue areas.

2.8 The research gaps

The review of the literature shows that citizen participation programs are mostly organised at the local level, and importantly, most of these are organised for fringe purposes: making small-scale development programs, formulating local public policies, and bringing ideas to reform the service delivery arrangements. While participatory processes in many developing countries are said to be increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of administrative inputs (budget and other non-budgetary resources) as well as bringing fruitful political outcomes such as social justice, political equity and equal distribution of resources, there is no clear conclusion about the institutional design that could lead to the success or failure of participatory processes (Fung 2006b, 2015).

As the adoption of participatory processes is shown in the literature as a norm in participatory governance, there are both conceptual and empirical gaps which require to be narrowed. In the conceptual domain, there are longstanding ambiguities as to whether participatory processes should be organised by the government or the non-government sector such as NGOs and civil society organisations, or a combination of both. This ambiguity is generated by the logic that there are incompatibilities between representative institutions and participatory processes (Adhikari 2006; Fung 2006a; Urbinati & Warren 2008).

Empirically, despite a growing amount of evidence being produced in developing countries across a range of policy areas, there is not any canonical answer to the questions such as (i) what level of government is best suited to implement participatory processes, and (ii) what policy problems (health, education, natural resources or broad political decisions) need participatory processes to solve. Although there are a very few empirical materials that are produced beyond the local government level (Fung & Warren 2011; Peixoto 2017), it is rare to see any advocacy for broadening the boundaries of local-level participatory processes in

the developing world, although there are claims that citizen participation has even touched various corners of global governance (Worthington *et al.* 2013).

Additionally, one of the most pressing research gaps in the citizen participation literature is that there does not seem to be any substantial knowledge on the effectiveness of the government-sponsored participatory processes. While already a thick set of empirical literature provides insights on successful case stories in the developing world, many of them are either initiated by political movements or elected leaders (Baiocchi & Ganuza 2016; Wampler & McNulty 2011). When we think about government-sponsored participatory processes, it is relatively unclear about the leadership. Is it the political leadership that initiates, runs and leads citizen participation programs, or, bureaucrats who can also play the same role? To what extent can appointed bureaucrats run participatory processes?

2.9 Conclusions

This chapter reviewed the literature of citizen participation both normatively, and also empirically in the context of developing countries. Theories of governance were understood as the key foundations for the studies of citizen participation although various other concepts from several disciplinary areas were found to be relevant in the studies of citizen participation. Three different types of participatory mechanisms: participatory planning, participatory budgeting and sectoral decision-making mechanisms were grouped to review the institutional design and internal processes of citizen participation programs in developing countries. A critical review of the citizen participation literature suggested that there were caveats in terms of institutions, processes and functions.

With the advancement in participatory structures, processes and methods, there are several normative and empirical gaps in the literature to be addressed. The key normative gap is the extent to which citizen participation projects are good for which level of the government. This also includes the ambiguity as to which policy area is best suited to incorporate a citizen participation program. The empirical gaps are mostly about uncertainties in terms of the effectiveness of government-sponsored citizen participation programs. Because of the emphasis on elected political leadership in steering government-sponsored participatory processes in developing countries, there are clear empirical gaps about participatory processes that are led by non-elected leaders such as bureaucrats.

Chapter 3

Research methodology

This chapter explains the methodology of the research that was adopted to examine a municipal planning process in Nepal. It adopts a case study approach to qualitatively investigate the participatory planning process in the Butwal municipality in Nepal. Field studies were conducted in 2014, 2015 and 2016 that involved (a) observation of the planning process in a ward in the Butwal municipality for three months between December 2014 and February 2015, (b) carrying out semi-structured interviews with 42 individuals representing diverse organisations, policy areas and interest groups, and (c) two focus group discussions.

First, the chapter introduces and explains research questions. Then it moves on to discussing the research approach from which the analytical framework is devised. A brief overview of the epistemological position of the research is presented next. The following section then explains the rationale for choosing a case study as its approach, the selection of participatory planning in the Butwal municipality as a case, and methods of data generation. The subsequent sections then chronologically outline the trustworthiness of data, ethical considerations and the researcher's roles in pursuing this research.

3.1 Research questions

The research aims to empirically investigate whether participatory planning made any contribution to facilitating citizen participation in the local policymaking process. This is an important empirical inquiry because the Local Self Governance Act (1999) had envisioned that elected politicians would steer the planning process in municipalities, but in their absence between 2002 and 2016, appointed bureaucrats were given responsibility for implementing the process for over a decade. The main research question is developed based on the organisation and processes of the planning process that municipalities in Nepal had formed and implemented in the absence of electoral politics. The following sub-questions are devised to guide the research process.

- How was the planning process organised in the absence of electoral politics?
- To what extent did the planning process facilitate citizens' participation in the making of local public policies?

In substance, the main research question is developed with an understanding that planning is a participatory decision-making mechanism organised annually to formulate local public policies and small and mid-term development programs.

3.2 Approaches to analysis

There are two dominant approaches to studying the organisation and processes of participatory policymaking mechanisms: process-centric and output/outcome-centric (Nabatchi 2012a; Rossi & Freeman 1993). The process-centric approach involves the examination of how processes are designed and the extent to which such designs affect the participation of citizens in decision-making; whereas the output/outcome-centric approach to analysis aims to understand the effects of the participatory process on given policy area(s). This research adopts the process-centric approach to analyse the organisation and processes of the planning process in Nepal because the aim is to assess the planning process with the hope of understanding if and what contributions were made by the planning process to offer opportunities to participate in the local decision-making when there were no elected representatives in power.

A framework to analyse participatory planning

A framework is necessary to systematically understand and distinguish two interrelated dimensions of participatory processes: *organisational structures* for citizens to participate (Williamson 2014); and, *functions* for which participatory processes are organised (Michels & De Graaf 2010). In terms of participation, the literature on participatory processes suggests that informal, formal and semi-formal methods are utilised to select participants (Fung 2006b, 2015). In relation to functions, the literature shows that participatory processes are organised to make decisions by providing deliberation opportunities to citizens (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2016; Irvin & Stansbury 2004). Analysing organisational structures and functions of participatory processes can be understood as a process-centric approach to analysis, although there is a recognition that the output (results) or outcome (effectiveness) aspect of participatory processes is equally important to analyse (Nabatchi 2012a).

The focus of this study is the structure of the planning process in which citizens participate, and functions for which structures are designed. For analytical reasons, it recognises the *organisational structures* and *functions* of planning as defining components of the analytical framework. The framework therefore consists of two interrelated dimensions of a participatory process: organisational structures for citizen participation; and, policy making

as the main function (Table 3.1). This is understood as a framework for studying participatory policymaking because it captures processes for participation (informal, formal and semi-formal) and policymaking (consultation, deliberation and a combination of both).

With the participation dimension, most of the empirical materials on the local level participatory process in developing countries are found to be functioning across three distinct yet interrelated methods: informal structures with reference to the activities that are organised mostly by civil society organisations at the neighbourhood level; formal structures that are mostly available as key decision-making mechanisms hosted by the government; and a combination of both formal and informal structures organised by a government institution in collaboration with civil society organisations (Heller 2013; Williams 2008). The focus of this dimension is either to create new organisational arrangements or to enhance existing methods with the hope of, inter alia, increasing the participation of those who are supposedly least able to participate in any of these structures either because of an exclusionary policy or for other reasons (Chakrabarti 2007; Irvin & Stansbury 2004; see Lawoti 2008, for an overview of exclusionary policy and practice in Nepal).

Table 3.1 A framework for studying participatory policymaking

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Methods</i>	<i>Focus</i>	<i>Assumptions</i>
Organisational structures for participation	Informal, formal and semi-formal	Organisational arrangements for inclusive citizen participation	Participatory organisations help increase the inclusion of marginalised/excluded groups in decision-making mechanisms particularly at the local level
Policymaking function in participatory planning	Consultation, deliberation and combinations of both	i. Identifying problems, ii. developing alternatives, iii. selecting suitable alternatives	Citizens can contribute to better policymaking when they are offered opportunities in consultative or deliberative forums, particularly on local public policies and small-scale development projects

With the policymaking dimension, it is recognised that participatory processes are involved in the making of public policies. Informed by the empirical literature in many developing

countries, it is understood that government-sponsored participatory processes are implemented to make local public policies though, as explained in Chapter 2, they vary in terms of subject (local budget, social and infrastructure problems, and policy-specific issues) and scope (local, provincial and national) of the public policy. While making policies, participatory processes involve both consultative and deliberative methods of decision-making with the aim of identifying and developing problems. The assumption is that when citizens are involved in the policymaking process, as argued by Michels and De Graaf (2010), both the organisers and participants achieve different goals. The organisers can ensure the participation of marginalised people which, in the long run, helps enable openness and diversity of opinions in the process. Participants, on the other hand, develop civic skills and virtues to actively participate in consultative and deliberative processes for identifying public policy problems and developing appropriate ideas to solve such problems.

3.3 Interpretive research

The notion of ontology and epistemology, as Marsh and Furlong (2002) argue, relies upon the researcher, not on the research topic. In other words, it is the researcher who takes his or her stand on which particular research tradition he or she believes in. The interpretive research tradition has been one of the dominant epistemological paradigms in public administration research (for example, Gopinath 2015; Perry & Kraemer 1986; Raadschelders 2011). Public administration has long been considered as one of the subfields of political science (Henry 1975; Meier 2015; Wilson 1887), and, unlike other fields of study, it seems to be adopting methodologies that are pervasive in the political science research (Halligan 2015; Miller & Yang 2008; Wettenhall 1997).

Nevertheless, situating the research in any of the families of ontology and epistemology is needed to maintain consistency in designing the research and selecting the methods to generate and interpret data. For example, positivist researchers require quantitative methodologies whereas interpretive research needs qualitative methodologies (Marsh & Furlong 2002; Maxwell 2005; Maxwell 2012). In public administration research that follows the interpretive research tradition (as McNabb (2015, pp. 251-275) shows), elements of grounded-theory and ethnography have increasingly been used in recent times (see also, Rhodes *et al.* 2007).

This research is designed based on an interpretivist epistemological research tradition because it aims to understand the implications of participatory planning on participatory

policymaking in the specified setup of municipal governance in Nepal. An important aspect of this research is to interpret the context (the absence of electoral politics at the local level), actions (of appointed officials) and operations in the given institutional framework of participatory planning. The aim and aspects of this research therefore resemble with what has been defined as interpretivism (Ercan & Marsh 2016; Hendriks *et al.* 2013).

3.4 Research methodology

3.4.1 Single-case with embedded multiple units

Case study approaches to research design are popular in the empirical research tradition (Adriaenssen & Johannessen 2015). Nonetheless, case studies are criticized for their limitations in terms of generalizability, subjectivity and narrow focus. Critics argue that case studies can be useful only to investigate problems at a preliminary stage (Abercrombie *et al.* 1984 p. 34). Flyvbjerg (2006), however, disagrees and argues that case study research can be the best research design methodology to inquire into any social problem. Bailey (1992), in particular, examines the possibility of incorporating case study research design in public administration to be able to produce knowledge that can be utilised in real-life situations.

Following Yin's (2013) classification of case study designs, this research adopts a single-case design with embedded multiple units. The participatory planning process, in its entirety, is a case that operates in three different forums: informal forums in neighbourhoods, semi-formal forums in wards, and formal forums at the municipal level. These three forums are regarded as embedded units of analysis. The rationale for designing this research as a single case with multiple units of analysis is to explore themes on how these forums are different or similar, and the extent to which their similarity and differences answer the main research question: does the planning process facilitate citizen participation in local policy-making?

3.4.2 Selection of the case

Yin (2013) suggests five different rationales for selecting the case: critical, extreme or unique, representative or typical, revelatory and longitudinal; but the main thrust of this research is not to select a case that needs to satisfy these criteria. Instead, it aims to examine the planning process as a local governance mechanism that was implemented by all the local bodies (village councils, municipal councils and district councils) in Nepal when there were

no elected leaders in power. Although all the local bodies might have had differing social, political and economic contexts during the implementation of the process, it is not the aim of this research to compare and contrast differences across jurisdictions. Therefore, it seeks to base the case on a municipal planning process, which, to a large extent, features several common aspects of village and district planning (Adhikari 2014; Adhikari 2006; Pandeya & Shrestha 2016). Additionally, focusing on village, municipality or district would not make any difference as the institutional setting of planning was intended to be designed to be in a *similar format* across these jurisdictions (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013).

At the time of this research, there were more than 200 municipalities in Nepal under the Local Self-Governance Act (1999). They were further categorised into three groups: municipality (small towns), sub-metropolitan city (medium town) and metropolitan city (big city) (Government of Nepal 2000). From a case study research perspective, selecting one municipality as a case was challenging particularly as different municipalities might have had different institutional designs of planning. However, as this research does not aim to make any generalizable assessment through the comparative case study design, a set of case selection criteria was developed to select a representative municipality in Nepal. The criteria included: the performance rank published by the Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission (LBFC), the institutional status of civil society organisations and their use in municipal governance, a combination of rural and urban neighbourhoods, and the demographic diversity in terms of caste and ethnic communities.

The necessary information on these criteria was gathered from several sources. The LBFC annually assesses the performance of municipalities and ranks them according to the score they obtain. These are known as Minimum Conditions and Performance Measures (MCPM), and are published online. In terms of information on the institutional status of civil society organisations, some pilot interviews conducted in December 2014 with officials working at the municipal division of the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development suggested considering Tole Lane Organisations (TLOs) as a criterion. Official publications of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Nepal were accessed to study annual evaluation reports of a collaborative project called Rural-Urban Partnership Project (RUPP) established in the Ministry of Local Development in the late 1990s. Some independent assessments of the RUPP were also analysed to understand TLOs and their use in municipal

governance. Moreover, the population monograph report published by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) was found helpful in analysing demographic profiles of municipalities.

During the early years of the research, assessments of municipal governance in Nepal provided insights about selecting the best performing municipality (Association of District Development Committees *et al.* 2013; Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission 2014a, 2014c). Although the criteria for ranking municipalities in terms of their performance do not have all the elements of planning as their core, the assessments of the past five years show that those municipalities which have been ranked on the list of the top five were better in implementing the planning process (Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission 2015). Additionally, such municipalities were found to have institutionalised civil society organisations. These two criteria: performance ranking and the availability of the civil society organisations, helped to select the Butwal sub-metropolitan city as the case.

Butwal municipality, one of the oldest municipalities in Nepal, was established in 1959. It is located in the Rupandehi district in western Nepal. The municipality has been continuously ranked as one of the top performing municipalities in Nepal for the last five years (Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission 2015) (Table 3.2). There were 16 wards until it gained the status of a municipality in 2014. However, two surrounding villages were annexed to Butwal as part of the central government's local governance reforms in 2014. These reforms have expanded the geography (now 101 sq. km) and also increased the population (120,982) (Central Bureau of Statistics 2014). As of December 2017, there are 22 wards in the Butwal sub-metropolitan city.

Table 3.2 *Top five municipalities in performance ranking*

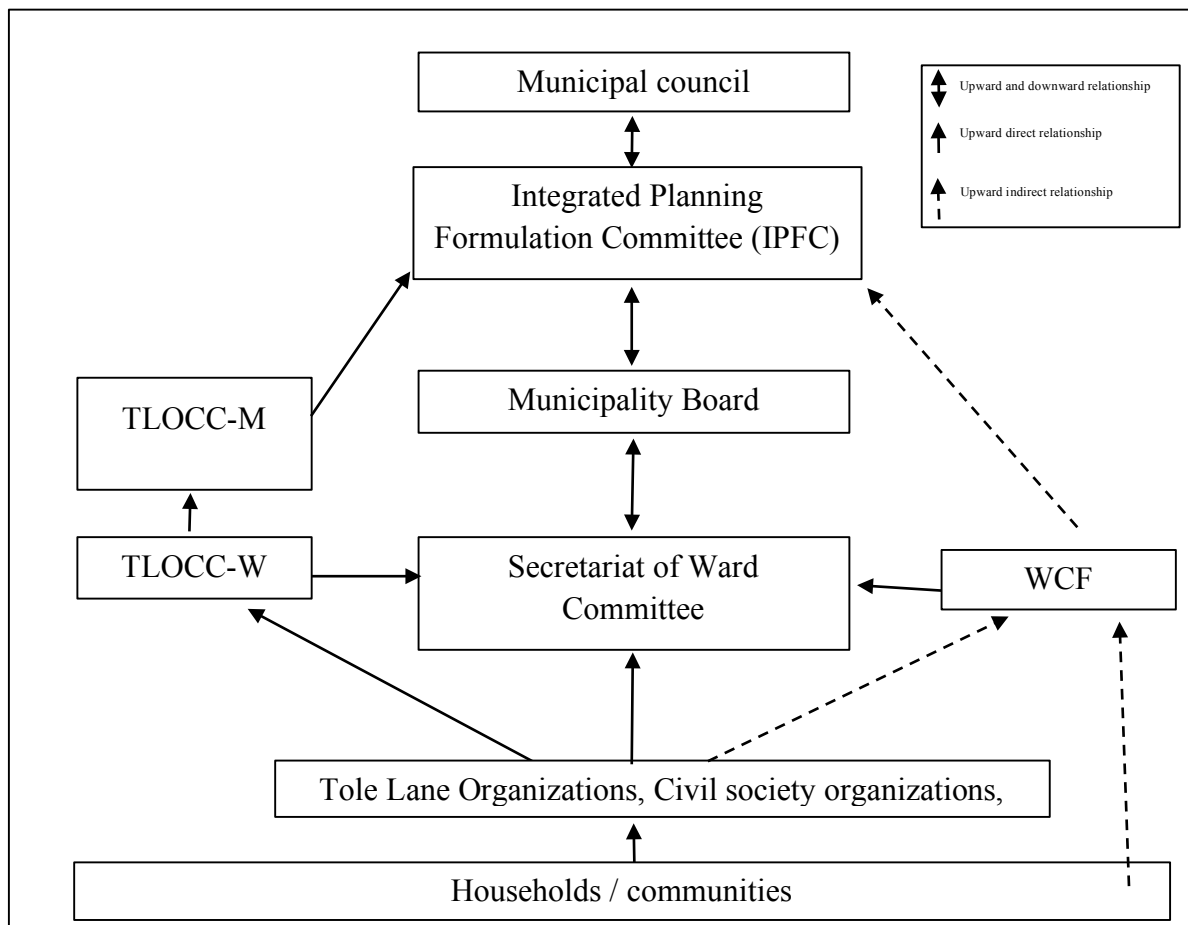
Fiscal Year	Top 5 municipalities
2011/12	<i>Butwal</i> , Gulariya, Ilam, Bhaktapur, Waling
2012/13	Dhankuta, <i>Butwal</i> , Itahari, Pokhara, Ghorahi
2013/14	Dhankuta, <i>Butwal</i> , Ghorahi, Itahari, Hetauda
2014/15	<i>Butwal</i> , Dhankuta, Hetauda, Ghorahi, Itahari
2015/16	<i>Butwal</i> , Ghorahi, Dhankuta, Hetauda,

Source: Annual reports of the Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission

The internal organogram of the Butwal municipality is presented in Figure 3.1. In the centre of the figure is the mainstream governance structure of Butwal. The council is the supreme body of the municipality that mainly works as the legislative body for the municipality. The

Integrated Planning Formulation Committee (IPFC) is an intermediate entity formed as part of the latest local governance reforms. The IPFC is responsible for recommending policy decisions to the council. The municipal board is an executive body of the council responsible for implementing decisions carried out by the council. The ward committee secretariats are the branches of the municipal board that implement the delegated functions of the municipality. The Local Self Governance Act, 1999 envisioned that these municipal institutions would be governed by elected authorities.

Figure 3.1 *Organisational structure of the Butwal sub-metropolitan city*



Source: Fieldwork, 2014

The bottom of the figure includes civil society organizations which are formed in different communities and neighbourhoods. The municipality encourages individual members of certain Tole (equivalent to a street) to form a TLO. The number of TLOs in one ward can vary, mainly depending upon the size of the population. There are up to 64 TLOs in one ward in Butwal sub-metropolitan city. There is a set of guidelines on the creation and functioning of TLOs (Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City 2014). Generally, the municipal staff

facilitate the TLO formation process. Furthermore, the necessary training and additional supportive environments are provided by the municipality office in order to make TLOs more effective and representative of their communities.

TLOs are non-political and community-based organizations. They are expected to collaborate with the municipality in formulating local plans, programs and policies as well as implementing certain projects that are decided either at the municipal board level or by the municipal council. The prevailing guidelines for TLOs of the Butwal sub-metropolitan city suggest that TLOs are expected to involve every single household in their organization. These general members then select up to 11 members as their executive committee. This executive committee is formed every two years by the general assembly of the TLO. Furthermore, the municipality office has a separate section to register, monitor and evaluate the TLOs.

The entities shown at the left-hand side of the figure are the representational organizations of TLOs. The bottom one is the Tole Lane Organization's Coordination Committee at the ward-level (TLOCC-W). This organization is created out of those TLOs which are formed in one ward. Each ward committee secretariat has one TLOCC-W. Currently, there are 22 ward committees in the Butwal sub-metropolitan city – meaning, there are 22 TLOCC-W. The upper box at the left-hand side in the figure points out another representational organization of TLO which is formed at the municipal level. The municipal level coordination committee (TLOCC-M) comprises all the chairpersons of TLOCC-Ws. So, the existing structure of the TLOCC-M consists of 22 members. These members select one person to work as the coordinator of the TLOCC-M.

On the right-hand side, alongside the ward committee secretariat, there is the Ward Citizen Forum (WCF). The WCFs are formed following the guidelines issued by the Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCDP) on behalf of the central government. The WCFs have been formed at the local level since 2004 as part of addressing the problems which emerged with the failure to conduct local elections (Local Governance and Community Development Program 2008b). WCFs are comprised of members from different socio-economic and gender-based communities to participate in local governance. As of December 2015, there were 31642 WCFs in Nepal out of which 2420 WCFs were formed in municipalities (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2015).

3.5 Methods

This section aims to fulfil two objectives: outline the research methods that are useful in the case study research design; and provide justification of certain methods that were adopted to generate data for this research (Creswell 2014). The first part of this section describes conceptual understandings, and the strengths and weaknesses of data generation methods proposed for this research. The second part describes how these methods were used to generate data.

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

In the literature, the interview technique has been widely acknowledged as a qualitative method to collect and analyse data (Creswell 2014; Patton 2005; Qu & Dumay 2011; Thomas 2006). An interview is a face-to-face conversation between different people which aims to enable the exchange of ideas on any specific subject. There are two parties to the conversation: the interviewer whose task is to moderate the conversation process; and, the interviewee who apparently expresses his or her opinions, experiences, beliefs and reactions around the topic the interviewer hopes to understand.

Conducting an interview is not a linear process. However, Rowley (2012, pp. 261-269) proposes considering at least three phases of utilizing interview techniques to generate qualitative data: (a) designing and planning interviews; (b) conducting interviews; and (c) making sense of the interview data (see also Ospina *et al.* 2017). The following table illustrates the individual steps she recommends following:

Table 3.3 *Activities of interview method (adjusted)*

Phase	Main Activity	Questions
I	Designing and planning interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why should I choose interviews for my research? • Which type of interview is best? • How do I decide the questions to ask? • How long should the interviews be? How many interviews do I need to conduct? • How do I select and enlist potential interviewees?
II	Conducting interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do I ensure that interviewees understand my questions? • How do I get the conversation going? • How can I get the interviewee fully engaged in the interview process?
III	Making sense of interview data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do I get started on analysing the data? • How is the best way to analyse the data? • How should I write up the interview data in my findings section?

(Source: Rowley 2012)

Nonetheless, interviews can be either structured, unstructured and semi-structured (Punch 2013). Structured interviews typically provide interviewees' opinions based on specific questions whereas unstructured conversations provide broader information about the understanding, perceptions, experience and reaction of the interviewees. Each of these ways has their own values and therefore are regarded as appropriate or inappropriate based on the research questions being investigated. The semi-structured interview technique has been greatly appreciated in qualitative research across divergent disciplines as it fits ethically sensitive topics as well as relatively less researched topics in social and political science (Corbin & Morse 2003; Lowndes *et al.* 2017).

3.5.2 Observation

Observation is defined as having two distinct characters: overt and covert observation (Iacono *et al.* 2009). In overt observation, the participants recognize the observer and his/her aim of participating in the event. The observer can therefore engage him/herself in the events together with other participants but s/he does not intervene in the process. In other words, an overt observer can be active in terms of recording the activities. However, in the covert form of observation, the observer may disguise his/her identity in order to get to the core of events. The core participants in the event can see the observer but they may not know their real intention. In order to generate data out of any formal process, or social event, or any other social settings, observation has been regarded as the most relevant and epistemologically sound technique (Berg 2001; Hume & Mulcock 2013; Patton 2005) in qualitative case study research.

Observation seems to be important for two reasons: to understand the details of how the planning process was organised in the Butwal municipality only (overt), and to have some knowledge of how other surrounding local bodies organised their planning processes (covert). A detailed description of the use of observation is presented in the fieldwork section.

3.5.3 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions (FGDs) are suggested for the research as a way of triangulating ideas and opinions expressed in individual interviews (Wilkinson & Silverman 2004). Focus group discussions help validate the opinions collected through individual interviews as well as through other modes such as observation (Berg 2001 pp. 111-131). The questions raised during individual interviews are submitted to the group discussions to learn what

participants of a certain group think about the same issue. Sometimes the group members can be invited to represent different associations or social classes in order to compare their perceptions.

The main difference between individual interviews and focus group discussion is that participants in group discussions are enabled to talk to each other, exchange and contest their ideas among themselves and the role of the researcher is to facilitate/moderate the discussion around the research issue. The idea of focus group discussion is to learn participants' understanding of the subject matter, particularly using their own vocabularies and through their own way of generating and interpreting questions (Kitzinger 1995 p. 299).

Literature on focus group discussions suggests two ways of conducting research: unstructured and semi-structured (Stewart & Shamdasani 2014). Unstructured focus groups are of an exploratory nature while semi-structured focus groups are of an explanatory type. Oates and Alevizou (2018) assert that unstructured focus groups are helpful in introducing the subject of research with relevant participants to generate background information whereas semi-structured focus groups work as an interpretive aid to examine earlier findings. Each of these focus group types has its own merits that researchers can benefit from, although the subject matter of the research itself can be a determinant of whether to adopt unstructured or semi-structured focus groups.

3.5.4 Document analysis

In qualitative research, document analysis is understood as one of the methods of acquiring information necessary to the research. The rationale for adopting this method is that it has often been used as a means of triangulation (Denzin 1970) which in turn breeds credibility (Eisner 1991). However, Bowen (2009, pp. 33-34) considers 'document analysis' as a process of evaluating documents in such a way that empirical knowledge is produced and further understanding is developed.

Document analysis comprises a series of activities. It is quite natural for the researcher to identify the relevant documents in the first place which may help establish 'context' for the research. The next step is to gradually select the most pertinent documents out of the first pile. At this stage, the researcher needs to be careful, critical and intellectual enough to get into the core of the resources. With the development of a computer software application

such as nVivo, qualitative researchers of our time are eased toward accessing the right contents of the most relevant documents (Richards 2000).

In comparison with other methods, document analysis is more about ‘deskwork’ which continues as an ongoing process throughout the research period. There is however a significant difference in approaching document analysis before and after adopting other methods such as qualitative interviewing in the field. Before conducting fieldwork, a researcher may be willing to read as many documents as necessary to find the core of the topic. When fieldwork is in progress, the researcher may find some readings worthless and some of greater value. Based on the reading as well as field experience, the actual value of document analysis emerges.

3.6 Fieldwork

The field study begun in late November 2014 when the planning process for the fiscal year 2014/15 was starting in all the municipalities in Nepal. Following some pilot interviews at the central government level, the observation of the planning process in the Butwal municipality began in a more or less sequential manner: from Tole Bhêlas to Ward Bhêlas to the IPFC while simultaneously semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of participants and other actors in the planning process. Although the focus of the study is the Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City (see case study section above), the participatory planning process was also observed in other local bodies such as municipalities, villages and districts, mainly for expanding the empirical knowledge about planning.

3.6.1 Description of interviewees

The process of selecting participants for interviews followed the principle of snowballing (Robinson 2014). In the beginning, two government officials who had experience working at the local level as executive officers were contacted for a conversation about the planning process. Based on their information, an executive officer of the Butwal sub-metropolitan city was contacted. A comprehensive conversation (about 3 hours) with the executive officer in Butwal revealed the various roles of TLOs, WCFs, political parties, INGOs and donor agencies, experts and other individuals. Next, with the help of the concerned official working at the Butwal municipality, individuals representing different civil society organisations, political elites, INGOs and donor agencies were identified, contacted and interviewed. Although the questions for these people were relatively generic (See Annex 4.2 for a list of questions), their opinions were mostly based on their experiences.

Interviews were organized in two different phases for this research. In the first phase, between November 2014 and February 2015, a total of 25 interviews were conducted across different locales simultaneously with observation (Table 3.4). The rationale for conducting interviews in the first phase was to generate a general understanding of the planning process.

Table 3.4 Summary of interviewees (first phase)

Level	Government	Civil	Political	INGO/Donor	Experts	Others
Central	3			1		2
Municipal	3	3	3		1	1
Community		8				
Total (25)	6	11	3	1	1	3

In the second phase, interviewees were entirely selected from a ward in the Butwal sub-metropolitan city. The rationale for selecting interviewees from a particular ward was that the ward committee secretariat had an excellent quality record book of who was participating in various levels of public meetings including the Ward Bhèla. Consideration was given to those who had participated in Tole Bhèlas, Ward Bhèlas and the IPFC. The information necessary to select participants was mainly obtained from the ward committee secretariat in the Butwal municipality, although some interviewees were contacted based on the recommendation of already selected interviewees. As the Annex 4.3 lists, interviewees were categorised into several groups.

The questions were designed in such a way that participants could describe their experience, not necessarily their knowledge, of the institutional environment of planning in a certain locale. Table 3.5 below illustrates the types and number of interviews that were carried out during the first round of the field study in 2014 and 2015. The interviewees enlisted in the table were selected based on their involvement in central or local government, civil society, a political party at the local level, an international aid agency, or were experts and others (researchers and professionals such as the trainer).

On devising an analytical framework, it was realised that the only interviewees that would be meaningful to incorporate in this thesis were those relevant to the planning process in the Butwal municipality. The interview data were reviewed (not necessarily transcribed and translated, but only heard) once again. While all the interviews are regarded as equally important, only 42 (29 interviews of 2016 and 13 interviews of 2014/15) are used in this thesis as its core data source (Table 3.5).

Table 3.5 Final list of interviews

	Tole Bhèla	Ward Bhèla	IPFC	All	Total
Interviewees	25	37	17	4	42

Of these 42 interviews, 38 interviewees were participants in different planning forums in the Butwal municipality. The remaining 4 interviewees were playing managerial roles at the municipal level. Of the 38 interviewees, only 17 had experience participating in the meeting of the IPFC, followed by 37 in Ward Bhèlas and 25 in Tole Bhèlas. In other words, many participants were selected from the Ward Bhèla, though they had experience of participating both in Tole Bhèlas in neighbourhoods and in the meeting of the IPFC at the municipal level.

3.6.2 Observation of the planning process

A total of seven different activities were carried out between November 2014 and February 2015 as part of observing the participatory planning process in Nepal (see Annex 3.2 for detail). The observation data were recorded in a notebook as a handwritten diary. A total of 5 out of 25 randomly selected Tole Bhèlas in a ward were observed which has provided significant empirical materials for this research. As soon as observation of all Tole Bhèlas in the case study ward was completed, the Ward Bhèla to which the representatives of the observed Tole Bhèlas (and others as well) had to submit their proposals was also observed in more or less comprehensive manner. The observation of the Ward Bhèla also included closely monitoring many of the activities of officials working at the ward committee secretariat. Important official communications were also observed, which helped tracing various forms of communication between municipal officials (seniors) and ward committee officials (subordinates), and also between the organisers of Tole Bhèlas (citizen participants) and ward committee officials (organisers). At the end of the process, the entire meeting of the IPFC was observed for two days in February 2015 in the Butwal municipality.

3.6.3 Focus group discussions

During the field study, two group discussions were organized in two different locations in Butwal. The first FGD was organised in February 2015 at the municipality office in Butwal where 14 members of the TLOCC-M were present. When they were gathered for their regular monthly meeting, a special request was submitted in writing to the Coordinator of the TLOCC-M prior to their meeting². Once they completed their regular discussions, an hour of time was allocated for this research. Participants *in the meeting* were given

information about the aim of the research and the objectives of the FGD. Then, participants were informed about the preliminary impression of the planning process in Butwal before being allowed to express their understanding of and experience in participating in various planning meetings in Butwal.

The second focus group discussion was organised at the case study ward in Butwal in February 2016. Participants in the FGD were the coordinators of the TLOs in that ward, and were invited by the ward secretary on the researcher's request³. Of the 24 TLOC-W coordinators, 16 were present in the discussions which lasted for 2 hours. In the beginning, participants were informed about the objective of the research, and specific concerns about why the focus group was organised. They were informed about the principles of organising focus group discussions based on Stewart and Shamdasani (2014)⁴, and asked whether they were comfortable dividing themselves into at least two groups to have discussions on (a) structures for citizens to participate, and (b) various roles of planning forums in policymaking.

3.6.4 Secondary sources

A number of official publications have been recognized as the most credible sources of data. These include the publications of the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD), the National Planning Commission (NPC) and Butwal sub-metropolitan city. Legislative documents were obtained from the Nepal Law Commission. Some publications of aid agencies and local non-governmental organizations have also been used. Previous research papers produced in academic environments have also been included.

3.7 The analysis of data

This empirical research has generated a range of qualitative data in the form of interview materials, field notes written during observation and focus group discussions, as well as the secondary sources of documents. Because this research is designed following the interpretivist approach, it should be acknowledged that the research design and data generation activities have followed consistent epistemological methods. This indicates that the analysis of the data is also stimulated by the interpretivist approach to research.

Informed by the three-stage process of planning in the Butwal municipality, a descriptive narrative was developed in which the forums of planning (or, the organisational structure of planning) were divided into informal, semi-formal and formal forums separately. The data

were then grouped in terms of a range of themes: attributes of the planning forums, participants, decision-making styles, roles of planning forums and implications for policymaking. Next, these themes were used to prepare a detailed description of the organisational structure and functions of planning forums which are presented in Chapter 5, 6 and 7 of Part 2 of this thesis.

In terms of the analysis of interview data, ten randomly selected interviews were transcribed and translated from the Nepali language to English. Other interviews were not transcribed primarily due to their time-consuming nature (listening and transcribing in the Nepali language, and then translating into English); but listened to regularly whenever necessary during the analysis. The translated interview data were put into the nVivo, a computer program, to extract ideas specifically about the two separate dimensions of the analytical framework. These ideas were then interpreted in terms of the organisational structures of planning for citizens to participate (Chapter 8) and of policymaking as a function of the planning process (Chapter 9).

3.8 Trustworthiness of data

The issue of the trustworthiness of the data has long been recognized in the literatures of qualitative research that use the case study as their design principle (Baxter & Jack 2008). Fortunately, a range of techniques are available to check and enhance the quality of data in case study research. Yin (2013, pp. 40-41), for instance, argues that four types of validity tests (construct, internal, external and reliability) can be done in different phases of the data collection and analysis. Two of his proposals are applied here to confirm the quality of the research.

First, the construct validity test proposed as a technique to ensure that the examining phenomenon is selected based on multiple sources of evidence, and that this evidence is tested to see if there are any inconsistencies between the claims (preferably published) and the perceptions (pilot interviews). In this research, the concept of a construct validity tactic, the degree to which a test measures what it claims, or purports to be measuring (Brown 1996), was adopted during the first phase of field visits. Several semi-structured interviews were conducted with the officials working at the central government level, donor agencies and local officials to triangulate evidence about the planning process that had been implemented in the absence of elected authorities for over a decade. The information

generated through these interviews was then tested by looking at the secondary sources of data.

Second is the testing of internal validity by matching patterns, explaining rival arguments and describing core themes that emerged in the interview data (Yin 2013). This was a significant data validation process in this research, as it helped to identify that Smith's (2009) *goods of democratic innovations*, which had been considered as a possible analytical framework prior to conducting the first phase of field study, were more or less insufficient to assess Nepal's planning process. The analysis of the interview data, field notes that were taken during the first phase of field study and some official publications suggested the need to rethink the analytical framework. Consequently, a second phase of field study was conducted.

While adopting multiple sources of data collection is desirable in the case study design, contradictions may appear in the essence of the data that is generated across different sources. To avoid or mitigate such contradictions, social scientists often propose using the triangulation method. This method suggests using more than two methods preferably quantitative and qualitative which would allow researchers to examine the extent to which such methods produce the same dimension of the research (Denzin 1970; Denzin & Lincoln 2002; Jick 1979). This research is aware of this type of technique; therefore, utilised observation, interviews and focus group discussions as complementary methods of data collection. For example, the arguments in the field notes, which were documented during the first field visit in 2014 and 2015, were triangulated with the interview data. Interview data were further tested with the participants in the focus group discussions. Hence a three-layer triangulation has ensured that the data collected, utilised, and analysed in this thesis is of a high level of trustworthiness and reliability.

3.9 Ethical considerations

As per the Human Research Ethic approval requirements, the privacy of interviewees has been maintained, and no identifying information is disclosed anywhere in any form. The views expressed by interviewees have been quoted in the thesis with due acknowledgement of the respondent. The personal identification has been completely suppressed when quoting their views, but they have been recognized by an understandable pronoun (see Annex 3.6).

Each of the respondents was asked for permission to use their views in this thesis prior to being interviewed. Permission was sought in writing, and the Nepali language was used to explain about the ethical aspects of this research that are characterised in the human research ethics approval letter of the University of Canberra. A loosely translated version of the consent form is attached in Annex 3.5.

The interviews and focus group discussions were recorded in audio format (.mp3). These files are secured on a computer provided by the university. Some of the interviews have been transcribed and translated, and have been stored in the same computer. The folder in which these files are located can only be accessed by the researcher who is fully aware of the university policy about the storage, reuse and destruction of the data.

3.10 Researcher's role

Within the case study research tradition, the role of researcher is expected to be disclosed, particularly for maximising the credibility of the entire research project (Thomson & Gunter 2011; Unluer 2012). The researcher was introduced differently as an observer in different situations as: (a) a planning officer of the National Planning Commission, (b) an officer of the government of Nepal, (c) an independent researcher, (d) a resident of Butwal, and (e) an individual who did not have any association with any CBOs/NGOs/WCFs/political parties but had an interest in learning the process, and (f) a PhD student who was observing the process.

Although none of these identities influenced the way the researcher observed the process and spoke to interviewees, it was relatively convenient to establish a relationship with appointed bureaucrats at the municipality office and thereby access official documents that were related to their planning process in Butwal. Additionally, whenever the researcher participated in their meetings at neighbourhood levels (Tole Bhèla), ward level (Ward Bhèla) and the municipal level (IPFC), the researcher was entrusted to speak to the participants without any obstacles. It is noteworthy to mention that the IPFC meeting in Butwal was not open for all, but the researcher was welcome to participate and speak to individual participants in the meeting.

3.11 Conclusions

This chapter has introduced research questions and ways to answer the questions. It has indicated different aspects of research design and methods that were adopted to generate the

necessary data. The single case with multiple units is the fundamental design principle of this research. Participatory planning in the Butwal municipality is broadly a case. Data were generated mainly through semi-structured interviews, observation, focus group discussions and relevant publications.

Chapter 4

The participatory planning process in Nepal

This chapter introduces participatory planning as the topic of this research. It begins with a brief historical overview about how the planning has been evolving. Next is a description of the stated aims of the planning process based on the relevant legislation, and policy documents. It then introduces the major reforms implemented in recent decades. The next section introduces the institutional and operational aspects of participatory planning implemented in local bodies between the periods 2002 and 2016 when there were no elected authorities in power. The final section summarises the chapter.

4.1 The evolution of the planning process in Nepal

Participatory planning is an annual local governance process for formulating local public policies and short and mid-term local development programs. It is a participatory decision-making process in which citizens of different types (ordinary people, activists, members of various civil society organisations, politicians, officials working for service delivery entities such as schools, hospitals at the local level, individuals of local NGOs and the like) and their nominated representatives work together with municipal officials across a range of forums at neighbourhood, ward and municipal level. This research is based on those institutions and processes articulated in the Local Self Governance Act (1999) and other relevant regulations and guidelines. The law was promulgated in 1999 and remained in force until September 2017.

Planning at the local level was initiated at the beginning of the Panchayat regime in the early 1960s as part of rural development programs (i.e Messerschmidt *et al.* 1983). The original idea of planning was to collect local demands through erstwhile local Panchayats [rural villages, urban municipalities and a combination of village and urban areas called districts] (Paudyal 1994). Several Panchayat Development Workers (PDWs) were deployed in different locales to help local people in exploring and bringing their needs to local decision-making. The PDWs were especially trained individuals who were experts in different areas such as engineering, agriculture and education. However, as Shrestha (1980, p. 283) hints, these PDWs were assigned with some hidden political agendas to promote the spirit of the party-less Panchayat and malign the multiparty democracy at the local level.

In 1975, the government circulated a guideline to all district Panchayats for preparing an annual district development plan, a policy and programmatic handbook specifying revenue sources and expenditure headings to be implemented within the territory of concerned districts. The guideline stipulated that districts must prepare their annual development plans drawing on popular participation. The term popular participation however was not defined clearly. The main objective of the annual handbook of district-level policies and programs was to formulate relatively bigger developmental projects that would benefit more than one village or municipality within the territory of the concerned district.

Although PDWs were expected to facilitate the participation of ordinary people in the process of a district development plan, it seems that they were not only informing citizens about what the central government was planning to implement in their locale but also reminding stakeholders about their responsibilities in implementing such programs (Panday 1989; Pant 1966). In other words, local officials including the PDWs used to authoritatively order local people for ‘voluntary labour’. Nonetheless, this activity has been explained as public participation in development (Messerschmidt 1986).

Decentralisation reforms in the 1980s showed some progression in involving local people in local decision-making mechanisms but they, too, were also insufficient (Paudyal 1994). A range of community level consultations were envisioned in the Decentralisation Act (1982), most of which were organised at places convenient for citizens. Although there was no provision for democratic elections for local government based on political competition, local leaders used to be elected on the basis of their professional membership of social organisations. The elected leaders were responsible for organising consultative meetings in their constituencies. However, it is unclear as to what extent consultations organised by elected leaders genuinely encouraged ordinary people to participate, and so allow the voices of these participants in the decisions to be heard (Bienen *et al.* 1990; Messerschmidt *et al.* 1983).

The democratic reforms in the early 1990s *re-emphasised* decentralisation as one of the principles for providing opportunities to citizens to become involved in local governance (Administrative Reform Commission 1992; Government of Nepal 1990b). Consequently, a number of local governance reforms were initiated as attempts to transform the local landscape of governance from relatively traditional bureaucratic entities to more participatory, open and democratic institutions (Ministry of Local Development 2003). One

example of such a transformation was the promulgation of the Local Self Governance Act (1999) which consolidated earlier reform efforts to introduce participatory democratic governance at the local level. The modern form of participatory planning is the product of one of the reform initiatives aimed at fostering bottom-up planning, creating demand-driven governance and linking central-local governance arrangements (Government of Nepal 1999b, 2000; National Planning Commission 1992, 1997, 2002; Thapa 2013).

Hence, the planning process in Nepal’s local governance has been evolving through the adoption of different approaches to citizen participation (Table 4.1). Before the 1980s, the planning process was designed to inform citizens about local development works and the citizen’s role in implementing such works. Involving citizens in decision-making was not fully developed but citizens were asked to be gathered at a convenient place to be informed about what policies and programs were going to be implemented in their locale. Between the 1980s and 1990s, the planning process was redesigned to consult with citizens about their needs. Again, citizen participation was understood in terms of the degree to which ordinary people meaningfully participated in the implementation of some small-scale development programs.

Table 4.1 The planning process in the public participation spectrum

	Inform (Before 1980s)	Consult (Between 1980s and 1990s)	Involve (Between 1990s and 2000s)	Collaborate with people through empowerment strategies
				From 2000 onwards
Goals	Inform citizens about local development works for exploiting their free labour	Ask stakeholders about their needs and preferences	Involve people directly and democratically in the decision-making mechanisms	Develop public policies in collaboration with local people, to ensure their involvement in the implementation of public policies

Source: Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation (2014) and further defined by Nabatchi (2012a).

Some promising steps were taken in the early years of the 1990s, alongside the (re) introduction of parliamentary democracy in 1990. Citizen participation in local governance was regarded as a constitutionally accepted principle (Government of Nepal 1990b), so a range of decentralisation reforms were carried out to provide opportunities for citizens to participate in local decision-making (Annex 4.1 shows a brief account of participatory

governance coded in different constitutions since 1950s). As the Annex shows, several participatory processes such as the planning process were further enhanced in terms of their democratic institutional design and process, aiming to involve people directly in the annual policymaking process in municipalities, villages and districts. However, there is little known about whether the planning process was genuinely incorporating the voices of local people in local public policies, or whether it was just a showcase of participatory policymaking with few citizen inputs (see Adhikari 2006, for instance).

Following the commencement of the new millennium, however, the planning process was revitalised as a local policymaking mechanism to not only involve ordinary citizens as its key actors in the development of local public policies, but also to aim to collaborate with local people in the implementation of small-scale local developmental projects (Government of Nepal 1999b, 2000). Through several embedded and mandatory provisions, such as the compulsory allocation of a certain proportion of the budget to women, children and minorities, the planning process has been operationalised in such a way that citizens were sought to be empowered in the making, and also in the implementation of, local public policies (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013).

Thus, modern-day participatory planning has been evolving for more than the last four decades. Although the Local Self Governance Act (1999) has impressively institutionalised the organisation and processes of planning in an unprecedented manner, there is a scarcity of knowledge as to what extent the planning provisions have been implemented in line with the legislative arrangements. The initial impression is that due to the absence of electoral politics at the local level in Nepal for over a decade between 2002 and 2016, the implementation of the planning process might have suffered significantly (see Byrne & Shrestha 2014, for instance).

To conclude, although the genesis of the planning process in Nepal was seeded in the late 1950s, it was institutionalised as a local policymaking process only in the beginning of the 1980s (Paudyal 1994). Even though critiques argue that participatory planning was not embraced as a democratic policymaking institution until the (re)introduction of democracy in 1990 (Adhikari 2006; Baral 2006, 2018; Dhungel *et al.* 2011; Khadka 1986), the contemporary institution of participatory planning at the local level has been evolving to formulate local public policies and small and mid-term developmental programs (Administrative Reform Commission 1992; Hachhethu 2008).

4.2 Aims of the planning process

As stated above, the institution of participatory planning was devised in the Local Self Governance Act (1999) as a method of formulating short and mid-term development plans and local public policies. Article 111 of the law devises procedural obligations for municipalities to formulate short and long-term development plans, annual local public policies and small-scale development programs through the participatory planning process. Moreover, according to Article 111 (5), the planning process is supposed to be consistent across all local bodies viz. villages, municipalities and districts. Although the legislative provisions about planning were exclusively obligatory for all local bodies, there were a range of arrangements which would allow *municipalities* to implement planning in a relatively autonomous environment in terms of, inter alia, the institutional design of planning, participant selection and decision-making (Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission 2015; Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013).

To achieve the legislative objective of planning i.e. to formulate short-term and long-term development plans, annual local public policies and small-scale development programs, several policy documents were formulated by both the central government and municipalities to guide the planning process. The policy documents of the central government were seemingly intended to facilitate municipalities to (a) implement the planning process consistently in terms of the institutional design and internal processes (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013), (b) distribute the performance-based grant in terms of the degree to which municipalities adhere to the planning process (Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission 2015), (c) harmonize local public policies and development programs across government and non-government agencies at the local level (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2016), and (d) encourage local communities to participate in the making of local public policies and collaborate in the implementation of small-scale development programs (Ministry of Local Development 2011). Although municipalities were simply to follow the rules and directives set out at the central government level, some municipalities have produced a range of documents for, inter alia, creating and utilising civil society organisations in the making and implementation of local public policies and small-scale development programs through the planning process (Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City 2014).

The guidelines stipulated in the legislation and subsequent regulations suggest that participatory planning was envisioned to be implemented for two distinguishable reasons (Government of Nepal 1999b, 2000). The first was to offer opportunities to citizens of different types to be involved in local decision-making to increase the legitimacy of decisions. The second was to formulate better policies and programs at the local level based on citizens' input.

4.3 The participatory planning process in municipalities

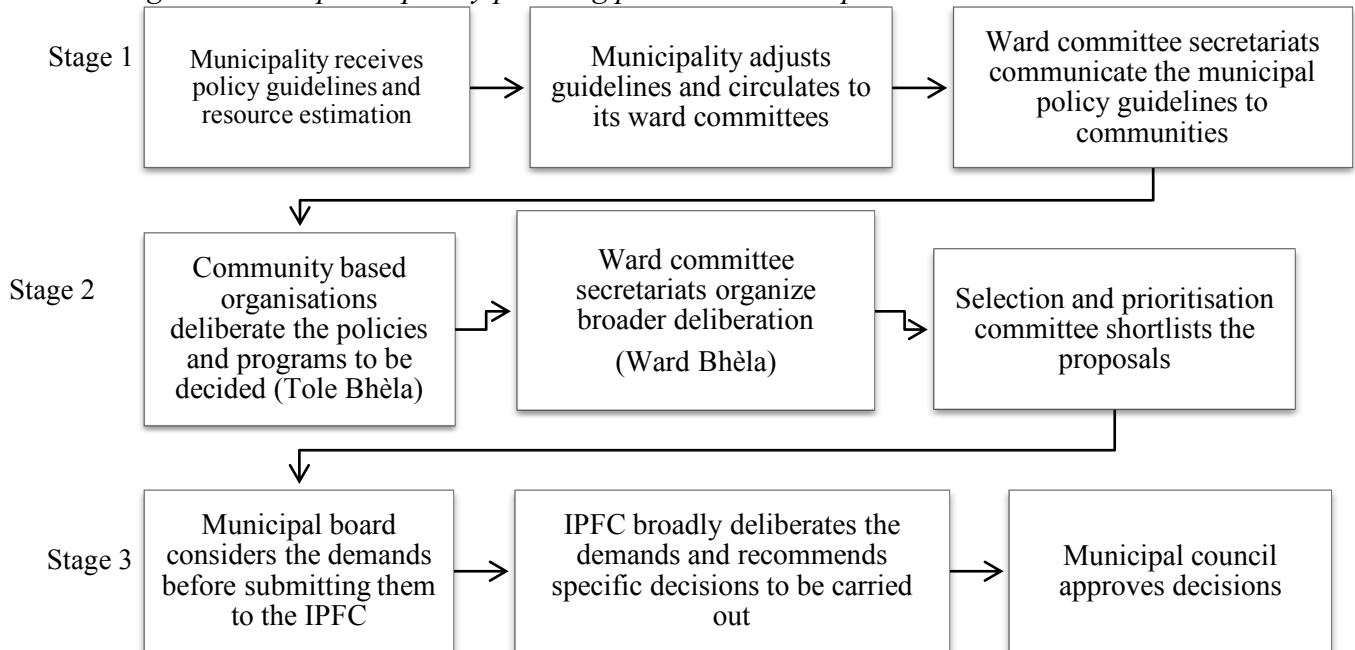
The Local Self Governance Act (LSGA), 1999 provides the main legislative basis for participatory planning. The subsequent regulations, directives and guidelines of the LSGA further define general procedures for organizing participatory planning in municipalities. As the LSGA is supposed to be implemented in electoral settings, the law does not explicitly mention any alternative arrangements to organise the participatory planning process. This is particularly the case for those occasions when certain features of electoral democracy are not available, or are simply dysfunctional. As local bodies suffered from the absence of elected leadership until May 2017, the original institutional design of the planning process was adapted to fit into local contexts. A reasonable extent of bureaucratic autonomy was given (by the central government) to centrally appointed chiefs of municipalities so the planning process would continue to be activated despite the absence of locally elected leadership (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013).

The contemporary legislative arrangements had given *municipalities* some flexibility in terms of designing the planning process according to their local contexts whereas other local bodies viz. villages and districts were given relatively less flexibility (Government of Nepal 1999b, 2000). At the time of conducting this research, many municipalities in Nepal were regarded as reasonably capable to the extent that they could internally fund some of the small-scale developmental projects that had been formulated through the planning process (Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission 2014b, 2014c). Financing, therefore, seems to be an important aspect of the planning process (Bryld 2003; Khatiwada *et al.* 2015).

At the municipal level, the participatory planning process used to be organized following rules 134-139 of the Local Self Governance Regulations (2000). In several respects, the municipal planning process was organised differently from that of village or district planning⁵. The overall institutional design of the planning between the years 2002 and 2016 was organised in three stages (Figure 4.1). The first stage involved some administrative

activities, such as acquiring local policy guidelines and a budgetary framework (including the annual budget ceiling for municipalities) from the central government. Irrespective of the central government’s policy and guidelines to be adopted in the planning process, municipalities were given some flexibility in adjusting the policy guidelines and budgetary frameworks.

Figure 4.1 The participatory planning process in municipalities



Source: Based on the fieldwork

Stage one is about adapting and adopting budgetary framework and policy guidelines in accordance with local revenue sources, implementation capacity and policy and developmental needs. As soon as municipalities receive policy guidelines and budgetary frameworks, they organise consultative meetings involving key officials working both at the concerned municipality office, bureaucrats of other government agencies whose working area is the same municipality and some selected representatives from the private and not-for-profit sectors. The objective of the consultation is to provide suggestions on the budgetary framework and policy guidelines. The executive officer of the concerned municipality then makes decisions about budgetary frameworks particularly in relation to revenue sources, and major policy areas to be considered for funding. The adapted version of policy guidelines and budgetary ceilings are then communicated to ward committee secretariats to be adopted whilst deliberating proposals in neighbourhoods at Tole Bhèlas and in wards at Ward Bhèlas.

At stage two of the planning process, most of the activities are related to public deliberation. Both government-sponsored civil society organisations such as Tole Lane Organisations (TLOs) and Ward Citizens Forums (WCFs) as well as independently formed community-based organisations and NGOs are particularly activated by ward committee secretariat to host deliberations, also known as Tole Bhèlas, about citizens' demands and needs. Once Tole Bhèlas are organised across all the neighbourhoods, their shortlisted proposals are forwarded to Ward Bhèlas, another round of deliberation organised directly by the ward committee secretariat at the ward level. The deliberation at the Ward Bhèla is relatively mature and comprehensive as it is organised by the municipality itself, and many of the participants are selectively invited to deliberate their proposals. A small yet representative jury-like committee is formed in each of the Ward Bhèlas which selects and prioritises the most pressing policy and developmental demands and needs of citizens.

The activities at the third stage are mostly organised at the municipal level. The executive secretary of the municipality forms an Integrated Planning Formulation Committee (IPFC) to which she or he nominates about three dozen individuals representing various social groups (women, indigenous communities etc.), interest groups (gender, transparency etc.) and policy issues (health, education etc.). The aim of such a committee is to deliberate the proposals from multiple perspectives. Once the proposals are deliberated, the committee prepares a recommended list of policy decisions, development projects and other service-delivery related reform agendas to be approved by the municipal council⁶. All of these stages take up to three months starting in November and concluding in February (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 The participatory planning process in timeline view

Month	Nov			Dec				Jan				Feb			
Week	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2		
Activity	Obtain policy guidelines and budgetary ceiling	Consult with political parties, communities and business sector	Circulate adjusted policy guidelines and budgetary ceiling to wards	Organise neighbourhood level consultation meetings and discussions (by CSOs, NGOs and sectoral agencies)				Organise Tole Bhèla	Organise Ward Bhèla				Select and prioritise demands and projects	Organise the IPFC meeting	Approve decisions (by the council)

Source: Based on the fieldwork

Once the council approves the decisions, a set of local policies, developmental projects and service delivery arrangements is published. Such a publication, labelled as the annual handbook of municipal policy and programs, consists of the exact detail of income and expenditure of the past year, amended details for the ongoing year and plans for the next fiscal year. The handbook also includes the projects to be implemented by various actors: the central government departments, district development committees, the municipality itself, NGOs and civil society organisations. Relevant copies of decisions are then forwarded to the concerned actors.

The planning process, as shown in Figure 2.1, is nevertheless, a newly adapted version of planning. The reforms in local governance in recent years have changed the initial institutional design and processes of the planning process, but these reforms did not seem to be compromising the original objectives, institutional design and processes that were articulated in the Local Self Governance Act (1999) and its subsequent regulations (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013).

4.4 Reforms in municipal participatory planning

Reforms in the late 1990s articulated different forms of participatory practices that were scattered across different sectors such as health, education, and water-supply at the local level. The promulgation of the Local Self Governance Act (1999) is an example of reform articulation that recognised traditional forms of participatory practices and embedded them within the framework of electoral local governance. The law required municipalities to formalise and strengthen traditional forms of entities as well as the new platforms to facilitate the participation of local people in the local decision-making (for example, Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City 2014; Madsen & Triantafyllou 2016). Moreover, the central government continued to work closely with a number of international aid agencies to contribute to fostering the functioning of participatory processes at the local level (Huntington *et al.* 1999; United Nations Development Programme 1999).

Participatory planning, in particular, has been revitalised as one of the main vehicles for engaging citizens in local decision-making. Two possible reasons why reformers were focused on revitalising the planning process can be categorised. The first is its already *institutionalised reputation* in the context of local governance (Adhikari 2006; Paudyal 1994). The policymaking role of municipalities was synonymously understood as the functioning of the participatory planning, even before the introduction of comprehensive

democratic and administrative reforms in the early 1990s (Administrative Reform Commission 1992; National Planning Commission 1992). The second is the changing context of local governance after the 2000s. While the legislative arrangements about planning were designed to be governed by elected authorities (Government of Nepal 1999a), reformers of the recent decade further revitalised the planning process, as one of the dominant *complementary mechanisms* of decision-making, to offer opportunities for citizens in the making and implementation of local public policies (Local Governance and Community Development Program 2008a; Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013).

The following sections outline six dominant reform measures introduced in recent decades to revitalise the participatory planning process. Although the fundamental institutional design of planning, as envisioned in the Local Self Governance Act (1999), was not compromised much, the reforms outlined below should be understood as the themes that were helpful for municipalities to adapt to the changing political context of local governance in Nepal. It is not to say, however, that these were the only reforms that aimed to improve the planning process, but to highlight that several piecemeal reforms announced particularly through annual policy guidelines and macroeconomic frameworks were also contributory in changing the institution and process of planning at the local level (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013).

4.4.1 Assigning political roles to administrators

When the tenure of the last elected local bodies ended in 2002, the government decided as a contingency to assign certain powers and duties of elected councillors to appointed bureaucrats (Government of Nepal 2003). In the early years following this decision, there was a general hope amongst the public that local elections would resume soon, and local democracy would be restored. However, the national political landscape steadily deteriorated following (a) the Royal massacre in 2003, (b) the Royal takeover in 2004 and the coup in 2005, (c) a growing Maoist insurgency and (d) tensions between political parties and the monarch, which ultimately overshadowed the possibility of conducting local elections. Consequently, appointed bureaucrats were obliged to steer local bodies in lieu of councillors and mayors. Authority for the planning process was, thus, unsurprisingly shifted to appointed officials.

Although such a temporal arrangement of local governance was supportive in maintaining many of the regular functions of local governments, the transformation of political power to bureaucrats created several questions mainly associated with the accountability of appointed officials⁷ (Pandeya 2015; Pandeya & Shrestha 2016). On the one hand, executive secretaries were not obliged to be directly accountable to citizens because of the rules and regulations coded in the Civil Service Act (1990). Despite several measures to keep the bureaucrats accountable for, at least, the decisions they took and their performance, these were insufficient to strengthen their downward accountability to citizens (Association of District Development Committees *et al.* 2013; Dhungel *et al.* 2011). Nonetheless, the central government was constantly introducing several piecemeal reforms through ministerial decisions to maximise the accountability of nonelected local officials. One example of such reforms was the promulgation of Local Bodies' Resource Mobilization Procedure (2014), which broadened the scope of the accountability of appointed officials though there were unclarity as to what extent these Procedures were effective (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2014 pp. 2-3).

4.4.2 Forming political mechanisms

In the early years of local governance reforms in the 2000s, the executive officers of municipalities continued to work closely with local politicians though they were not legally obliged to do so. The local administrators preferred to collaborate with local politicians because they wanted to avoid ownership of the decisions and thereby minimise their career risks (The Carter Center 2014). On the one hand, such a practice enabled unelected politicians to get involved in decision-making for which they did not have to bear any accountability; on the other, appointed bureaucrats would point to unelected politicians for the consequence of the decisions (Association of District Development Committees *et al.* 2013). This caused a situation in which the state of public accountability for local decisions, resources and functioning was visibly eroded (Pandeya & Shrestha 2016). The reformers in the middle of the 2000s therefore started to formalise the roles of unelected politicians by forming multiparty mechanisms in local bodies, a committee which consisted of the representatives of major political parties that was chaired by the executive officer of the concerned municipality (Association of District Development Committees *et al.* 2013; Local Governance and Community Development Program 2008a).

It was generally expected from the mechanism that the local decision-making power would revert back to local politicians (Goutam 2006). The mechanism was similar to that of an elected local council in terms of the structure but members of the mechanism were unelected. The aim of this reform was to create a provisional political institution that could potentially bridge the gap which emerged in the absence of local elections. Local administrators who exercised political power for over five years welcomed the reforms because they wanted the politicians to take ownership of the decisions. Additionally, municipal staffs wanted the local politicians to be accountable to their constituencies. Because such a mechanism was not envisioned in the Local Self Governance Act 1999, the reform was later challenged in the court and the government then dismantled it in 2010.

Interestingly, there had been continuous demands from several actors in local governance (the public, international aid agencies, political parties and civil society organisations to name a few) to minimise the roles of appointed officials in decision-making (Hachhethu 2006, 2008). Consequently, the government decided to transform multiparty mechanisms to *advisory political mechanisms* at the local level in the latter period of reforms. The mechanism remained unhelpful in addressing the accountability problem of appointed officials, simply because members of this advisory committee started to claim as they were advisors yet their unofficial involvement in local decision-making continued to affect appointed officials (Pandeya 2015). As a result, such a mechanism was also regarded as incapable of bearing accountability for decisions and blamed as a catalyst in increasing corruption (Transparency International Nepal 2013). It was also dissolved by the central government in 2013.

4.4.3 Introducing minimum conditions and performance measurement

The Minimum Conditions and Performance Measure (MCPM) is a performance assessment tool that was implemented by the Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission (LBFC) in 2005. The purpose of using this measure is for allocating the central government's funding to local bodies. It has a set of criteria to assess local bodies' level of transparency, accountability and responsiveness. Most of these criteria are embedded in the objectives of the planning process. In regard to the performance of municipalities, the LBFC monitors outcomes against 31 indicators under five categories namely local governance, fiscal and financial resource mobilisation, planning and program management, organisation and human resource development and urban basic services management. The performance

measurement technique is regarded as one of the local governance innovations because it encompasses many innovative indicators to encourage municipalities to perform better (Adhikari & Mellemvik 2011; Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission 2014b).

Table 4.3 summarises the performance area, number of indicators and the weight of each of the criteria. While all the indicators measure different aspects of municipal performance, the planning and program management indicator is relevant here. These indicators are assessed in question format. Two specific criteria are relevant to the assessment of the planning process: whether the municipality is organising the planning process on a timely and regular basis, and (b) whether the municipality has conducted feasibility study of projects to be formulated through the planning process. A range of legislative and other statutory documents are taken as references to assess the planning process in municipalities (Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission 2017).

Table 4.3 Indicators of the municipal performance measurement

SN	Performance Area	No of Indicators	Full Marks
1	Local Self Governance	8	20
2	Financial Management	11	28
3	Planning and Program Management	8	20
4	Organisation and Human Resource Development	6	14
5	Urban Basic Service Management	7	18
	Total	40	100

Source: Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission (2013, p. 5)

Although the aim and rationale of performance measurement in the context of local governance relates to grant distribution (Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission 2013), as can be seen in Table 4.3, a total of 20 marks is allotted to measure the planning and program management of municipalities. The underlying criteria within this area are related to the planning process. In other words, the municipal planning process is assessed as part of the financial grant distribution strategy of the central government, that, among others, seeks to examine how well the participatory planning process was operationalised (Upadhyay 2015). The measuring exercise does not enforce local bodies to do or not do any specific activity, but simply takes account of what and how certain things were carried out. If the activities are not in line with what the prevailing legislation or other guidelines suggest, the local bodies are given lower marks.

4.4.4 Reforming national planning

Nepal has been formulating its development plans for over six decades. In the beginning, the planning exercise was mandatory for membership of the Colombo Plan, a framework that was initiated in the 1950s as a way of arranging foreign aid for developing countries in South and Southeast Asia (Mihaly 2002). Gradually, the formulation of a development plan has become a regular part of the business of the government in Nepal. To the end of 2017, a total of 14 periodic plans have already been formulated in the country. The National Planning Commission (NPC) is the apex body for formulating national development plans.

Planning at the local level in Nepal is mostly seen as complementary to national planning (National Planning Commission 2013). Often regarded as a 14-step bottom-up process⁸, the national planning process consists of the formulation of local plans through systematic and hierarchical activities carried out by different echelons of the government. In principle, national development plans are supposed to incorporate the policies and programs developed through the local planning process by local governments although analysts often point out there are gaps in terms of what is raised by local governments and what is decided in the national development plans (Wildavsky 1972, 1979).

Recognising this gap, the government has been continuously reforming the way national development plans are formulated. The national periodic plan formulation process was an entirely top-down process until the end of the Panchayat period in the late 1980s (National Planning Commission 1992). With the introduction of democracy in 1990, the government introduced certain measures to establish exclusive links between the planning activities that are carried out at the local level and central government's annual and periodic budgeting and planning activities (National Planning Commission 1997, 2002). Consequently, national development planning is carried out by adopting both bottom-up and top-down approaches (Khanal *et al.* 2005). Almost half of the initial activities of national planning formulation are performed top-down, these are then complemented by the bottom-up activities. Most of the bottom-up activities are carried out at the village, municipal and district level as part of the planning process (Government of Nepal 2000).

4.4.5 Revitalising community mobilisation

For over a decade, community mobilisation has been one of the key local governance strategies to bring changes in the way people engage in local decision-making. The social mobilisation procedure of the government of Nepal explicitly aims to mobilise communities

towards improving income sources, increasing citizen's access to local public services, enhancing the capacity to exercise their rights and duties, helping to minimize the sociological and economic gap between the members and contributing to fostering local democracy (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2014 p. 4). The government has formed social mobilisation committees both at the central and local level, mainly to facilitate local bodies in mobilising communities toward achieving the aforementioned objectives.

Two important institutional arrangements that have emerged in the context of community mobilisation in Nepal are particularly relevant in the functioning of participatory planning at the local level. First, Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs), a type of government-sponsored civil society organisation created in each wards of municipalities, have been formed to mobilise ordinary citizens at the ward level to attain the above mentioned objective of community mobilisation. The membership is open to those community members who have not affiliated to any other societal or political organisations and at least 33% of the members must be women. WCFs are given special responsibilities to help formulate development proposals, facilitate the planning process and monitor local governance activities (ibid. 25).

Secondly, Civic Awareness Centres (CACs) have been formed at the ward level consisting of members from marginalised groups, particularly Dalit and ethnic communities. The main function of a CAC is to help communities understand their rights, know the procedures to get public services, and help address the root causes of poverty. This institution is particularly important in the working of participatory planning because the prevailing resource mobilisation procedure of the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (2013) obliges local bodies to allocate a total of 35% of the budget for the advancement of women and socially backward communities.

Beyond these modern institutions of community mobilisation, there are some other forms of community mobilising organizations at the local level. These entities are relatively conventional but encompass the notion of community mobilisation. Tole Lane Organizations (TLOs), for instance, are such organizations that were formed as part of a United Nations Development Program (UNDP)'s support to strengthen civil society organizations for local governance in the mid-1990s (Huntington *et al.* 1999). TLOs are broader than WCFs and CACs as their membership covers every household in a certain

suburb. In some municipalities, the institutional design and functioning of TLOs is far more systematic than WCFs and CACs (for example, Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City 2014).

4.4.6 Adopting inclusion as a mandatory public policy

Public sector organizations in Nepal have been introducing various strategies to include people from marginalised communities in public decision-making for over two decades. The earliest reforms to increase inclusive participation (Government of Nepal 1990b) were arguably ornamental as the instruments of inclusion were not sufficiently designed for needy people (Lawoti 2008). Following the Comprehensive Peace Accords with Maoist insurgents in 2005, the government decided to introduce robust reform measures to ensure the inclusion of women, Dalit and indigenous communities in governance (Government of Nepal 2006, 2007).

State institutions thereafter started to introduce instruments to increase the inclusive participation of people in public sector organizations (Paudel 2018; Yadav 2018). In the civil service, for example, a total of 45% of total vacancies started to be classified as 'reserved' seats (Government of Nepal 1990a) with the beneficiaries to be women (33%), ethnic minorities (27%), Madhesi (22%), Dalit (9%), people living with disabilities (5%) and people from backward parts of the country (4%). Since its inception, this allocation has offered a guiding principle for all public sector organizations including local governments to adopt inclusiveness in their organisational structures and working procedures (Government of Nepal 2000).

The planning process has been revitalised to incorporate the principle of inclusion since its inception in 2007. Two different approaches to inclusion can be identified in this regard. First is the presence of women, children and minorities in the process. The organisers must ensure the participation of such groups and communities in different planning forums. Second is the compulsory allocation of 35% of the total budget to women, children and minorities. This is expected to ensure that the voices of such groups are heard appropriately (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013). Some studies have already shown that the inclusion strategies have been instrumental in raising the livelihoods of socially backward communities while simultaneously increasing the quality of citizen participation within the context of participatory planning (The Carter Center 2014, for instance).

4.5 Participatory planning in the context of non-electoral politics in Nepal

The practice of participatory planning in Nepal is rooted in its centuries old classical forms of community-based organisations. Pandeya (2015) summarises these as Gosthis (popular village assemblies), Panchayat (assemblies of five non-politically elected elders), Manyajan Kachahari (assembly of elders and respected people in communities), Guthi (a patriarchal social organisation) and Samaj (community groups) (see also Shaha 2003). Two dimensions of these ancient types of local entities are important. The first is the extent to which these initiatives facilitated the provision of democratic opportunities for citizens to influence local public policies. As Nepal endeavoured to introduce a democratic system of government only in the early 1950s, earlier efforts to govern local communities through these conventional forms of local entities were obviously lacking a democratic flavour, although there are only a few small-scale publications to confirm this claim (Gellner 1986; Gellner & Karki 2008).

The second dimension concerns who used to participate in these organisations and what roles they were entitled to play in managing local governance. The available literature on Nepal's pre-historical aspects of local governance suggest that only a handful of (mostly five) elites who had connections with the dynasties at the centre used to be nominated as the members of such organisations. Scholars like Gellner (1986), Dhungel *et al.* (2011), Shaha (2003), KC (1976) and Hasrat (1970) have worked hard to take account of some of these organisations in ancient times, yet there are ambiguities about both institutional design and their efficacy in offering avenues for ordinary citizens to participate in the local decision-making. Additional evidence also exists in the *Ancient Nepal*, a Nepali journal published by the Department of Archaeology and catalogued at the Cambridge University's Digital Himalaya collection, although it is unclear whether this represents evidence with a general application.

Following the re-introduction of parliamentary democracy in 1990, reforms in local governance transformed many of the conventional forms of local government processes to be put to work in a representative setting of local democracy (Ministry of Local Development 2003). Although the key decision-making institutions such as village, municipal and district councils were designed to be governed by elected politicians (Government of Nepal 1999b), a range of other policy-specific non-electoral local government entities such as the Health Management Committees were created at the local level (Table 4.4). While the electoral local government entities created to exercise political

power are coded in the Local Self Governance Act (1999) and further devised in the Devolution Action Plan (2002), the non-electoral entities were created as part of the de-concentration strategies of the central government many of which were based on individual legislative frameworks (see Government of Nepal 2013, for example).

Table 4.4 List of electoral and non-electoral local governments in Nepal

Organisation type	Participants	Legislative base	Functions	Examples
Electoral local government	Elected politicians	Local Self Governance Act, 1999	Implement and exercise the roles and powers enlisted in the LSGA (1999) Devolution Action Plan (2002)	Village, municipal and district councils
Non-electoral local government	Nominated individuals	Individual legislation such as Health Management Committee Formation Orders	Implement sector-specific policies based on the relevant Orders as well as in collaboration with the elected local government	District Health Management Committee, District Education Management Committee, Municipal-level Coordination Committees on the issues of women, ethnic communities etc.

Source: Adapted from Stoker (1988) and content is derived from the LSGA (1999) and other relevant legislation

Citizen participation in Nepal's local governance was, thus, devised to take shape through these two diverse roots: electoral and non-electoral. Each had its own way, and objectives for offering opportunities to citizens, and benefitted from their participation. However, this was not exclusively the case. There were subsets of non-electoral institutions and processes (i.e. the participatory planning process) within the electoral setup of local governments. In terms of non-electoral processes within electoral settings, the focus – as evidenced in this thesis, has been to broaden decision-making platforms to ordinary citizens (The Carter Center 2014).

Nevertheless, starting from 2002 when the tenure of the last elected local governments ended, the entire local governance in Nepal turned into a situation which can be categorised as non-elected local government (Government of Nepal 2003). Following the typology of non-elected governments (Stoker 1988), all the local bodies were starting to work as central government's arm's-length agencies, whose focus was to maintain the existence of local governments envisioned in the LSGA (1999). Although the absence of electoral politics in municipalities was a severe democratic deficit from the viewpoint of representation, many local governance reforms of the central government either created new institutions or strengthened conventional processes to give opportunities to citizens for participating in the local decision-making (Local Governance and Community Development Program 2008a, 2013; Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2014, 2015). One of the best examples of such reforms was the enhancement of civil society organisations such as the Tole Lane Organisation in Butwal municipality which promoted the participation of ordinary citizens in decision-making through non-electoral channels in municipalities (Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City 2014; Huntington *et al.* 1999; Madsen & Triantafillou 2016).

4.6 Conclusions

The participatory planning process has been evolving as a policymaking process at the local level. The basic aim of the process is to offer opportunities to citizens for participating in exploring, developing and setting out their policy and programmatic preferences to be incorporated in the annual handbook of policies and programs, which all the municipalities in Nepal must formulate on an annual basis. Since the early 1990s, the planning process has been institutionalised as an important participatory process for making local decisions.

In the past two decades alone, several local governance reforms have made the planning process a participatory policymaking process at the local level. It provides ordinary people with several avenues to participate and thereby influence the decision-makers. It helps local government officials to communicate the municipality's actions and plans and get input from citizens; and for other external agencies such as the central government, it is a mechanism to institutionalise bottom-up policymaking (National Planning Commission 1992). Although the Local Self Governance Act (1999) meant the planning process to be steered by elected leadership at the local level, the absence of local electoral politics caused municipalities to be governed by appointed bureaucrats between the years 2002 and 2016.

Part 2:
Levels of Participation in the Planning Process

Chapter 5

The Tole Bhèla: citizen participation in neighbourhoods

A Tole Bhèla is a neighbourhood-level participatory forum in the planning process. The term Tole Bhèla is derived from Nepali and literally means a purposive gathering of diverse group of people residing in a specific neighbourhood. Although the Tole Bhèla is not recognised as a formal forum in the planning process in the legislation, municipalities either directly organise or sponsor civil society organisations to host Tole Bhèlas with the aim of increasing the participation of people from different communities. In the Butwal municipality, a total of 291 Tole Bhèlas were organised across 15 different wards in 2014, enabling the direct participation of approximately 7384 people in the planning process (field notes 2014).

This chapter examines the Tole Bhèlas based on the observation of five different Tole Bhèlas in the case study ward in the Butwal municipality. It provides empirical material about organisational structure, functions, participants and their involvement in the making of decisions in the Tole Bhèlas. These materials are analysed in terms of their contribution to facilitating citizens' participation in the making of local public policies and in small-scale development programs. Subsequently, there is an explanation of the extent to which the Tole Bhèlas have implications for policymaking, which is recognised as one of the core functions of the planning process.

5.1 The organisational structure of the Tole Bhèla

The Tole Bhèla is lowest level planning forum that is organised in the form of a public meeting in neighbourhoods. It does not have any specific structure nor any pre-determined set of procedures; but has a task to “discuss with local people about their collective problems” that municipalities have the ultimate responsibility of addressing (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013). Even though Tole Bhèlas have been gradually institutionalised as the most effective neighbourhood forums (see Asian Development Bank 2010, for instance), the absence of a formal structure and established rules make Tole Bhèlas informal forums of planning.

As we shall see in upcoming chapters, planning is organised as a bottom-up process in local policymaking where the planning forums are hierarchically structured. Tole Bhèlas are at the bottom in the overall organisational structure of the planning process (Figure 8.1). In the

case study ward in the Butwal municipality, a total of 25 Tole Bhèlas were organised between November 2014 and December 2015. The placement of Tole Bhèlas at the bottom in the hierarchy also suggests that they are entry-level planning forums, facilitating the bottom-up flow of agendas to be decided for local public policies and development projects.

In the Butwal municipality, two aspects of Tole Bhèlas are important in describing the organisational structure. The first is defined in terms of what was devised in the Local Self Governance Act (1999) and its subsequent rules. Article 111 of the Local Self-governance Act (1999) required that municipalities organise consultative workshops at various locations but neither the law nor any of its substantiated rules and regulations specify the structure of Tole Bhèlas. As was observed in a discussion meeting organised in the Butwal municipality to make decisions about adopting policy guidelines and setting up ward level budgetary ceilings (stage one in the planning process), both the bureaucrats working in the municipality and others such as the representatives of political parties, chambers of commerce, NGOs and civil society organisations were seen to be unanimously agreed on following the statutory provisions of the planning process (field notes 2014). Irrespective of ambiguities about the organisational structure of Tole Bhèlas in the law, or any other rules, Tole Bhèlas were regularly organised to consult citizens about their demands that could be addressed through municipal interventions.

The second important aspect is about how Tole Bhèlas were organised in the Butwal municipality, particularly in the absence of clear statutory provisions. It is interesting to note that most of the Tole Bhèlas were not directly organised by the municipality but by Tole Lane Organisations (TLOs), a form of civil society organisations, which were utilised to host Tole Bhèlas in specified neighbourhoods. However, not all municipalities had a similar experience of utilising Tole Bhèlas to host neighbourhood-level deliberations in their planning processes⁹.

Delegating the responsibility to host Tole Bhèlas to TLOs raises two important questions. The first relates to why municipal officials decided not to organise Tole Bhèlas by themselves but to utilise TLOs in hosting such important public deliberations in neighbourhoods. A general assumption is that the municipality did not have adequate human and financial resources to host Tole Bhèlas in all the neighbourhoods. A municipal official said:

Hosting 291 Tole Bhèlas by ourselves is almost impossible for a variety of reasons. There are financial constraints, inadequate staff, and capacity to invite residents in each and every neighbourhoods. You can assume how time consuming it can be. ... If we had not had such an exemplifying presence of TLOs in our municipality, we would certainly need to host Tole Bhèlas in some neighbourhoods (Interviewee, local staff #002, 2016).

The second question, which is partially reflected in the preceding quote, is about why TLOs were chosen in the Butwal municipality to host Tole Bhèlas. Although there is less scholarly evidence about the institutionalisation of TLOs in municipal governance in the Butwal municipality, the scanty literature suggests that TLOs in Butwal have been increasingly popular for their performance in being active civil society partners in the municipality (Huntington *et al.* 1999; Rural Urban Partnership Program 2001; US Agency for International Development 2007). The partnership between TLOs and the municipality has been reported in many of the Butwal municipality's annual handbooks of policies and programs (Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City 2015, 2016a). Several dimensions of partnership are recognised in these handbooks which can be grouped into three key categories: formulating local policy and programs, implementing small-scale development programs, and mobilising communities in the municipal governance process.

In terms of partnership in the formulation of local public policies and small-scale development programs, TLOs are officially mandated to collaborate with the municipality in organising consultations in the relevant neighbourhood, and into sharing policy and resource related information with communities thereby carrying citizens' inputs in the decision-making. With the second dimension of partnership, the Butwal municipality was observed as implementing many of the small-scale development programs in partnership with TLOs. In other words, TLOs were given responsibilities to lead the implementation process of certain small-scale projects while the municipality monitored the process. With the mobilisation role, TLOs involve representatives from every household in a given neighbourhood as their members. An executive committee is formed every two years from these members, whose main responsibility is to mobilise community members in the formulation and implementation of local public policies and small-scale development programs. All of these dimensions of partnership are articulated in the TLO regulation guideline promulgated by the Butwal municipality (Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City 2014).

Hosting of Tole Bhèlas by TLOs was observed as having a number of both strengths and weaknesses for the organisational structure of Tole Bhèlas in the Butwal municipality (field

notes 2014, 2015). On the one hand, the formal structure of the organising TLO helped shape the temporal structure of Tole Bhèlas and other aspects such as inviting participants, organising discussions, and making decisions. It was observed in some Tole Bhèlas in the case study ward that relatively well institutionalised TLOs had better management skills which were seen to be systematic in, for example, informing residents about the Bhèla, facilitating deliberations in the Bhèla, and making mostly consensual decisions as an output of the Bhèla (field notes 2014). On the other hand, Tole Bhèlas were seemingly organised as disconnected forums of the planning as TLOs did not have much power in connecting citizens with actual decision-makers in the municipality. In some of the Tole Bhèlas, it was noted that even though the concerned TLO was given responsibility for organising consultations, they constantly appeared simply organisers when participants raised questions about, for example, the efficiency and effectiveness of existing policies and programs.

Obviously, the interview data and observation notes provide some important references as to whether TLOs should be given the roles to organise Tole Bhèlas. Both municipal officials and citizens appreciate the role of TLOs in, *inter alia*, organising Tole Bhèlas in neighbourhoods. In the case study ward in Butwal, municipal officials regard the Tole Bhèla as an alternative forum to traditional ways of consulting citizens (Interviewee, local staff #002, 2016). Similarly, ordinary people, as a Tole Bhèla participant in the case study ward reported, regard the Tole Bhèla as the most authentic public-sector platform in their neighbourhood (Interviewee, Tole Bhèla participant #003, 2015). Both of these views suggest that the Tole Bhèla – despite informal setting, has been evolving as an alternative forum to enable the participation of ordinary people at the neighbourhood level.

To sum up, Tole Bhèlas are seen as informal forums because they do not have their own predefined structure. They are informal also because municipal officials are not legally obliged to organise Tole Bhèlas when it comes to making decisions through the planning process. Nonetheless, it was observed in the Butwal municipality that municipal officials were broadening the boundaries of consultations across a range of communities and neighbourhoods. The TLOs were particularly seen as civil society partners in hosting Tole Bhèlas in neighbourhoods which were observed as not only organising consultation but also acting as intermediaries to regulate a flow of two-way communication between municipal officials and neighbourhoods (field notes 2014).

5.2 Functions of the Tole Bhèla in planning

As explained earlier, offering participation opportunities to ordinary citizens in the making of local public policies and small-scale development programs is the core function of Tole Bhèlas. Because of their informal organisational structure, however, the roles of Tole Bhèlas were observed to be less influential in the planning process. While Tole Bhèlas are regarded as important for the three key functions of collecting demands, sharing information, and mobilising communities, the other implicit functions are relatively less recognised. These include building relationships between communities and the municipality, educating ordinary people about local policy making and implementation of public policies, and facilitating communities to organise and form civil society organisations and users' groups to collaborate with the municipality to implement small-scale projects. This section examines the three key functions of the Tole Bhèla.

Information sharing

Both citizen participants and organisers have some form of expectation of each other when they participate in the Bhèla. Citizen participants are particularly interested in knowing about the status of ongoing projects or programs that potentially benefit their communities, as well as the possibility of having more programs in the future. While the organising TLO may not have adequate, and or convincing information on the subjects that citizens want to know about, they were observed to be providing as much information on the local policies and programs as they had (Interviewee, Tole Bhèla participant #003, 2014). The Tole Bhèlas, therefore, may not satisfy the people's right to know the actual status of municipal policies and programs in detail (field notes, 2014)

In the Bhèla, participants are asked to share their experiences, opinions or impressions of any of their collective problems. This gives the organisers an opportunity to learn of the actual problems from those who are the potential beneficiaries. Such a role helps the organisers to claim that nobody knows the problems better than those facing them. The role of information sharing is, therefore, particularly relevant to organisers.

These two dimensions of information sharing – a top-down flow that brings information on municipal policy and program information to participants, and a bottom-up flow that gathers information on the problems the communities are facing, are crucial information sharing functions of the Tole Bhèlas. While both of these roles are important to make planning a

successful participatory process, the top-down flow of information sharing, as observed during the field study, is relatively weaker than the bottom-up flow. This is partially due to the fact that the Tole Bhèla is truly an informal forum, and the organisers are not empowered enough to bring comprehensive information on local public policies of the past, ongoing and forthcoming fiscal years to share in the Tole Bhèla.

Community mobilisation

In the specific context of planning processes in Nepal, community mobilisation is a governance process that encourages ordinary citizens not only to participate in the making of local decisions but also to contribute to the implementation of such decisions (Thapa 2013). There are a range of community mobilisation mechanisms such as the Ward Citizens Forums (WCFs) and Citizens Awareness Centres (CACs) in the Butwal municipality. Although TLOs also are explained as civil society organisations with the objective of mobilising communities (As-Saber & Hossain 2009), there are some fundamental differences between these two sets of organisations. WCFs and CACs were initiated by the national government to be established in all municipalities (Local Governance and Community Development Program 2008a, 2012, 2013) while TLOs were specifically created in only a few municipalities including Butwal as part of the Rural Urban Partnership Program (RUPP) (Huntington *et al.* 1999). The available assessments of TLOs show that they have been generally effective although the degree of their effectiveness varies notably across the municipalities where the RUPP was implemented (i.e. Jones *et al.* 2013).

In the case study ward in the Butwal municipality, Tole Bhèlas were observed to be playing a number of roles that contributed to mobilising people in the planning process. Both municipal officials and TLO representatives believe that Tole Bhèlas play important facilitative roles in mobilising communities in the planning process. Municipal officials explained that Tole Bhèla organisers are primarily delegated to mobilise citizens, particularly for identifying collective problems that might have been faced by residents in the relevant neighbourhood (Interviewee, local staff #001, 2015). TLO representatives agree with this belief. A TLO representative said:

If you look at the TLO Regulation Guideline of the Butwal municipality. Organising the Tole Bhèla is one of our mandated roles hence we mobilise our members to participate in the Tole Bhèla and help the Bhèla in exploring and developing their problems.... Additionally, the municipality has deployed a community mobiliser to inform our members about the planning process, encourage residents to participate

in public affairs, and thereby be involved in various aspects of municipal governance (Interviewee, Tole Bhèla participant #003, 2014).

Specific to the community mobilisation function of the Tole Bhèlas, two different roles can be distinguished: encouraging residents to participate in the local decision-making; and enhancing the sense of shared responsibility when it comes to the implementation of decisions (field notes 2015). With the first role, it was observed in many Tole Bhèlas that the organising TLOs were not only informing local residents about the meeting of the Tole Bhèla, but members were also found to be providing necessary information about annual budgeting and planning processes. Some other civil society organisations such as the WCF and CACs were also assisting TLOs in the Butwal municipality. They informed residents, provided training and other capacity development related workshops and helped residents to identify their problems in advance.

In terms of advancing the sense of shared responsibility for implementing decisions, the roles of the Tole Bhèlas were observed as crucial because they were claimed to be the only planning forums to discuss the possibility of stakeholders participating in the implementation process (Interviewee, local staff #002, 2016). In many Tole Bhèlas observed in the case study ward in the Butwal municipality, participants committed to support or oppose the implementation process. One participant in a Tole Bhèla said:

We demand to strengthen water supply pipelines in our area for over five years. Nobody listens to us. Instead, we are imposed on [in the sense that residents are asked to co-invest in small-scale infrastructure development projects such as blacktopping roads etc.] to implement the decisions that are made at the upper [municipal] level. I propose to strongly oppose the implementation of any other projects unless our demand to strengthen the water supply pipelines is addressed (field notes 2014).

Collecting demands

Collecting policy and program demands from the different types of citizens (lay people, interest groups, experts, professionals etc.) is observed as the most basic objective of the planning process. In attaining this objective, the Tole Bhèla plays a key role in articulating lay people's voices by allowing them to have discussions among themselves before they report their demands to the organisers. Hence, the way organisers collect demands from the participants is unique in the sense that the Tole Bhèla provides opportunities to participants

to make consensual decisions about what is proposed through uninterrupted deliberations (field notes, 2014).

The task of demand collection has two further implications. First, demand-lists are not simply prepared based on the discussions but they are deliberated amongst participants. This gives the organisers a legitimate basis to claim in the other planning forums that the respective communities fully own their demand-lists. Second, such ownership of the demand-list gives the organisers a confidence that these lists, if formally decided by the municipality, can be implemented in collaboration with communities¹⁰. Whilst raising their demands in the Tole Bhèla, some communities may express their willingness to collaborate with a certain proportion of, for instance, financial investment. As expressed in a field note:

Today, a participant in the [...] TLO raised a very genuine issue about maintaining the road lights. She said that her Tole was really in dark for over a few months despite a regular supply of electricity. The problem she mentioned was that the bulbs were fused for a long time and nobody reported this problem to the concerned department at the municipality office. She suggested an important idea about managing road lights by the relevant Tole. She said, “Is there any problem for the municipality to hand over the responsibility to manage road lamps to the TLO?” (field notes, 2015)

This example indicates how Tole Bhèlas are involved in identifying problems which are selected and prioritised in the form of demands. The demands can vary in terms of scope (from neighbourhood-wide to ward-wide to municipality-wide), time (from short-term to mid-term to long-term) and policy area (health, education, water supply and so on) but broadly they can be categorised as policy and program demands. From the viewpoint of public policymaking (which is one of the analytical dimensions of this thesis), the demands prepared at Tole Bhèlas are regarded as important elements of agendas to be discussed in Ward Bhèlas.

Although there is a question of the extent to which demands raised and developed at the Tole Bhèlas are considered as policy and program items for discussion at the upper level forums of planning, a few scholars have endeavoured to characterise the demand raising roles of communities (not necessarily the Tole Bhèla though) as defining attributes of demand-driven governance (i.e. Thapa 2013). In terms of setting agendas in the planning process, it is obvious that Tole Bhèlas play important roles in identifying fundamental demands that are further developed in other upper level forums.

To sum up, the peripheral functions of Tole Bhèlas can be placed in two groups: the first relates to the facilitation of citizen participation in a planning forum; and the second contributes to achieving the functions of planning (Table 5.1). In terms of citizen participation, Tole Bhèlas provide gateways for ordinary people to participate in planning. By participating in such an entry level forum, citizens learn how to participate, and thereby develop skills to explore and extend their preferences. From the mobilisation point of view, citizen participants in Tole Bhèlas are mobilised to help organisers identify the neediest problems of the relevant communities. Once the right problems are identified in the presence of the beneficiaries, as observed in the Butwal municipality, it becomes easier for organisers to implement decisions – often in collaboration with citizens – that solve such problems (Interviewee, local staff #001, 2015).

Table 5.1 The roles, activities and significance of the Tole Bhèla

Functions	Activities
Information sharing	(a) Shares municipal activities, inform communities about the policy and budget that is beneficial to them, (b) generate ideas about the problems of neighbourhoods and their perceptions of the planning process
Community mobilisation	(a) Offers avenues for citizens to participate, raise their voices and escalate their demands, (b) provides background environment for organisers to help enhance the ownership of the decisions
Demand collection	(a) Problem identification, deliberation and preparation of prioritised list of demands in the form of policy and program proposals

Source: Field notes and interviews.

In terms of the contribution to achieving the functions of planning, demands collected through Tole Bhèlas are regarded as important discussion points in Ward Bhèlas. Although there are ambiguities about the linkage between the demands collected in Tole Bhèlas and actual decisions made at the municipal level, the observation of many Tole Bhèlas in the Butwal municipality showed that citizens find Tole Bhèlas as most authentic platforms to express their problems.

5.3 Who participates and why

There are not any membership criteria for people to participate in the Tole Bhèla because everyone can participate. Moreover, there is no formal rule or guideline that organisers need

to follow, but they (TLOs or similar other civil society organisations) are delegated to prepare a list of neighbourhood level problems or demands based on public participation. It was observed in many of the Tole Bhèlas in a case study ward that the executive members of TLOs were informed of the date, time and venue of the Tole Bhèla in advance so as to enable the maximum participation of residents. Several entities such as the Tole Lane Organisation Coordination Committee at the ward level (TLOCC-W), NGOs, community mobilisers and other civil society organisations were also actively communicating information about the planning process.

The type and number of participants vary across Tole Bhèlas as different contextual factors such as the population of the suburb, time and venue of the Bhèla, as well as the weather determine the level of participation. All executive members of the TLO (between 9 and 15) generally attend the Bhèla. Additionally, some representatives of local political parties, representatives of the TLOCC-W, school teachers and students, NGOs, youth and children's clubs participated in almost all the Tole Bhèlas that were observed. In some Tole Bhèlas, a staff member of the ward committee secretariat was also observed to be attending.

Due to difficulty with acquiring the attendance registers of all the Tole Bhèlas in the case study ward, the exact number of participants in the Tole Bhèlas could not be extracted. However, Annex 5.1 shows the number of TLOs in all wards which gives a general idea about the number of people who could have participated in Tole Bhèlas across the Butwal municipality in 2014 and 2015.

Generally, all the executive members of the organising civil society organisations (in Butwal's case, the TLOs) attend the Bhèla¹¹. They perform various tasks: registering attendees, minuting speeches, facilitating discussions and sometimes resolving disputes. In certain circumstances where participants are relatively less aware of the issues, the members of the executive committee propose agendas for discussions. In other words, the executive members of the organising TLO dominate most of the proceedings of the Tole Bhèla.

Other participants cover different identities and represent diverse interests. Housewives, business persons, teachers, students, retired pupils, local politicians, interest leaders such as the representatives of ethnic minorities are a few examples of people who participate in the Bhèla¹². A crucial aspect of participation, regardless of whoever participates, is that all citizens take part in the Bhèla voluntarily. They are not officially invited but are told of the venue, date and time of the Bhèla in advance. Participants do not get any financial support.

For analytical purposes four different groups of participants are distinguished: lay participants, special interest representatives, professionals and local politicians. These groups are categorised based on the participants' belonging to any organisation, the roles they play as well as their motivation to participate in the Bhèla. Those participants who belong to a group may, at the same time, belong to another group which means categories may overlap. For example, a woman participant can be categorised into a 'lay participant' group while the role she plays for and in the Bhèla may also identify her as a special interest representative.

Lay participants

These are the people who participate mainly to learn the process, know other participants, and spend time in public activities. This group of people rarely speak in the Bhèla and mostly remain spectators (field notes, 2014). Housewives, retired pupils and business persons can be included in this category. Sometimes they may raise certain concerns over certain issues with which they are familiar, but most of the time their role is either to express agreement or disagreement on issues.

The motivation for taking part (or not) in Tole Bhèlas varied from one person to another, but the most common motivational factor, as revealed in interviews, was their willingness to learn the decision-making process of the municipality. Irrespective of the feeling that they did not have the necessary aptitudes to influence decisions (Tole Bhèla participant, #003, 2014), participants in this group were interested in developing skills to understand the decision-making. A retired civil servant who was in his 60s said –

Despite my long experience in the field of service delivery (for the central government), I was astonished to have no knowledge about the local decision-making processes. To me, participating in the Tole Bhèla provides me with the opportunity to learn what and how the municipal officials work, and thereby develop skills to influence them. (Interviewee, Tole Bhèla participant #014, 2015)

Special interest representatives

The executive members of the TLO/WCF/CAC, representatives of a certain policy issue or members of certain advocacy campaigns fall into this group. They had some kind of experience, knowledge or say on the issues that they were particularly concerned with. Participants in this group generally did not speak on any of the issues in debate but they were actively engaging when their own concerns were raised in the Bhèla.

This group of people were also voluntary participants. Regardless of whatever issue they were interested in, their main motivation to participate in the Tole Bhèla was to inform the organisers about their interest. This group of people was observed to be seeking to establish themselves in the community by introducing the issues or showing some kind of knowledge of the issues. Public forums like the Tole Bhèla provided them with the opportunity to advertise their ability to understand their relevant issues.

Professionals

Participants in this group included school teachers, community mobilisers, health workers, and members of specialised agencies such as the community forestry users' groups. In the majority of the Tole Bhèlas that were observed in the Butwal sub-metropolitan city, however, only a few such professionals turned up. Only those professionals whose work area was around the locale where the Tole Bhèla was being organised seemed to be participating. Unlike other participants, this group of participants' motivations to participate was noted as being to help ordinary people refine their demands by providing relevant and technical input on the issues.

When asked about why professionals prefer not to participate in Tole Bhèlas, a municipal official explained:

We inform the relevant professionals about the planning meetings at the neighbourhood level but cannot force them to participate. Many professionals therefore regard the Tole Bhèla as an informal meeting where their presence is desired but cannot be obligatory. Instead, they prefer to participate in the other forums of planning because they think they can contribute with their expertise in other forums more effectively (Interviewee, local staff #003, 2016).

Local politicians

Since the early years of the absence of elected leadership in municipalities, local representatives of political parties were continuously looking for opportunities to get involved at various levels of the municipal decision-making mechanisms. The organisers of many Tole Bhèlas were noticed to be informing local representatives of political parties mostly on a face-to-face basis. As explained by a political representative who was participating in one of the Tole Bhèlas:

We are not only the residents of this Tole (suburb) but are attentive citizens too. We have some form of political affiliation which demands us to keep eyes on the public

affairs that take place at our locale. In my opinion, it is my civic duty to participate regardless of whether I receive any formal invitation (Interviewee, Tole Bhèla participant #015, 2016).

It was observed in many Tole Bhèlas that local politicians are attentive to *who speaks what* in the Tole Bhèla. During the meeting, they do not interfere with any of the participants raising their concerns but at the end, they try to influence the prioritisation activity (field notes, 2014). When asked about why they were almost silent during deliberation, one participant said:

Our aim is not to influence the ordinary participants while they are discussing the issues, but to see how their discussions are received. Therefore, we mainly involve ourselves in the decision-making activity, that generally takes place at the end of the meeting. You can argue that our intention to participate in Tole Bhèlas is to see who raises what issue, and then check if the organisers incorporate the agreed issues in the list of prioritised proposals (Interviewee, Tole Bhèla participant #001, 2014).

5.4 Decision-making in the Tole Bhèla

As explained earlier, the main objective of organising Tole Bhèlas is twofold: to enable the participation of ordinary people in the planning process; and, to attain a better understanding of the problems that these ordinary people have been collectively facing. It was shown in the previous section that the first objective of Tole Bhèlas is to be achieved by offering unrestricted participation and speaking opportunities to different types of citizens in neighbourhoods. The term unrestricted participation opportunity shows that Tole Bhèlas do not select any individual as a participant but that every resident in the relevant neighbourhood is informed as an equal citizen to participate in the Bhèla. This is how Tole Bhèlas facilitate the participation of different types of citizens in a public decision-making forum at the neighbourhood level.

With the second objective, Tole Bhèlas aim to generate a better understanding of what residents believe are the most pressing collective problems in their neighbourhoods. As observed in some of the Tole Bhèlas in the case study ward in the Butwal municipality, Tole Bhèlas provide listening opportunities to both municipal officials (though implicitly) and the organisers of Tole Bhèlas about what residents say about their collective problems. A caveat about this statement, however, is that Tole Bhèla participants do not always have the expertise for exploring and developing problem statements. For example, a participant in a Tole Bhèla said:

It is good to see all of you discussing what our municipality is doing, or wants to do in the future. But, as all of you know, there are other national political issues that need to be resolved first. We have to discuss about how many provinces we need in our country under the federal structure of governance and what their names should be. This will help the members of the Constituent Assembly to recognise people's demands (field notes 2014).

The underlying meaning of this statement is that not all participants in Tole Bhèlas are equally capable of identifying problems accurately. In such circumstances, organisers of Tole Bhèlas are expected to assess what subjects are relevant in the context of municipal planning. It was observed in some Tole Bhèlas that organisers were always careful to see if participants were raising relevant issues. This shows that both organisers and citizen participants *collectively develop a* better understanding of the problems that residents in the concerned neighbourhood have been facing. In other words, Tole Bhèlas feature some deliberative ideals in situations when negotiation takes place among participants, and, also between organisers to make decisions, when it comes to attaining an objective to develop better understanding about public problems in neighbourhoods.

The availability of some deliberative ideals has an important implication for the decision-making function of Tole Bhèlas. A typical deliberative ideal in decision-making should mean, as Fung (2006b) asserts, that participants are given opportunities to engage with one another directly as equals who reason together about public problems. In the real setting of Tole Bhèlas, however, only a few participants were negotiating with each other while putting forward their views about certain problems, many of the participants were mostly silent. However, while they were actively listening to negotiation among some active participants who were seemingly experienced in public speaking with some knowledge about the decision-making role of the Tole Bhèla, organisers were also often seen to be encouraging all the participants to contribute in exploring and developing their problems.

It is important to note that developing a better understanding of public problems was carried out mostly by a few elite participants¹³. The organisers of Tole Bhèlas were observed to be getting only a few new, or newly refined problems to list as decisions of Tole Bhèlas. Because the organisers of Tole Bhèlas were required to prepare a list of at least five of the most pressing collective problems in the relevant neighbourhood, there remains a question of the degree to which such a list incorporates sufficient public inputs (field notes 2014, 2015). When asking about what organisers think about public deliberation as a way of decision-making in Tole Bhèlas, the coordinator of a TLO said:

It is not surprising [to me] to see that many of the Tole Bhèla participants are not actively involve in deliberation. Despite our effort to describe various dimensions of the planning process, only a few understand the terms such as planning, budgeting, policy, projects and so on. In my view, those who understand these terms, they speak. It is difficult to be judgemental here as to why a majority of the participants do not speak, there could be some individual reasons such as having less experience of public speaking. In decision-making, however, it does not matter to us because our role is to inform residents about the planning process and thereby ask participants about their problems. If they do not speak, as a non-political civil society organisation in this neighbourhood, we [the executive committee members] put forward our proposals to be enlisted in the final decision of the Tole Bhèla (Interviewee, Tole Bhèla participant #014, 2014).

This statement sets out a very important argument about who is involved in the actual decision-making process in Tole Bhèlas. Perhaps it is one of the problems of the Tole Bhèla in terms of how and the extent to which all participants are involved in the decision-making process. It was observed in many Tole Bhèlas that the organisers engage only some elite participants in selecting and prioritising public problems (field notes 2014, 2015). However, this is not to say that only elites are involved in setting up, selecting and prioritising agendas, but to highlight that mostly executive members of organising TLOs perform the ultimate decision-making activities.

Moreover, the Tole Bhèla organisers are obliged to follow certain practices that are in line with the principles of inclusion (a detailed analysis of the adoption of inclusive policies in the planning process is presented in Chapter 8)¹⁴. What is important here is to emphasise that even at the level of the Tole Bhèla, organisers of Tole Bhèlas are required to specify proposals that specifically benefit targeted groups (women, children and minority communities). Although Tole Bhèlas were observed as having fewer concerns about the exact amount to be allocated to targeted groups, their major concern was observed to be to incorporate the demands of the targeted communities into the prioritised list. A sample of the list of prioritised proposals can be seen in Annex 5.3.

5.5 Implications for the policymaking process

The participatory planning process is more about how local public policies are formulated in municipalities, than how they are implemented. Although the annual handbook of policy and programs in the Butwal municipality shows different ways of policy implementation, the primary focus of the planning process is to formulate local public policies and small-scale development projects. In this respect, Tole Bhèlas seem to have some implications for

the policymaking process, particularly from the viewpoint of three interrelated stages of policymaking: identification of problems, development of alternatives and selection of alternatives. Keeping these three core stages of policymaking into account, this section examines the implications of organisational structure, core and peripheral functions, different types of Tole Bhèla participants and their selection methods, and the decision-making style of Tole Bhèla for the policymaking process.

The implication of organisational structure seems to be less significant in the policymaking process as Tole Bhèlas feature an informal institutional design. In the case study ward in the Butwal municipality, it was observed that almost all Tole Bhèlas had some predefined sets of rules to be followed. The ward committee secretariat had asked them to organise discussions at a convenient date, time and place but had not given any specific instruction to design and implement Tole Bhèlas (field notes 2014). Although all the 25 TLOs in the case study ward had organised discussions with their fellow residents, they were not required to follow any principle of institutional design and operational procedures. Perhaps due to this flexibility, Tole Bhèlas in the case study ward were inconsistently organised, which makes it difficult to understand the degree to which discussions in Tole Bhèlas were linked to any of the three stages of a policymaking process.

The core and peripheral functions of Tole Bhèlas seem to have implications for the policymaking process. As explained earlier, the core function of Tole Bhèlas was to prepare a shortlist of at least five selected problems. It was observed in almost all the Tole Bhèlas in the case study ward in the Butwal municipality that both the core and peripheral functions were related to exploring and developing common problems and prioritising them. Although such a process was not observed as happening in a linear way, participants were systematically asked to identify their problems and come to a consensus on such problems.

Participants and their selection processes did not have any explicit implications for the policymaking process. Assuming that the problem identification function of Tole Bhèlas would need people with some background knowledge and skill to distinguish public policy problems, it was not observed in the case study ward that any of the TLOs were conscious about the skills needed in Tole Bhèlas (field notes 2014, 2015). In fact, they were primarily interested in opening the Bhèla for everyone who was interested. It is not difficult to assume that not being careful to select participants with specific knowledge would affect the activities in policymaking.

Finally, the decision-making style of Tole Bhèlas showed some flavours of public deliberation; however, participants in many of the observed Tole Bhèlas were not systematically negotiating among themselves (Field notes 2014, 2015). A few elite participants in Tole Bhèlas occupied most of the discussion, this raised implications for developing alternatives in the policymaking process. It is recognised that none of the three activities of policymaking need to have any specific decision-making style, yet the availability of a deliberative style in Tole Bhèlas provides relatively significant implications for participatory policymaking.

5.6 Conclusions

This chapter brought empirical evidence to explain the working of the Tole Bhèla as an informal planning forum. It is shown that the Tole Bhèla is a neighbourhood level meeting organised mostly by civil society organisations. In the case study ward in the Butwal municipality, Tole Bhèlas were observed to be organised in neighbourhoods. Most of the citizen participants of many of the observed Tole Bhèlas were ordinary people who were seen to be participating voluntarily (field notes 2014). There were a range of individual reasons as to why citizens were participating in Tole Bhèlas, a common aim was to put forward collective problems to be solved by municipal intervention.

Three key points about Tole Bhèlas need to be reinforced here. The first is that there is not any specific organisational structure for the Tole Bhèla. The actual structure of Tole Bhèlas are provisionally determined by the Tole Bhèla hosting civil society organisations such as TLOs in Butwal. The second is about their functions. While Tole Bhèlas aim to generate public opinion on the policies and programs to be formulated in the municipality, a total of three peripheral functions were observed to be implicitly performed: sharing information both top-down and bottom-up; mobilising citizens in the policy and program formulation process; and, collecting demands that participants think are the most pressing in their neighbourhoods. The third key point is about who participates and how participants make decisions. The targeted participants of Tole Bhèlas are, indeed, ordinary people and any relevant resident can participate in the Bhèla.

Chapter 6

The Ward Bhèla: participation in semi-formal forums

The Ward Bhèla is a ward-level participatory forum of the planning process which is organised by the ward committee secretariat after the completion of Tole Bhèlas being organised in neighbourhoods. It is also organised as a public meeting. The Local Self Governance Act, 1999 recognises a Ward Bhèla as being organised by the elected ward committee chief (Government of Nepal, 1999, 2000); however, in the absence of elected ward committees from 2002 to 2016, the responsibility for organising the Ward Bhèla was delegated to ward secretaries, locally appointed bureaucrats in municipalities (Government of Nepal, 2003; Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development, 2013).

This chapter examines the Ward Bhèla based on the empirical data generated in a case study ward in the Butwal municipality. The analysis is divided into five sections. The first section introduces the organisational structure of the Ward Bhèla. Then it moves on to analyse the functions of the Ward Bhèla in planning. The third section explains why and how citizens of different types participate in the Ward Bhèla. The fourth section analyses how participants and organisers make decisions. Before concluding the chapter, there is a discussion of the implication of Ward Bhèlas for policymaking at the local level.

6.1 The organisational structure of the Ward Bhèla

The Ward Bhèla is a public meeting organised at the ward level as part of the planning process. Each ward in the municipality is required to organise a Ward Bhèla after all the Tole Bhèlas submit their shortlisted proposals. In 2015, all 15 ward committee secretariats in the Butwal municipality organised Ward Bhèlas in January 2015. It was estimated by a municipal official that some 120 individuals in average take part in one Ward Bhèla, which indicates that approximately 1800 people participated in Ward Bhèlas in Butwal's planning process in 2015 (Interviewee, local staff #003, 2016). About 60% of Ward Bhèla participants were observed to be selected by the ward committee secretariat, making Ward Bhèlas representative planning forums.

From the viewpoint of its structure, the Ward Bhèla is neither an informal nor a formal forum in the planning process. It is not an informal forum because, unlike Tole Bhèlas, the majority of the processes of the Ward Bhèla are officially managed by ward committee secretariats. Moreover, it is not entirely formal because there is no specific rule that shapes

the structure and processes of the Ward Bhèla. In practice, therefore, both organisers (municipal officials) and participants (citizens) bring agendas for discussions, set rules for deliberation and select, shortlist and prioritise proposals to be decided by the Integrated Planning Formulation Committee (IPFC), the highest level forum in the planning process. For analytical purposes, therefore, Ward Bhèlas are characterised as semi-formal planning forums in this thesis.

There are two crucial aspects of a Ward Bhèla that are helpful in defining its structure. The first is its organisation. The absence of any explicit organisational structure shows that ward committee secretariats can organise Ward Bhèlas as per their local circumstances. However, they must organise the Bhèla at a convenient place suitable for all residents in the ward to attend, select representative participants, and provide equal speaking opportunities to all participants. These are some of the specific requirements articulated in the Local Bodies' Resource Mobilisation Procedures (2013). In the case of the Butwal municipality, it was pointed out that municipal officials used these requirements as a checklist to ensure that all Ward Bhèlas were organised in a consistent organisational environment. A municipal official stated, however, that not all ward committee secretariats in Butwal followed a similar pattern of, for instance, selecting participants and organising deliberation (Interviewee, local staff #002, 2016).

The second important aspect of the organisational structure of Ward Bhèlas is the provision of a project selection and prioritisation committee, a small citizens' jury-like entity made up of nine to eleven individuals from political parties, TLOs, the ward committee secretariat and other influential groups such as mothers' groups (field notes 2015). Although it is not officially a required entity for making decisions, it was noted in the Butwal municipality that all 15 ward committee secretariats formed the committee to select and prioritise proposals. A ward secretary said:

As the ward secretary of this ward, I prefer making decisions in a small group. Although discussions in the Ward Bhèla are mostly useful, not all discussion points deserve to be enlisted as shortlisted proposals. A fixed amount of ward-level budget and several policy and issue specific guidelines limit our ability to translate discussion points into shortlisted proposals. Creating a project selection and prioritisation committee obviously helps in analysing discussions and tallying them with the budgetary framework that is supplied by the municipality in advance of the Ward Bhèla (Interviewee, local staff #001, 2015).

Both the statutory requirements in the Local Bodies' Resource Mobilisation Procedures (LBRMP) (2013) and the actual activities in the Ward Bhèla in the case study ward in the Butwal municipality have significant implications for claiming it as a semi-formal forum. On the one hand, the statutory provisions suggest that Ward Bhèlas must follow more or less formal rules. These include, among others, selecting participants and prioritising proposals. On the other hand, the actual activities of the Ward Bhèla were organised in a more or less informal environment. For example, it was observed that the ward committee secretary had organised an informal meeting with a few influential individuals such as politicians, teachers, community mobilisers and coordinators of the WCF and CAC about a week before the Ward Bhèla. The objective of such an informal meeting was to inform participants through them that there were some obligations to be followed whilst organising the Bhèla. It was observed in one of such meetings that the ward secretary specifically pointed out the policy guidelines and budgetary ceilings circulated by the Butwal municipality in November 2014, which stated, "Ward secretaries must inform about policy guidelines and budgetary ceilings to participants in the Ward Bhèla." This shows that the municipality requires some form of guidelines to be followed by all ward committee secretariats.

The actual activities in the Ward Bhèla, on the other hand, were observed as being dominated by local contextual factors. These include the different roles of an official (the ward secretary) in selecting participants, organising deliberations, nominating the members for the project selection and prioritisation committee, and finally playing an influential role in selecting and shortlisting proposals to forward to the IPFC. It was observed in the case study ward that local representatives of political parties were also influencing the ward secretary in doing these tasks. Additionally, people belonging to TLOs and the ward-level TLOCC were also influencing the ward secretary in these regards. What is interesting was that neither the political representatives nor the members of TLOs were formally expected to influence an official in shaping the structure of, and determining the procedures to deliberate in, the Ward Bhèla (field notes 2015). When asked about why they were keen to influence the ward secretary in designing the structure of the Bhèla, selecting participants and also in making decisions in the project selection and prioritisation committee, a politician in the committee said:

There are three obvious reasons for why I am involved in this meeting and try to influence the decision-making process. The first is that I have a political

responsibility to check and balance the issues that were raised in the Ward Bhèla and deliberated in the committee. Being a politician, I must be attentive to whether other members (including the ward secretary) are biased about any particular subject. The second reason is related to my personal interest to participate in such forums so as to continue to maintain my political image. This will be useful to my political career. And, the third reason is that the ward secretary also wants me to play roles to help accelerate the discussions in the meeting. I do not aim to make the decisions that I like the most, but I help negotiate between ourselves (members in the committee) before shortlisting and prioritising the proposals (Interviewee, local politician #002, 2016).

To sum up, the organisational structure of the Ward Bhèla is semi-formal. The obligation to follow formal requirements articulated in the Local Bodies' Resource Mobilisation Procedures (2013) make the ward secretary adopt formal rules to design and implement the Ward Bhèla. However, as observed in the case study ward in the Butwal municipality, the local contextual factors and different roles of diverse participants in the Ward Bhèla contributed to organising the Bhèla as an informal planning forum. The combination of formal rules that guide the organisation and informal practices that influence the procedures feature Ward Bhèlas as semi-formal structures in the planning process.

6.2 Functions of the Ward Bhèla in planning

As in other locales, the Ward Bhèla in the Butwal municipality was first conceptualised during the early years of the 1980s as part of the then-robust devolution reforms. All the municipalities and villages were legally obliged to host such public meetings in their wards, reasonably once a year during the planning process in winter (Paudyal 1994). Nonetheless, those early years of Ward Bhèlas were not designed to foster citizen participation in the local decision-making process, but instead local elites (the Pancha) used to take advantage of such forums to inform citizens about their duties and roles in the local development process (see Khadka 1986, for instance). An experienced Ward Bhèla participant said:

When I was young (*presumably in the early years of 1980s*), the government officers (*perhaps, he is pointing out to unelected municipal officials*) used to organise different types of meetings (*probably the Ward Bhèla*) in our ward. Everybody in our ward was forced to participate in the Bhèla. If anyone refused, the officers would threaten to stop providing public services to the concerned household. In the Bhèla, the officers used to share what policy or programs they had designed to be implemented in our ward. Their intention of sharing that information was not to inform but to remind us that providing our free labour to implement their decisions is our citizenry duty (Interviewee, Ward Bhèla participant #009, 2015).

The institutional design shows that the Ward Bhèla, from the organiser's point of view, features consultative functions. In other words, the Ward Bhèla is organised to consult citizens of different types about the policies and programs to be formulated. However, the same forum looks different if the Ward Bhèla is viewed from a citizen's perspectives. It appears as an official planning forum at the ward level where citizen participants play important roles in setting up agendas for discussion, among others. In other words, Ward Bhèlas are designed to perform as an official consultative forum in the ward.

From its outset, therefore, the observation of a Ward Bhèla in the Butwal municipality provides insights into three specific functions: connect Ward Bhèlas downwards to Tole Bhèlas and upwards to the IPFC; balance raw proposals with technical requirements; and consequently, select and prioritise the ward-level policy and programs. While these functions were identified based on the empirical materials generated in the case study Ward Bhèla, both citizen participants and the organisers offer additional perceptions about the functions of the Ward Bhèla. The organisers perceive that the Ward Bhèla acts to obtain critical, unbiased and actual public opinions about the ongoing policies and programs as well as developing consensus about the most pressing problems in the ward (Interviewee, Local Staff #003, 2016). Citizens, on the other hand, take the Ward Bhèla as an opportunity to comment on the past year's policies and programs, to assess their impression about the ongoing policies and programs, and demand that certain policies and programs be implemented in the forthcoming fiscal year (Interviewee, Ward Bhèla participant #021, 2016).

Connect Tole Bhèlas with the IPFC

Being an intermediary planning forum, Ward Bhèlas have a function to link Tole Bhèlas with the IPFC. There are two distinguishable elements in the Ward Bhèla that were catalysts to connect Tole Bhèlas with the IPFC in the Butwal municipality: invited participants, and the discussion points. Invited participants (see next section) are those individuals who are specifically selected as representatives of political, community-based, and, or civil society organisations in the ward. In the case study ward, many of the invited participants were from TLOs whose responsibility was not only to attend the Bhèla but also to present and defend the shortlisted proposals that were prepared in the respective Tole Bhèla. From this point of view, the participation of an individual from a Tole Bhèla into the Ward Bhèla indicates the connection between these forums.

Although there was not any mechanism in the Ward Bhèla to appoint any participant as a member of the IPFC, it was observed in a IPFC preparation meeting in the Butwal municipality in 2015 that municipal officials were asking ward secretaries to nominate some of the Ward Bhèla participants to be the members of the IPFC (field notes 2015). Municipal officials, however, were required to follow the LBRMP (2013) which stipulated, among others, the type of social or political organisation to be represented as an ex-officio member in the IPFC. Nomination of individuals from the Ward Bhèla was, therefore, not understood as a guarantee to represent Ward Bhèlas in the IPFC, but had some implications for connecting Tole Bhèlas with the IPFC.

In terms of discussion points, the primary subjects of discussion in the Ward Bhèla were submitted by Tole Bhèlas (see Annex 5.3) though participants could raise additional issues to be discussed there. In other words, the prioritised list prepared in Tole Bhèlas contributed to connecting Tole Bhèlas with the Ward Bhèla (Interviewee, local staff #003, 2016). All proposals submitted by Tole Bhèla representatives in the Ward Bhèla were officially recorded in the minutes. Because the Ward Bhèla itself did not make any decision about these proposals, public input on them was separately noted by organisers and submitted to the project selection and prioritisation committee for further deliberation. Although the organisers of the Ward Bhèla were watchful about individual comments on the proposals submitted by Tole Bhèla representatives and other participants in the Ward Bhèla, there did not seem to be any systematic mechanism which would ensure that participants' feedback was accommodated in the list of formally invited participants' proposals.

To sum up, irrespective of whether uninvited participants' views are taken seriously or not, the main function of the Ward Bhèla in linking Tole Bhèlas with the IPFC was being implemented in various forms. These include offering participation opportunities to citizens who attended Tole Bhèlas, and bringing proposals from Tole Bhèlas for discussion, and thereby escalating the shortlisted and prioritised proposals to the IPFC for final decisions.

Balance basic proposals with technical requirements

Based on the observation of five different Tole Bhèlas in the case study ward in the Butwal municipality, most participants did not know much about the exact process of planning. Moreover, many of the speakers were observed to be raising issues that were generally regarded as irrelevant to, or beyond the scope of, the municipality although there did not seem to be any way that issues would be classified as either relevant or irrelevant.

Consequently, many Tole Bhèlas produced a prioritised list of issues without paying much attention to technical requirements such as a feasibility study (field notes 2014).

When proposals were submitted to the Ward Bhèla, the discussions were mainly centred around if and to what extent the demands embedded with proposals were necessary. Obviously, the respective Tole Bhèla representative and other beneficiaries were seen to be defending their proposal with reasonable justifications, but many of them were not able to meet technical requirements. In other words, despite the knowledge that the ward was given a fixed amount of budget as the ceiling and that several policy-related requirements were to be followed, the majority of Ward Bhèla participants were not linking these requirements adequately to their proposals. Balancing basic proposals with technical requirements was, therefore, understood as one of the key functions of the Ward Bhèla.

Two approaches to carrying out this function were observed to be in place. The first was the adoption of 35% of the capital budget to be earmarked for those proposals that were specifically prepared for the wellbeing of women, children and minority communities. This approach was coded in the Local Bodies' Resource Mobilisation Procedures (2013), which means that organisers of the Ward Bhèla had to prepare a list of proposals for women, children and minorities with at least 35% of the budget to be allocated to them. Consequently, a significant number of proposals prepared in Tole Bhèlas were disqualified from further deliberation in the project selection and prioritisation committee.

The second approach was to scrutinise proposals in terms of whether they had fulfilled technical prerequisites. Although there was not any specific rule for this to be based on, the ward secretary in the case study ward was observed to be checking if the proposals prepared in Tole Bhèlas had developed project concept notes, a detailed project information document, and other requirements such as an assessment of the environmental impact. While many Tole Bhèlas were not sufficiently empowered and also capable of preparing these technical requirements on their own, the approach of checking technical prerequisites was understood as a process of making technically sound decisions, particularly in the project selection and prioritisation committee in the Ward Bhèla. One drawback of this approach, however, was that actual decision-making in the committee was not adequately informed by technical details, hence, proposals were selected and shortlisted in the absence of significant technical information.

Project selection and prioritisation

Once all proposals are presented, deliberated on and submitted to the organiser in the Ward Bhèla, there remains the major task of the selection and prioritisation of proposals. None of the guidelines seem to have a provision to form such a committee, however, it was observed in the case study ward in the Butwal municipality that the organisers would prefer to form a project selection and prioritisation committee for particular reasons (field notes, 2015). At the end of the Ward Bhèla, the organisers explained to the participants why project selection and prioritisation was a difficult task and how they planned to sort it out. Generally, the ward committee secretary explained the next steps by acknowledging that the organisers were cautious about what had been discussed in the Bhèla.

The purpose and method of the project selection and prioritisation committee was publicly announced in the Bhèla. In the Ward Bhèlas, the ward committee secretary was nominated as the chairperson of the committee. The ward committee secretary then announced other participants to form the committee though Ward Bhèla participants were not given adequate opportunities to express if they were happy with the ward committee secretary's decision. The committee was small in terms of its size (up to seven) (field notes 2014, 2015). The ward secretary said:

As you can interpret from its name, the main task of this committee is to select those proposals that fulfil both technical and policy requirements. Because the proportion of the budget for which the Ward Bhèla is organised is relatively very small, I as a ward secretary could select proposals and prioritise them. The reason why I do not prefer to do it alone by myself is that I want to give opportunities to people who represent certain political and social groups in this ward, even though I am not legally required to do so. My experience suggests that forming the committee has greatly helped in recognising the contribution of political parties, civil society organisations and other individuals in the developmental process in this ward. After all, I can get their necessary support in implementing the decisions if they are respectfully incorporated in the decision-making process (Interviewee, local staff #001, 2015).

As suggested in the quote above, members of the committee represent major political parties, TLOCC-W and a community mobiliser at the ward level. The committee, from its structure, seems to be representational. However, there is not any justification for why the ward committee secretary choose politicians as members of the committee, particularly during the period when politicians were not legitimate representatives of people. When

asked about this issue, the ward committee secretary said, “Politicians can help facilitate the implementation process by encouraging communities to be the part of the planning process.” Additionally, they were also expected to negotiate at the upper level planning forums with senior bureaucrats and politicians to claim that their proposals were the neediest in the municipality (field notes 2015).

It was observed in the case study ward that the committee met a day after the Ward Bhèla, but it did not allow individuals other than the selected representatives to participate in their deliberation (field notes 2015). The committee took the project selection criteria in the Local Bodies’ Resource Mobilisation Procedures (2013) as its guideline to select and prioritise proposals (see Annex 5.2 for details). Each of the members was assigned a specific sector such as the infrastructure so that s/he could compile all relevant proposals before presenting them in the meeting. The member could ask for any technical assistance from the community mobiliser or the ward committee secretariat if needed. As soon as each of the members finalised the compilation of proposals, they worked together in ranking the proposals based on the criteria.

Table 6.1 Summary of the selected projects (sample)

SN	Project/Program	Funding Source
1	Develop Butwal as a tourism city	Central government
2	Establish a drinking water tank of 1 Million litre capacity at a convenient place for wards 1, 2, 3 and 4	Central government
3	Construct a retaining wall at the Tinau river to protect residential areas	District Development Committee, Rupandehi
4	Construct a wall around the Butwal high school	Butwal Municipality
5	Strengthen the road in front of Shikhar Deurali residential area	Butwal Municipality
6	Infrastructure projects, promotional programs, targeted programs (women, children and minorities)	From the allocated budget to the ward

Source: field notes 2015

As soon as the list of selected projects was prepared, the members discussed the budget ceiling provided by the municipality, as well as other financial sources committed by

different organisations such as NGOs and CSOs in the ward. It was noted in the case study ward the members prepared a long list of selected projects and then further refined the list in accordance with the possible funding. Table 6.1 shows a version of the list of such proposals prepared by the project selection and prioritisation committee in the case study ward in the Butwal municipality in 2015. A sample of prioritised list of proposals is attached in Annex 6.1.

To sum up this section, Ward Bhèlas' function seems to be relatively more technical than the functions of Tole Bhèlas although both of these planning forums are functionally interconnected. Proposals prepared in Tole Bhèlas are refined and further developed in the Ward Bhèla, and are then forwarded to the IPFC for decisions. Most of the Ward Bhèla participants are the representatives of Tole Bhèlas who bring prioritised issues to the Ward Bhèla as agendas for discussions. It is important to mention these two aspects of the planning forums: functions and participants were observed as contributory to linking Tole Bhèlas with the IPFC.

6.3 Who participates and why

The Ward Bhèla is a semi-formal planning forum. Hence, participants in the Bhèla consist of both formally invited individuals who belong to different organisations and interest groups in the ward as well as voluntarily participating individuals. In Butwal's case, most of the formally invited participants were the coordinators of TLOs, local representatives of political parties, and other distinguished personalities who were known for their expertise in any public issue or had contributed to uplifting the socio-economic status of local communities. A mandatory provision ensures that at least 33% of total participants in the Ward Bhèla are women, and a proportional presence of other socially marginalised communities/groups (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013), representatives of children's clubs, Dalit organisations and other minorities' associations are also officially invited to participate in the Ward Bhèla (field notes, 2015).

Volunteer participants may or may not belong to any of the formal organisations in the ward, but do not receive any formal invitation from the organiser. These include lay participants who are interested in learning about how public policy decisions at the local level are made. The Ward Bhèla does not restrict any individual from participating, so this group of people does not find any major obstacles to participating in the Bhèla, although there may be some difficulties for those who do not understand Nepali (Interviewee, Ward Bhèla participant,

#021, 2016). What is important in this regard is that while the organisers do not really intend to differentiate between the invited and uninvited, they offer front seats to some special participants such as those who are senior leaders of local political parties, or religious organisations (field notes, 2015).

Approximately, 60% of participants were noted as invited individuals in the case study Ward Bhèla in the Butwal municipality. Many of these participants were given the special responsibility of presenting the proposals that were prepared in the Tole Bhèla. However, not all invited participants were assigned the task of presenting the proposals because some participants in this group may not belong to any Tole Bhèla. So, the organisers offer this group of participants the chance to raise their opinions or concerns over any issues (field notes, 2014, 2015). While invited participants were given a special emphasis in the Ward Bhèla, volunteer participants could also express their opinions on any of the issues being deliberated. It was also noted that they were given opportunities to raise novel issues. Their views are also officially recorded in the minutes (Interviewee, Local Staff, #001, 2015).

This section of the chapter separates participants of the Ward Bhèla into two broad categories – officially invited participants and lay participants who participate voluntarily. It is recognised, however, that there could be some overlap between these two groups of people, particularly in terms of their characteristics. For example, an officially invited participant may not belong to any of the organisations or the campaign in the ward and therefore may not be given any specific task to perform in the Bhèla. Similarly, a volunteer participant may not be invited to the Bhèla but, when s/he attends, organisers of the Ward Bhèla may ask him/her to present his/her opinions about what concerns him/her.

Invited participants

Given that the Ward Bhèla has responsibility for presenting all the proposals deliberated in Tole Bhèlas, it was noted as necessary for the organisers to invite chairpersons or the representatives of TLOs responsible for organising Tole Bhèlas for two reasons. The first was to condense all the shortlisted proposals prepared in Tole Bhèlas. There did not seem to be any other mechanism in the planning process at the ward level that was designed to transmit the shortlisted proposals from Tole Bhèlas to the Ward Bhèla (field notes 2014). The second reason for inviting TLOs representatives in the Ward Bhèla was to establish the Ward Bhèla as a deliberative forum (Interviewee, local staff #001, 2015). When discussions were observed to be ongoing in the Ward Bhèla, it was interesting to see that participants of

different types were discussing their proposals with one another, sometimes in a heated environment. The TLOs representatives in particular were seen to be defending their proposals with their fellow participants.

The other group of invited participants was made up of those who belonged to professional organisations. These included teachers, health service providers, foresters, youth clubs, women's groups, children's clubs and NGOs. These people represented their area of interest and mostly remained as watchdogs over the proposals that were presented in the Ward Bhèla. If needed, members of this group were noted to be helping other participants to understand problems by refining or translating them into plain languages (Field notes, 2015). Sometimes, proposal presenters and participants in this group were also observed to be having heated discussions but, in general, the main expectation of the organisers from this group of participants was to refine the proposals by getting professional ideas from a relevant technical perspective (Interviewee, local staff #001, 2015).

The other group of people being invited in the Ward Bhèla were local representatives of political parties. They were invited due to a possibility that they could contribute later in the project selection and prioritisation committee. In the words of a local official, politicians were expected from the organisers of the Ward Bhèla to get political support for the issues to be forwarded to the IPFC, as well as to get them engaged in the implementation process (Interviewee, local staff, #003, 2016). It is interesting to note that the local representatives of political parties were continuously maintaining their presence in the local decision-making processes via different public platforms such as the Ward Bhèla (field notes, 2014, 2015).

Moreover, the organisers of the Ward Bhèla in the case study Ward Bhèla invited civil society activists including representatives of NGOs. People in this group were seen to be especially attentive to matters related to their specific subjects, though they were observed to be engaging in other issues being deliberated (field notes 2014, 2015). During the Bhèla, members of civil society organisations were keen to demand projects or programs in their locality while members of NGOs were observed to be seeking potential opportunities to collaborate with the ward committee secretariat in implementing certain projects (field notes 2015). It was particularly possible for NGOs to seek collaboration because they already had their own programs to be implemented in the ward. As explained by a Ward Bhèla participant, the purpose of their participation in the Ward Bhèla was to obtain information

about their programs so as to develop a common framework (with the project selection and prioritisation committee) to implement such programs in collaboration with the ward committee secretariat or beneficiary communities (Interviewee, Ward Bhèla participant, #002, 2016).

Volunteer participants

Volunteer participants were recognised on the basis of the fact that they were not invited to the Ward Bhèla. Roughly about 40% of total participants in the case study Ward Bhèla belonged to this category. Unlike their fellow invited participants, they were not given any responsibility in the Bhèla, but were expected to express their opinions on the issues being deliberated. The main reason for not allocating any specific task to this group of people was a management issue, that as an organiser of the case study Ward Bhèla said, “There is no reason for not assigning any task to uninvited participants, but if we do that, it would be so time consuming (Interviewee, local staff, #003, 2016)”.

Based on observation, it was noticed that individuals belonging to this group included housewives, unemployed and retired persons, and others who were keen to participate in any public forum regardless of not receiving any formal invitation. While each of the individual participants had his/her own personal reason to participate, most of them said that they, by participating, wanted to learn the planning process, and if necessary support or oppose any proposal (field notes, 2014, 2015).

Whereas the agendas for discussions were mostly presented by invited participants, inputs from volunteer participants were equally recognised though there is a question of the extent to which issues raised by volunteer participants in the Bhèla were considered by the project selection and prioritisation committee. Nevertheless, participants in this category were not feeling excluded when it came to contributing to bringing issues for deliberation. A Ward Bhèla participant from this group said:

Getting formal letters from the organisers does not matter much, at least to me. What matters really is whether the organisers listen to us. I have been participating in the Ward Bhèla as well as other public meetings organised by the municipality for long, mainly to learn the way authorities solve our problems. While most of the solutions they provide sound (to me) impractical, I feel my responsibility to put forward my ideas. I have seen that my opinions are officially recorded in the minutes. I feel as if I am recognised greatly. (Interviewee, Ward Bhèla participant #017, 2016)

It is noteworthy to mention that many, if not all, volunteer participants had had experience of participating in other planning forums, mostly in Tole Bhèlas. It was noted that they had already learnt the basics and objectives of the planning process, so they were observed to be confident in the agendas being raised and deliberated (field notes 2015).

6.4 Decision-making in the Ward Bhèla

It was recognised that the decision-making process did not aim to involve all participants, but that a Project Selection and Prioritisation Committee (PSPC) was formed to make decisions. In other words, the committee was formed in the Ward Bhèla with the aim of bringing together a group of relatively educated, experienced and influential people in the relevant ward. These people were primarily selected on the grounds that they represented particular policy interests, political organisations, and other collective problems. With the help of the ward committee secretary, the members of the PSPC were given adequate information about what was raised and deliberated in the Ward Bhèla. Although they had knowledge about the Ward Bhèla proceedings, the help of the ward secretary in interpreting the proposals was observed as a key element of the decision-making process in the committee.

The function of the PSPC is specifically explained as the explanation considers the proceedings of the Ward Bhèla as equally important as the PSPC. Two aspects of decision-making are particularly considered whilst explaining the committee's function. They include: inclusiveness, the extent to which the committee's structure involves people or their representatives from marginalised communities; and, interactivity, the degree to which participants are given opportunities to discuss agendas amongst themselves as well as with the organisers.

Inclusiveness

Inclusiveness refers to the extent to which the PSPC involves people from marginalised communities. As explained in the preceding section, participants in the Ward Bhèla were observed to be carefully selected to ensure sure that diverse communities and groups were represented. This was noted as one of the ways to foster the practice of inclusive citizen participation both in the Ward Bhèla and the PSPC.

The ward committee secretary was especially attentive to ensure that a third of the participants were women and that there was a proportional representation of children's

representatives, and representatives from other marginalised communities (Interviewee, local staff, #003, 2016). Because the Ward Bhèla was designed for deliberating proposals that either escalated through Tole Bhèlas or emerged in the Ward Bhèla, the presence of traditionally marginalised groups of people was part of the compulsory process to include people from diverse backgrounds (Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission 2014a; Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013). In other words, the Ward Bhèla is compelled to be inclusive in terms of who it selects as its invited participants.

The PSPC features inclusion as its character, not only in how representatives from traditionally marginalised communities are selected, but also in how the existing strategies are helpful in incorporating their views and demands in the actual policymaking. Although selecting representatives for the PSPC was observed as a subjective responsibility of the ward secretary, members in the PSPC were found to be representing diverse organisations, interests and issues (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2 Members of the PSPC

Position	Who	Representation
Chairperson	The ward committee secretary	The municipality office and the ward committee secretariat
Member	Local representatives	The ward-level committees of political parties
Member	TLO Representative	The TLOCC-W
Member	WCF Representative	The WCF of the respective ward
Member	Community mobiliser	Not clear

Source: field notes 2015

In terms of the strategies adopted to ensure the voice of women, children and minorities was heard, the committee was observed to be relying on the criteria mentioned in the LBRM (2013). The criteria were circulated to ward committee secretariats as part of the policy and budgetary guidelines of the municipality. According to these guidelines, a total of 35% of the capital budget was allocated to address the demands of women, children and other minorities in the ward (Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City 2015). A detailed analysis of the degree to which Ward Bhèlas featured inclusion both in terms of presence – who

participates, and voice – how the participation of marginalised people ensures their voices are heard in actual decisions, is presented in Chapter 8.

Interaction

The second aspect of decision-making in the Ward Bhèla is interactivity which means that the forum provides an opportunity for participants to discuss with one another before negotiating with organisers. Indeed, the Ward Bhèla was observed to be providing interactive avenues for citizens to have conversations among themselves, and also with organisers, before their agendas were further deliberated in the PSPC to produce recommendations on various aspects of local public policy, developmental programs and service delivery arrangements. In the words of a participant, interactivity was the *most attractive feature* of the Ward Bhèla (Interviewee, Ward Bhèla participant #003, 2015). Once proposals were presented by TLO coordinators in the Bhèla, it was noted that all participants were given equal chances to exchange their opinions with each other along with the presenter. Participants were observed as constructively engaging with each other to formulate the maximum possible *financially viable* selection of demands (field notes, 2015)¹⁵. The organisers facilitated discussions by, for example, resolving disputes or providing necessary information, but they were observed not to be interfering in discussions.

However, interactions did not always go smoothly in the PSPC. Of a number of obstacles to smooth interactions that were observed during the field study, three vital ones are illuminated here. First is the presence of controversial issues to be deliberated. Participants in the PSPC were generally divided on what issues should be discussed in the meeting (Field notes 2015). The TLOCC-W representative supported only those issues that were escalated through Toile Bhèlas whereas some representatives of political parties wanted to introduce fresh proposals on the issues (Field notes 2014, 2015, 2016). This created a situation in which participants were clearly divided into two groups: political and non-political, and wrestled with each other in setting up agendas for discussions. The ultimate responsibility for handling such a situation was noticed to be with the ward committee secretariat who would convince both of these groups by, for instance, writing each and everyone's demands into their official minutes.

The second vital obstacle to smooth interaction was related to developing proper alternative solutions. Participants might agree on the problem to be discussed in the PSPC meeting but may not always be able to decide on proper solutions¹⁶. There could be several reasons

including the capacity-related ones for why participants were not able to develop proper solutions. One group of people, particularly the group of non-political participants, explained that their role was to bring problems, but not the solutions, into the discussions. One participant of this group explained:

I loudly raised a problem, that my community had been experiencing the shortage of clean water for ages. Since the organisers were aware of this fact, I did not think to remind them how a regular water-supply system could be built. They knew it already. On the other hand, I am a lay person. I do not have any technical knowledge on solving the problem. (Ward Bhèla participant, #017, 2016)

The third vital factor for interaction in the PSPC meeting was the ownership of the issues. Political representatives in the meeting as well as in the Ward Bhèla were observed to be raising fresh issues. Although their opinions were officially recorded in the minutes, there did not seem to be any evidence which would explain the fate of those proposals that were put forward in the Ward Bhèla (field notes, 2015). This raises a question of ownership – to what extent do the participants or the organisers own those proposals that were raised but not further deliberated both in the Ward Bhèla as well as in the meeting of the PSPC?

6.5 Implications for the policymaking process

In the policymaking cycle, the majority of the proceedings of the Ward Bhèla were related to deliberating the problems that were raised in and through the Tole Bhèla. While previously identified problems were considered as the agendas for discussions, participants in the Ward Bhèla could also bring new ideas and issues. Hence, the main focus of the Ward Bhèla was to ensure that the problems identified in the Tole Bhèla were further refined in terms of, for instance, balancing basic proposals with technical requirements (field notes, 2014, 2015, 2016).

Two major issues of proposal refinement are particularly important when it comes to the contribution of the Ward Bhèla in local policymaking. First, observation of the Ward Bhèla in the Butwal municipality in 2015 showed that representatives of Tole Bhèlas defended their proposals by arguing how their problems were more crucial than others'. In other words, the presenters competed with their fellow participants to claim that their proposals needed immediate action – particularly in terms of policy decisions and funding. This activity of the Ward Bhèla helped refine the problems by attracting serious discussion in the PSPC.

Second, although participants in the PSPC represented diverse clusters of the ward, most of them were not concerned only with the problems of a specific geographic or policy area. They were attentive to whether the proposals were biased towards certain communities, or the problems of certain area were exaggerated, or the organisers were unnecessarily friendlier to some presenters (Interviewee, Ward Bhèla participant #002, 2016). Their attentiveness towards these aspects in the Ward Bhèla created a situation in which all proposals were given equal emphasis; although, if certain proposals were not as important as others, they proposed eliminating them from further deliberation (field notes 2015).

Finally, once a refined list of problems was prepared in the Ward Bhèla¹⁷, the PSPC carried out an important action by selecting the neediest proposals. Although there was a clear set of criteria which was used to select and prioritise the projects and programs, the function of this committee was clearly linked to the development of the best alternatives to potentially address the issues.

6.6 Conclusions

The Ward Bhèla is an officially organised planning forum provisioned in the Local Self Governance Act (1999) and its subsequent regulations. Irrespective of its conception in the legislation, it does not have any formal structural or procedural obligations, so local officials had flexibility in organising the Ward Bhèla in accordance with their local circumstances. Observation of the planning process in the Butwal municipality showed that the Ward Bhèla was organised as a joint activity of civil society organisations such as the TLOs and municipality through its ward committee secretariat. Such joint work made the Ward Bhèla a semi-formal planning forum.

Participants in the Ward Bhèla were of two types: invited participants, those who were officially invited to present the proposals; and volunteer participants, those individuals who were not officially invited but voluntarily participated for their own sake. Invited participants had some responsibilities in the Bhèla such as the presentation of proposals prepared in Tole Bhèlas. On the other hand, volunteer participants, were not assigned any specific role in the Bhèla but they were free to raise new issues, or express their opinions for or against the issues that were presented by their fellow invited participants.

To sum up, the overall function of the Ward Bhèla can be categorised in terms of its contribution to local-level participatory policymaking. While the Bhèla is positioned

between the Tole Bhèla and the IPFC, its main function is to escalate shortlisted proposals to the IPFC where the actual decision-making activities happen. Indeed, it was observed that the Ward Bhèla offered an opportunity for citizens to freely participate, negotiate with organisers and other participants to defend their proposals and opinions, and influence the planning process at the local level.

Chapter 7

Integrated Planning Formulation Committee: participation in formal forums

The Integrated Planning Formulation Committee (IPFC) is a formal planning forum formed annually in municipalities at the end of the planning process. The LSGA's (1999) initial concept of the IPFC was that it would be formed by District Development Committees (DDCs) with the aim of condensing policy and programs that were potentially designed to be implemented by different governmental and non-governmental organisations at the district level. In the absence of an elected leadership at local government level from 2002 to 2016, local governance reforms of the central government replicated the IPFC in municipalities and villages with similar aims. The objective of the IPFC in municipalities was to raise and deliberate ideas and perspectives from political and civil society representatives, as well as policy and program information from government and non-governmental organisations established in the municipality concerned (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013).

This chapter examines the IPFC organised in the Butwal municipality as part of the planning process in 2014/15. It begins with an introduction to the organisational structure of the IPFC in Butwal. Next is an explanation of the functions the IPFC performs in the planning process. The third section describes participants and their selection methods. The fourth section investigates how the IPFC makes decisions. Before concluding, the chapter discusses possible implications for the policymaking process.

7.1 The organisational structure of the IPFC

The novel concept of the IPFC was initially set out in the Local Self Governance Act (1999) which was to be formed as part of the district planning process. The idea of the district-level IPFC was to incorporate various governmental and nongovernmental agencies into an authentic forum of local policymaking so as to condense diverse policy and program information into the annual handbook of policy and programs to be implemented by the DDC concerned. In other words, the IPFC at the district level was created to involve representatives of the central government agencies established in district headquarters, NGOs, civil society organisations, and business enterprises in a decision-making entity at the district-level with the aim of harmonising diverse programs being implemented by different actors in the concerned district (Interviewee, Local Staff #002, 2016).

The IPFC, however, is a relatively new organisation in municipal planning. It was introduced in the early years of the political vacuum of the 2000s, and mostly based on the discretion of appointed local officials, and partly guided by the central government (Interviewee, Central Government Employee #001, 2015). Members of the committee would represent political parties, civil society organisations, activists and local staffs, but many of them did not have clearly stated responsibility and accountability (Pandeya 2015). The main function of such a de facto committee would be to provide a forum where members could discuss various aspects of local policies, programs and projects with appointed bureaucrats in municipalities (Interviewee, local politician #001, 2016). Later on, the central government introduced a reform measure that not only formalised the previously created de facto committee in municipalities but also made the IPFC a policymaking entity (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013).

Following the rules devised in the Local Bodies' Resource Mobilisation Procedures (2013), the Butwal municipality was observed to be using the IPFC as a legislative body of the local government. The meeting of the committee would be organised once a year, and that objective of the meeting was noted as formulating local public policies and short and mid-term small-scale development programs. When asked about how the structure of the IPFC in the Butwal municipality can be claimed as a legislative body of the local government, a local staff member working in the Butwal municipality explained:

The IPFC works as a legislative body of the local government. Although its members are not elected, they represent a range of sectors, issues and policy areas. Of their many mandates, what makes their function legislative is that they are empowered, practically, with the right to (a) assess past years' policies and programs, (b) recommend necessary adjustments on the ongoing policies and programs, (c) prepare a final list of policies and programs to be implemented in the next fiscal year. (Interviewee, local staff #002, 2016)

It was observed in the Butwal municipality's IPFC meeting that the IPFC involved a range of individuals who represented different sectors (public, private, not-for-profit and a mixture of all), issues (women, children, social welfare and so forth) and policy areas (health, education etc.). The committee was formed just a week before its meeting. There were 36 members selected to be on the committee in 2015 which was reported to increase to 58 in 2016 (field notes 2015, 2016)¹⁸. The committee was chaired by the executive officer, a central government employee employed as the head of the municipality (Government of Nepal 2003).

There are five crucial elements of the IPFC that are helpful in describing its organisational structure as a formal planning forum. The first element was the appointed official's role in designing the structure of the IPFC. Although municipal officials were obliged to follow the provisions stipulated in the Local Bodies' Resource Mobilisation Procedures (2013), it was observed in the Butwal municipality that key aspects of the IPFC were discretionarily designed by the executive officer. These aspects included setting up the meeting procedures, deciding to appoint the specific individuals as members of the IPFC, mapping out rules to resolve conflicts if they occurred during the meeting, and determining specific criteria to be followed whilst making decisions.

The second element is the requirement to select participants from diverse social and political organisations. While the Local Bodies' Resource Mobilisation Procedures (2013) had a list of specific individuals to be obligatorily included in the committee, municipal officials in Butwal were observed to be arbitrarily selecting participants from a diverse type of organisations and interests in the municipality. However, there did not appear to be any significant variances in terms of legislative provisions about participant selection methods and actual practices in the formation of the Butwal municipality's IPFC (Field notes 2015). Indeed, the focus of the participant selection method in Butwal was observed to be one involving to the maximum possible extent women and minorities which resulted in the incorporation of representative participants from political parties, civil society organisations, professionals and experts (field notes 2015).

The third element that characterises the IPFC as a formal planning forum is the adoptability of recommendations to be approved by the municipal council. Unlike other planning forums, recommendations prepared in the IPFC meeting were targeted as obligatory decisions to be approved by the council, although the prevailing legislation did not compel the council to approve the decisions of the IPFC as final decisions to be incorporated in the annual handbook of policy and programs. It is important to re-emphasise that all roles of the municipal council during the period of a political vacuum in local governance in Nepal were temporarily handed over to the executive officer (Government of Nepal 2003). Though the executive officer was not obliged to approve the decisions made by the IPFC, there were only very rare cases of disapproval. When asked why officials did not reject recommendations of the IPFC, an executive officer said:

If I start refusing to approve what is decided by the IPFC, it will impact the implementation process. The representative participants in the IPFC would certainly be unhappy with decisions that I solely make in the name of the council, which will also generate questions about the legitimacy of decisions. Therefore, I prefer approving recommendations of the IPFC without any significant prejudice as policy decisions to be incorporated in the annual handbook of policy and programs. I am aware that the prevailing statutory provisions do not oblige me to do so (Interviewee, local staff #002, 2016).

The fourth element of the IPFC to be labelled as a formal structure of planning is its recognition by external agencies. It was understood from an interview with an official of the central government that both the proceedings and decisions of the IPFC were being closely monitored by several agencies at the central government level for different purposes. For example, the National Planning Commission (NPC) would pay attention to whether municipalities were following policy guidelines and budgetary frameworks; the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD) would monitor whether municipalities were organising adequate consultations in neighbourhoods, wards and specifically in the IPFC; and the Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission (LBFC) would assess the performance of municipalities for distributing financial grants on the basis of municipalities' status in adopting the criteria developed in the Local Bodies' Resource Mobilisation Procedures (2013) for structuring the IPFC.

The IPFC is an official planning forum which is recognised by different external agencies for different purposes. The central government agencies recognise it as an organisation to implement their policy, budgetary and other relevant policy-specific guidelines. The non-government organisations recognise it as a forum to discuss if there are any collaborative opportunities to implement certain programs in the municipality. The civil society organisations also recognise the IPFC as a platform for them to raise their problems to be addressed by municipal intervention. Even the donor agencies show interest in what is decided by the IPFC with the aim of exploring potential areas to finance (Central government employee, #002, 2015).

The final element that characterises the IPFC as a formal planning forum is the perceptions of both officials who are in charge of designing and organising the IPFC and participants who are selected to represent a particular organisation, policy issue or interest group in the municipality. Municipal officials were found to understand that the IPFC was the only key decision-making authority that provided annual mandates to implement local public policies and small-scale development programs (Interviewee, local staff #003, 2016). Although the views of participants vary in terms of where they are from, a general understanding amongst

the IPFC participants was that they regarded the IPFC as the most powerful policymaking entity created in the absence of elected political leadership in municipalities (Interviewee, IPFC participant #005, 2016).

To sum up, the IPFC was a formal planning forum because the organisational proceedings, participant selection methods and decision-making in the IPFC were articulated as obligatory requirements in the Local Bodies' Resource Mobilisation Procedures (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013). Although, the IPFC was not specifically conceptualised as a part of the municipal planning process in the relevant legislation that regulates planning in municipalities (Government of Nepal 1999b), it was observed in the Butwal municipality that the appointed officials were playing key roles in designing the organisation of the IPFC as a formal planning forum. Importantly, all decisions carried out in the IPFC were adopted in the annual handbook of local public policies and programs in 2015 (Field notes 2015).

7.2 Functions of the IPFC in planning

At the outset, the IPFC's key role is to provide a formal public forum for representatives of different organisations, interest groups and policy issues to address the most pressing social problems that need municipal involvement. These representatives are carefully and systematically selected to ensure that the IPFC adheres to the principle of inclusive citizen participation, a form of citizen participation that incorporates women, children, and other socially marginalised communities. All the core, the overall objective of the IPFC is to produce an annual handbook of local policies and programs to be implemented by the municipality, mostly solely and partly in collaboration with external agencies including civil society organisations in the relevant communities. To achieve this core aim, it was observed that the IPFC had three distinct yet interrelated functions. These include (i) evaluation of existing local policies in the phase of implementation, (ii) deliberation of local demands that were raised through Tole Bhêlas and Ward Bhêlas, and (iii) preparation of a list of future policies and programs to be approved by the council.

The policy evaluation function of the IPFC was seen to be conducted by creating sectoral committees with the mandate to submit their reports in advance of the IPFC meeting¹⁹. These committees consisted of different stakeholders representing both the political and social organisations in the municipality. They were observed to be evaluating existing local public policies and programs based on different data sources, most of which are generated by

themselves via field visits, informal consultation with local people, and, in certain cases, through public hearings (field notes, 2015). So, the task of policy analysis was generally conducted outside the regular structure of the IPFC although this function was a necessary component of the IPFC.

Deliberation was another important function of the IPFC. Four important elements were observed to be in place that were helpful in defining this function in the IPFC. The first was the selection of participants to represent diverse issues, interests, communities, and entities to make sure that there was the notion of inclusive citizen participation. One caveat, however, should be noted here for the IPFC meeting that it was not open for all, hence only selected participants were able to participate. The second element of public deliberation was noted to be the availability of equal speaking opportunities to discuss agendas, firstly, among participants themselves and then, secondly, with municipal officials. It was observed that participants were given adequate information and time to deliberate the agendas. The third element of the IPFC to characterise its function as deliberation is its connection to the actual decision-making. While other planning forums were also noted as involving citizen participants in decision-making, a speciality of the IPFC was that the decisions made in the IPFC were approved by the municipal council. In other words, decisions produced in the IPFC meetings were clearly linked to the actual decisions articulated in the annual handbook of public policies and programs.

The third function of the IPFC was to prepare a list of future policy and programs to be included in the annual handbook of local public policies and programs. The list is to be recommended to the municipal council for approval. Upon preparing the list, the organisers (appointed municipal officials) were observed to be ensuring that each and every member of the committee had spoken or expressed their opinions on issues. Additionally, municipal officials were observed to be keeping in mind the mandatory policy guidelines and budgetary ceilings. While the act of municipal officials in reminding people of policy guidelines and budgetary frameworks was generally regarded as a way of ensuring that the IPFC functions to produce viable proposals, not all participants in the IPFC were happy about that. In the words of an IPFC participant, these guidelines limit their autonomy in proposing the policies or programs in their communities –

The IPFC certainly gives a platform for the representatives of different communities to double check if their voices raised at the bottom-level forums of planning are

considered for actual policy decisions. The moderator in the meeting does not interfere with any participants expressing their concerns. However, when it comes to actual decision-making, the organisers put forward a number of restrictions, which thwart our capacity to take decisions independently. The forms of restrictions include budgetary limitation, boundaries in policy statements and several programmatic problems such as coordination with line agencies. (Interviewee, IPFC participant #001, 2015)

On the other hand, a municipal staff member who had been working in the Butwal municipality for over a decade explained the policy and budgetary frameworks as guidelines for smoothly achieving these three different functions of the IPFC. According to this interviewee, the guidelines helped both participants and organisers in the IPFC to “(a) assess the outcome of the policies and programs that were implemented in the last fiscal year, (b) have a thorough discussion on what local people have expressed during different stages of planning, and (c) recommend a list of policies and projects to be implemented in the next fiscal year (Interviewee, Local Staff #002, 2016)”.

To sum up, the IPFC was observed to be performing two key functions in the Butwal municipality. The first was to provide participation opportunities to representatives of diverse political and social organisations in the making of local public policies and short and mid-term development programs. The selection of participants was observed to be determined by the executive officer in the municipality although s/he was not compromising the statutory provisions about selecting participants. The second function was related to the deliberation of policy and program proposals that were generated through Tole Bhêlas and Ward Bhêlas. The public deliberation function of the IPFC was observed in terms of the inclusive character of its citizen participation, equal speaking opportunities for participants, and the potential of linking deliberations with actual decisions.

7.3 Who participates and why

Although there was no pre-defined participant selection method to be followed in the IPFC, municipal officials in the Butwal municipality were observed not to be selecting any particular individual as a member, instead local level organisations with diverse issues, interests and policy areas were requested to nominate a representative to be a member in the IPFC (field notes 2015). Consequently, it was seen in the IPFC meeting in 2015 that a considerable number of participants were from civil society organisations such as TLOs and

WCFs with the notable presence of women and other individuals from marginalised communities.

Based on the observation of the IPFC meeting in the Butwal municipality in 2015, a number of groups of people were distinguished for analytical purposes. These include: civil society organisations, political parties, government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector.

Representatives of civil society organisations

As explained earlier, civil society organisations in the Butwal municipality play important roles in organising the planning process, particularly in neighbourhoods and wards. It was shown in Figure 4.1 that these organisations are structured to perform in neighbourhoods, wards and at the municipality level. The Tole Lane Organisations (TLOs) were particularly emphasised in the Butwal municipality where individual TLOs were observed to be steering Tole Bhèlas in neighbourhoods, the ward-level TLOs coordination committees (TLOCC-W) were cooperating with the ward committee secretariat in organising Ward Bhèlas, and the municipal-level TLOs coordination committees (TLOCC-M) were noted as contributing to organising the IPFC. The representatives of TLOs at different levels were selected as participants in the IPFC. Additionally, a number of other representatives from Ward Citizens Forums (WCFs), Civic Awareness Centres (CACs), mothers' groups, children's clubs etc. were also selected to participate in the IPFC meeting in 2015.

Two distinct motivational factors were noted in the interviews in relation to why people in this group prefer to participate in the IPFC: individual and collective. The first motivational factor relates to individual willingness to participate. An interviewee said that the official invitation letter gives them a feeling of being respected and needed by the municipality. Obviously, none of the individuals would be allowed to participate in the IPFC if s/he had not been invited officially, however, as one interviewee explained:

Being a TLO coordinator, I was selected to participate in the IPFC. I was invited by the ward secretary to participate in this meeting. While I knew some of the basics of the planning process, I really wanted to know how actual decision-making would take place in the IPFC. Understanding the decision-making in the IPFC was obviously one of my motivation to participate, but at the same time, I also felt so proud of being selected as a member in the IPFC. Being present at the meeting was an honour, hence I participated (Interviewee, IPFC participant, #002, 2015).

The second motivational factor relates to the desire that individual participants had to contribute in promoting projects that were demanded through Tole Bhèlas. Because of the

representative nature of participation in the IPFC, some TLO representatives mentioned that they wanted to influence the decision-makers in selecting the proposals that were raised through Tole Bhèlas and Ward Bhèlas. Some individuals belonging to this group mentioned that if they were successful in influencing decision-makers, they would be respected. Overall, that would help them to build their political careers (Interviewee, TLO participant #001, 2014).

Political parties

Even in the absence of electoral politics for over a decade, local representatives of political parties were given different types of roles in local decision-making. It was observed in the IPFC in the Butwal municipality that local officials were specifically conscious of selecting local representatives of all the available political parties in Butwal. In the IPFC meeting in 2015, there were participants representing ten different political parties. As in the case of selecting participants from political parties, municipal officials were noted to be sending letters to the municipal-level committees of the political parties to nominate an individual to represent them in the IPFC. Even though municipal officials were not seen as specifying certain individuals to be nominated from each political party, it was observed that mostly chairpersons or coordinators of the municipal-level committee participated in the meeting (field notes 2015).

It is difficult to generalise why individuals representing various political parties were motivated to participate in the IPFC. However, the majority of interviewees in this group mentioned that they were asked by their political party (the municipal-level committee) to, "... check if local bureaucrats were being biased towards any community, or issue, or policy area whilst distributing the budget (Interviewee, local politician #002, 2016)." Another politician mentioned that the absence of electoral politics at the local level had sidelined politicians for over a decade which had resulted in increasing mistrust between citizens and politicians. According to her, "... participation offers in public events such as in the IPFC are useful ways through which we can maintain our presence both in the municipal decision-making as well as in the society (Interviewee, local politician #001, 2016)."

Government agencies

A few officials representing the de-concentrated service delivery units of central government agencies were observed to be participating in the IPFC meeting in the Butwal municipality in 2015. The de-concentrated service delivery units were established in

districts with the aim of providing specific public services that were not provided through municipalities (field notes 2015). Even though representatives of these agencies were participating in the IPFC in 2015 in the Butwal municipality in 2015, they were observed to be well informed about their own sectoral programs to be implemented in the forthcoming year (field notes 2015). The obligatory provisions to involve representatives of de-concentrated agencies of the central government were, therefore, irrelevant in the context of municipal planning.

When asked about why they were participating in the IPFC meeting especially in light of their lack of information about forthcoming sectoral programs, one representative said:

I am aware of the objective of the IPFC. Being a representative of an area forestry office herein this municipality, municipal officials were wanting from me to know if there were any specific (forestry-related) policy or programs to be launched in this municipality. It would obviously be helpful for the municipality to incorporate the information about forestry-related programs to be implemented through my office, but unfortunately, I do not know anything about if the Department of Forestry has planned to implement any specific program in this municipality. Even though I was unable to share any information about potential programs to be launched through my office, I was enlightened to learn about various aspects of the municipal planning process. I can certainly communicate about some of the relevant subjects to my department whenever I am asked to do so (Interviewee, IPFC participant #010, 2015)

This statement confirms that officials from the de-concentrated agencies of the central government in municipalities are invited in the IPFC to share information about their sectoral policies and programs. However, it was observed in the IPFC meeting in Butwal that the representatives from this group were mostly unable to provide the required information (field notes 2015).

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

NGOs who were legally obliged to implement their municipal-level programs in cooperation with the concerned municipality (Government of Nepal 1999b, 2000). The Local Bodies' Resource Mobilisation Procedures (2013) had, therefore, an obligatory provision that municipal officials must involve the representatives of NGOs in the IPFC, mainly with the aim of encouraging them to let the IPFC know if they had any specific projects to be implemented in the municipality. The objective of obtaining the information about NGOs' plans was to avoid duplication implementing development projects and to encourage NGOs to collaborate with communities and the municipality in implementing

small-scale softcore programs such as campaigning for cleaning the street (Interviewee, former mayor #001, 2015).

The representatives of NGOs like to participate in the IPFC because of the opportunity for them to introduce their NGO in front of relatively powerful people in the municipality. It was pointed out by a NGO representative in the IPFC, "... participating in the IPFC was a chance to share the objectives of our NGO, provide details about our funding sources and working procedures, and thereby inspire municipal officials to cooperate with us (Interviewee, IPFC participant #012, 2015)." This generates a possibility that the IPFC can make certain decisions to be implemented in collaboration with NGOs (field notes 2015).

Private sector

Only one private sector representative was observed to be participating in the IPFC meeting in Butwal in 2015. The municipal officials explained that the participation of the private sector in the IPFC would raise the possibility that certain projects could be implemented in partnership with the private sector, hence, "... it was necessary to involve the private sector representatives to inform them about possible development works in which the municipality would seek for, for example, public-private-partnerships (Interviewee, local staff #002, 2016)." The selection of the private sector representative was relatively easy as the Butwal municipality was regularly inviting individuals from the Chambers of Commerce in Butwal. For the private sector representative, participating in the IPFC was a chance to learn about how key decision-makers in the municipality consider the role of the private sector in municipal governance.

Regardless of having a notion of representative participation, it was observed in Butwal that the majority of the members of the IPFC were from the elite (Field notes, 2015). Many of them, especially the representatives of political parties, were the chairpersons of the municipal committee of their respective political parties, coordinators of TLOs, executive officers of NGOs, head of the public-sector organisations such as Area Forestry Office, and leaders of activist groups. They seemed to have experience in their areas, however, some of them appeared to have less knowledge about how exactly the IPFC works in relation to their concern. When asked about why some participants were less aware of the business of the IPFC, a municipal official explained that it was not their concern about who participated from the chosen organisation, their concern was only to see if representatives from selected organisations were participating (Interviewee, local staff #003, 2016).

Having said that, however, it is noteworthy here to reassert that each participant had his or her own preferences and motivations for (or, not) participating in the IPFC. Some participants mentioned that they felt honoured to be selected and therefore they participated. To them, there was nothing hidden except fulfilling the social responsibility that the municipality was expecting from them (Interviewee, IPFC participant, #001, 2015). Some others, especially the politicians, explained that they participated because of their party's direction to attend the IPFC.

7.4 Decision-making in the IPFC

The IPFC is the main decision-making forum in the planning process although decisions produced in the IPFC in Butwal were subject to the approval of the municipal council. While decisions made in the IPFC related to local public policies and short and mid-term development programs, three key elements of decision-making in the IPFC need to be broken down: administrative, procedural and technical. The administrative aspect of decision-making involved condensing all proposals submitted through Ward Bhêlas for further deliberation. The procedural aspect of decision-making concerned scrutinising to see whether submitted proposals satisfied policy and budgetary requirements such as mandatory budget allocation to women, children and minorities. The technical aspect of decision-making included examining proposals from the viewpoint of technical requirements which was carried out by sectoral committees formed ahead of the IPFC meeting.

Even though these three aspects of decision-making in the IPFC were equally important in producing the annual handbook, it was recognised that procedural aspects of decision-making needed to be particularly explained. However, this does not mean that the administrative and technical aspects of decision-making in the IPFC were less important.

The general procedures of decision-making in the IPFC were as follows (Field notes 2015). First, the municipal officials selected 36 members for the IPFC from diverse policy areas, issues and interests. Secondly, a two-day training program was organised in the municipality to help members understand (a) the basics of the planning process, (b) the existing national priorities of public policy and programs, (c) international commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), (d) policy guidelines and the budgetary framework to be adopted in the Butwal municipality during the forthcoming fiscal year, and (e) project selection and prioritisation criteria. Third, members were informed of the date,

time and venue of the IPFC meeting to be held. Next, on the day of the meeting, members were told in detail about the proposals that had advanced through Tole Bhèlas and were submitted by Ward Bhèlas. Fifth, the executive officer facilitated the discussion allowing participants to express their concerns about the proposals. It was observed that participants were given adequate speaking opportunities and support services to help them explain their views. Sixth, a set of policy and development programs were decided as recommendations. Finally, the recommended list of 1001 diverse policies and programs were approved and publicised by the municipal council.

From a procedural point of view, the most important aspect of decision-making in the IPFC was its interactivity, an environment in which citizen participants could freely talk to each other, and also with the organisers to discuss the proposals forwarded through Ward Bhèlas (Field notes, 2015). Two modes of interactions were observed to be pervasive in the IPFC meeting in Butwal: the first was between citizens and local officials; and the second was the interaction amongst participants themselves. The first mode of interaction was seen as a question-answer session in which representatives of civil society organisations were observed to be asking questions of local officials. In certain circumstances, the question-answer type of session was observed to be expanding between citizen participants and politicians because they had been involved in different aspects of municipal decision-making for a few years irrespective of their non-elected status in the municipality (Field notes 2015). Although local officials were the key decision-makers in the municipality, the involvement of non-elected politicians in several decision-making mechanisms in the municipality obliged them to respond to citizens' questions²⁰.

The second mode of interaction featured conversation among participants. The executive officer in the municipality was observed to be encouraging participants to express their opinions on the proposals presented in the IPFC as 'agendas for discussions' (Field notes 2015). Not all participants, however, spoke on each and every agenda in the meeting. It was observed that some participants were interested in discussing only those proposals that were related to their communities, while others were seen as paying more attention to policy issues (field notes 2015).

In general, participants were not observed to be significantly disagreeing with project proposals because many of them had already participated in the deliberation in Ward Bhèlas (Interviewee, local staff #003, 2016). However, some participants who belonged to political

parties were seen to be actively taking part when policy issues such as increasing rental tax emerged as discussion points. When asked why many participants in the IPFC did not disagree about small-scale projects but were having heated discussions on policy issues, an IPFC participant responded –

Project proposals are generally prepared by the Project Selection and Prioritisation Committee at the Ward level. In many cases, such proposals fulfil the minimum conditions to be decided by the IPFC. So, we do not need to have further deliberation on them. However, sometimes there emerges a situation when new policy agendas are submitted in the IPFC directly by politicians, top-ranked bureaucrats, and representatives of NGOs which we need to discuss more seriously (Interviewee, IPFC Participant #001, 2015).

This statement shows that interactions become relatively contentious when participants enter into discussions on policy problems or issues (field notes, 2015). Those members who were seen as new participants in the IPFC meeting were seen to be passive, so the discussions around the policy proposals were mostly carried out by experienced if limited participants. These included politicians, business persons, local officials and experts. Politicians had diverse political ideologies so they were noted to be expressing concerns on policy changes as per their political ideologies; business persons were observed to be concerned with tax policy if it was proposed to be increasing or expanding; local staffs wanted to maintain the status-quo; and experts insisted on introducing new policy measures (field notes, 2015).

To sum up, decision-making in the IPFC features some attributes of deliberative decision-making. These include, inter alia, inclusive and representative citizen participation and adequate opportunities for participants to interact with each other and with organisers. Moreover, what is more important to characterise the decision-making function in the IPFC is that the recommended list of policy and program proposals had clear linkages to actual decisions, which deliberative governance scholars call consequentiality (Ercan & Dryzek 2015). Nevertheless, further research might be needed to claim that the decision-making function in the IPFC is carried out in accordance with the attributes of deliberative decision-making.

7.5 Implications for the policymaking process

The institutional design, working procedures, participants and linkages to actual policy decisions are key attributes of the IPFC that characterise it as a policymaking entity in

municipalities, particularly in the context of the political vacuum at the local level. As explained earlier, the IPFC in the Butwal municipality was designed to prepare a list of policy, program/projects and service-delivery related recommendations to be approved by the municipal council as actual decisions. From the policy cycle perspective, this was clearly linked to *the selection of the best suitable alternatives* to solve the problems identified in various planning forums (Interviewee, local staff #002, 2016).

As has been explained earlier, the main function of the IPFC is to condense all the proposals prepared, selected and prioritised in Ward Bhèlas, and then deliberate over them with the aim of selecting the best suitable policy and program proposals. This gives an indication that the IPFC is involved in all three stages of policymaking: identifying problems, developing alternatives and selecting suitable alternatives to solve the identified problems. There is obviously a question of the degree to which the IPFC gives an emphasis to involvement in these stages.

The empirical study in the Butwal municipality's IPFC meeting suggested that the IPFC emphasised selecting small-scale development proposals prepared in Ward Bhèlas while developing policy alternatives in the IPFC meeting. Members of the IPFC were observed to be developing policy alternatives to be incorporated in the annual handbook of policy and programs. Observation of the planning process in Butwal indicated that not all participants in the IPFC were equally capable of developing policy choices, but were adequately informed about the problems that their respective communities were facing. Involvement of diverse participants with different capacity suggests that the IPFC, as a formal planning forum is involved in performing all three stages of policymaking, although the emphasis is obviously on the selection of proposals.

7.6 Conclusions

The analysis above explains that the IPFC features several attributes of a participatory policymaking institution that works formally as part of the planning process. The forum facilitates the representative participation of people from different interests and groups. Discussions organised in the IPFC feature some attributes of public deliberation, and its linkages to actual policy decision-making mechanism have greater implications for the local level participatory policymaking process. In the sequence of planning activities, the IPFC is organised at the end. It articulates all the proposals that were discussed in Tole Bhèlas and Ward Bhèlas, and further deliberates from various viewpoints such as necessity,

technicality, and sustainability among several others. Decisions made in the IPFC are labelled as policy and program recommendations which are forwarded to be approved by the municipal council. In the Butwal municipality, recommendations made by the IPFC were approved by the municipal council and thereby incorporated in the annual handbook of policy and programs.

Part 3
Analysis of Citizen Participation in Policymaking

Chapter 8

Examining citizen participation in planning

This chapter examines if and how municipal planning provided participation opportunities to citizens, particularly those who belonged to or were categorised as marginalised communities or groups²¹. Two aspects of the municipal planning process are analysed. The first is the analysis of organisational arrangements that were restructured to offer participation opportunities for citizens at different levels. The second aspect is the investigation of selection processes that were adopted across different planning forums to ensure the inclusion of marginalised groups and communities in the planning process.

It is presented in two sections. In the first section, the analysis concentrates on the institutional design of planning with the aim of explaining how informal, semi-formal and formal planning forums worked together. In particular, it seeks to understand the extent to which the three different forums were conducive to citizen participation. In the second section, the analysis moves on to investigating participant selection processes across the three forums and their implications for inclusive citizen participation. The aim is to understand if and how planning forums were facilitating the participation of people with diverse identities, interests and agendas.

8.1 The institutional design of planning

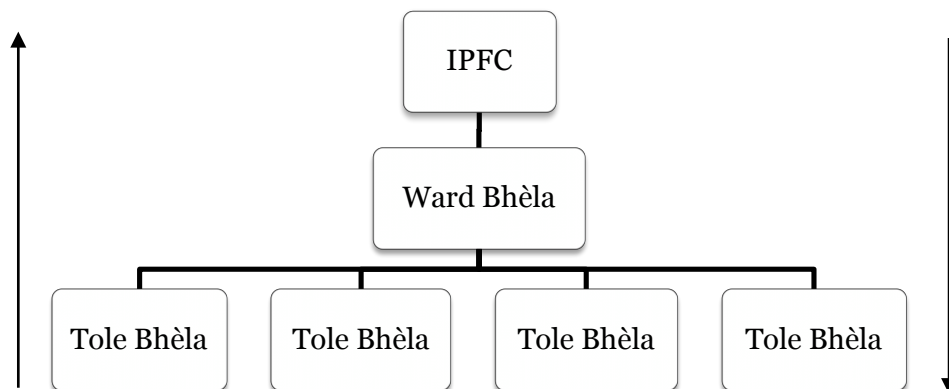
The actual workflow of the participatory planning was presented earlier in Figure 4.1. It involves three stages, each representing different yet interrelated activities of planning. While each stage has a varying degree of potential to offer opportunities for citizens to participate as discussed in the preceding chapters in part 2, it was observed that the focus of citizen participation was mostly on stage two and partly on stage three. According to an administrative official at the municipality, “All the activities of policymaking at the first stage and partially at the third stage of planning are of a technical nature, hence the participation of ordinary people at these stages is regarded only as desired but not necessary (Interviewee, local staff #003, 2016).” The subject of this section is, therefore, the analysis of the activities of stages two and three.

Although the planning process in the Butwal municipality did not follow any specific type of institutional design type during the absence of electoral politics, three different components of the planning process were observed as helpful to explain the institutional

design of planning. They include the sequential workflow, bottom-up orientation, and control mechanisms (field notes 2014, 2015). The sequential workflow underscores that planning activities were carried out in a sequence i.e. Tole Bhèlas would be organised as first step deliberations in neighbourhoods, Ward Bhèlas would then condense all proposals prepared in Tole Bhèlas and deliberate further, and the IPFC would be organised at the end of the planning process. In terms of the bottom-up orientation, planning forums were observed to be placed in a way that they would launch the process in neighbourhoods through Tole Bhèlas, accelerate in wards through Ward Bhèlas, and conclude the process by selecting suitable policy and program proposals at the municipal level through the IPFC. With regards to control mechanisms as organisational elements of planning, the entire planning process was implicitly controlled through budgetary ceiling and policy guidelines by the central government in the municipality though organisers of different planning forums at different levels were found to be relatively independent.

These three essential components of planning portray planning as a hierarchical organisation (Figure 8.1). At the top of the hierarchy is the formal planning forum organised at the municipal level; at the middle is a semi-formal forum organised in the case study ward (altogether, fifteen Ward Bhèlas were organised municipality-wide); and at the bottom are twenty-four Tole Bhèlas organised in the neighbourhoods in the case study ward (a total of 291 Tole Bhèlas were organised municipality-wide in which approximately 7384 individuals participated (see Annex 5.1 for details)). The arrows in the figure point out that the planning forums in the hierarchy have had some form of relationship between and among themselves.

Figure 8.1 Structure of the planning process in the Butwal municipality



Source: Field work 2014, 2015

The bottom-up relationship between Tole Bhèlas, the Ward Bhèla and the IPFC is shown by an arrow at the left of the figure. There were two separate elements to define the bottom-up process in planning. The first element was related to the representation of participants from one planning forum to the other, though there was a recognition that participants in the upper-level planning forums were not necessarily the only participants in the middle-level forum or lower-level forums. As explained in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, Tole Bhèla participants are represented in the Ward Bhèla, and there can be representation of Ward Bhèla participants in the IPFC.

The second element to define planning as a bottom-up process is to examine the decisions made at each of the planning forums. Each Tole Bhèla was asked to explore, shortlist and prioritise the demands in deliberation with residents in the neighbourhood. As noted earlier, the proposals prepared in Tole Bhèlas were the primary agendas for deliberation in the Ward Bhèla. Similarly, decisions made by the PSPC in the Ward Bhèlas were the main discussion points in the IPFC. Nevertheless, participants in each of the planning forums were not bound to discuss only those proposals forwarded through downwards (field notes 2015).

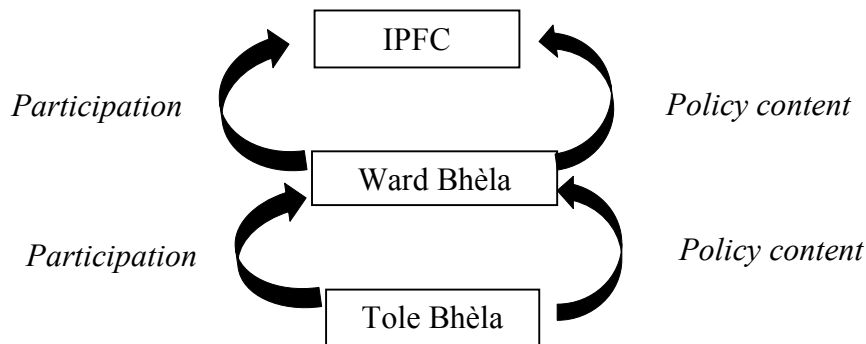
The top-down relationship between planning forums is shown by an arrow at the right of the figure. Although upper-level forums did not have any exclusive mechanism to control lower-level forums, two elements of the planning process were observed as defining the top-down relationship. The first element was the obligation for adopting project selection criteria in all planning forums (Annex 5.2). The project selection criteria, developed at the central government level, were observed to be circulated by the municipality in advance of the commencement of the planning process (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013). In other words, participants in each planning forum were allowed to raise and deliberate any issue, but they were obliged to follow the project selection criteria whilst making decisions about their choices.

The second element to define the institution of planning as a top-down process was the provision of budgetary ceilings as well as policy guidelines. As per these provisions, each ward was allocated with a specific amount of money to be invested in those proposals that met the requirements stipulated in policy guidelines. It was observed that budgetary ceilings for each ward in the Butwal municipality in 2015 were important tools to help shortlist the demands raised in Tole Bhèlas and the Ward Bhèla. Although officials viewed the provision of budgetary ceilings and policy guidelines as tools to systematically organise planning

forums, some citizen participants thought that such provisions would limit the scope for effective deliberation.

Beyond the top-down and bottom-up relationship between planning forums, the hierarchical institutional design of planning was observed to be facilitating interaction between the internal structures of planning. The bottom-level forums were vertically connected to upper-level forums though there is a question about the extent to which one influences the other. In terms of participants and policy content, as explained above, it does not seem that either of the forums can influence the other, but the bottom-level forums do have some roles to play in upper-level forums (Figure 8.2). The institutional design of the planning process requires the forums to be organised in sequence – from bottom to top, which potentially hinders the ability of the upper-level forums to influence the bottom-level forums because all the meetings at the Tole, Ward and the municipality are organised as one-off public meetings. Nevertheless, Ward Bhèlas are designed in such a way that the representatives of Tole Bhèlas, and other actors in neighbourhoods, come together and defend their proposals.

Figure 8.2 Relationship between internal structures



Source: based on field notes 2014, 2015

Because of the hierarchical institutional design of the planning process, it is interesting to observe that, even though the entire process is implemented to produce an annual handbook of local public policies and short and mid-term developmental programs, some of the internal processes of planning vary significantly. These include: agendas, actors and decision-making. As observed in the case study ward in the Butwal municipality, the shortlisted proposals of Tole Bhèlas became the subject matter of Ward Bhèlas for further deliberation; and, the proposals prepared by the project selection and prioritisation committee at the Ward Bhèla became the agendas for discussions at the IPFC meeting. Given that each planning forum is relatively independent from the other, it was observed

that Ward Bhèlas predominantly discussed agendas submitted by Tole Bhèlas, and the IPFC engaged members in deliberating mostly the prioritised proposals forwarded through Ward Bhèlas. What is important here is that the agenda setting roles of the planning forums is not performed in a linear manner but designing the planning process in a hierarchical setting provides a number of intervals through which agendas are progressed upwards.

The key actors in the planning process vary across informal, semi-formal and formal forums. As noted in the relevant chapters earlier, Tole Bhèlas were organised by civil society organisations, or by TLOs in Butwal; Ward Bhèlas were organised by ward committee secretariats; and the IPFC was organised by the municipality office. Generally, leaders of civil society organisations (or the members of the executive committee of the TLOs in Butwal) are the key actors of Tole Bhèlas. In the absence of elected politicians in Wards, ward committee secretaries were the key actors in organising Ward Bhèlas though they were administratively controlled by senior-level bureaucrats working in the municipality office. In the IPFC, the executive officer of the municipality was observed to be the chief actor of the forum where a range of other influential actors were present. These include the representatives of the political parties, civil society organisations and the private sector representatives.

The third internal process that varies across the planning forums concerns decision-making processes. Despite different ways of raising agendas for discussions in the presence of different key actors, each forum exhibits a different process of decision-making. In Tole Bhèlas, the executive members of the organising civil society organisations select and prioritise the subjects though participants in the relevant Tole Bhèlas are given adequate opportunities to speak. In Ward Bhèlas, deliberations are not always significant as a small yet representative project selection and prioritisation committee is formed to select and prioritise proposals. The committee is predominantly obliged to follow, *inter alia*, project selection criteria (see Annex 5.2), the budgetary ceiling and policy and program guidelines circulated by the municipality. The IPFC, on the other hand, condenses all the shortlisted proposals submitted by Ward Bhèlas as its basis for decision-making. In addition, members of the IPFC are informed about other obligations that the municipality has committed to.

The limitation of this design type are familiar, partly because hierarchies are often considered as obstacles in any governmental performance (Peters & Pierre 1998). It is unclear about if the hierarchical institutional design type of the planning process in the

Butwal municipality was contributory to, or a hurdle for, achieving high performance. However, it was observed that the decision-making processes were lengthy in terms of timing and repetitive in terms of the process.

8.2 Participant selection processes

As identified in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 above, different types of citizens were identified as participants in the planning process. Diverse types of planning forums offer varying degrees of opportunity for citizens to participate in the policymaking process yet there are variances in terms of selecting (or not selecting) a specific individual as a participant in a specific planning forum. In semi-formal and formal forums, participants are selected by the organisers based on a certain set of criteria (see Annex 7.1, for example) but the informal forums at the Tole level do not select any individual as such but inform/invite the neighbourhoods through loudspeakers, pamphlets, face-to-face etc. to participate. In addition to questions about who develops the criteria and whether one or different sets of criteria are adopted across different forums to select participants, the concern here is what motivates administrative officials at the municipality-level to select certain individuals as participants while ignoring others.

To sum up, informal forums do not employ any participant selection criterion, semi-formal forums follow a set of predetermined criteria (though some adaptations were observed in the case study ward in Butwal municipality), and formal forums adopt the rules prescribed by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (2013) (Table 8.1). It was witnessed that municipal officials did not have much to work on while developing participant selection criteria though considerable adaptability was noted during the field study. The participant selection process depends on what the central government has issued as a generic set of selection criteria, however there is a question of the degree to which such criteria are used across all the planning forums. As observed in Butwal, Tole Bhèlas invite the participation of all individuals who reside in the relevant neighbourhood; Ward Bhèlas involve the representatives of different political and social entities at the ward level while leaving the Bhèla open to everyone; and the IPFC nominates only the selected individuals who claim to be representatives of different political, economic, social and cultural entities in the municipality.

Table 8.1 The participant selection process in planning forums in Butwal

	Tole Bhèla	Ward Bhèla	IPFC
Participant selection basis	---	Criteria developed at the municipality level	Criteria developed in the Local Bodies' Resource Mobilisation Procedures (2013)
Adaptability	Everyone can participate	Some adaptation can be made to select locally important individuals	Predetermined type of participants must be selected, though local circumstances can be considered
Participant selection criteria development process	---	The ward committee secretary, TLO representatives and politicians discuss before selecting participants	Municipalities do not have any role as the criteria are predefined in the Local Bodies' Resource Mobilisation Procedures
Participant selection process	Public information channels (pamphlets, face-to-face messaging, loudspeakers)	The ward committee secretariat consults with local politicians and TLO representatives to select participants	The Executive Officer and other officials at the municipality select participants
Participants	Self-selected individuals	Combination of self-selected and selected participants	Only selected participants

Source: Field notes and interview materials 2014, 2015, 2016 at the Butwal municipality

Practically, Tole Bhèlas offer the most open gateways for citizens to participate in the planning process. All the residents of the concerned neighbourhood can participate in the Tole Bhèla and express their opinions. Tole Bhèla participants are self-selected individuals.

However, Tole Bhèlas are not systematic in ensuring the participation of those individuals in the neighbourhood who do not turn up to such open public forums.

The literature on participatory governance seems to be unclear about whether informal participatory forums can be categorised as inclusive public spaces (see Speer 2012 for an overview of the overall concentration of participatory governance programs in developing countries). Deliberative governance scholarship, however, argues that informal forums can have a better impact on inclusion and the representation of different social identities if they are effectively coupled with formal decision-making mechanisms (Hendriks 2015). In a different context, considering self-selection as a way of citizen participation, Fung (2003) expresses doubt about the extent to which participatory forums with all self-selected participants can be inclusive. He argues:

The difficulty with voluntarism [self-selection] is those who show up [in such informal forums] are typically more well-off – wealthy, educated, and professional – than the population which they come from. Nearly all forms of political participation exhibit participation patterns favouring high-status persons, and more demanding forms tend to exacerbate that bias (p. 342).

The case of citizen participation in Tole Bhèlas is rather the opposite of what Fung (2003) and several others such as Sjoberg *et al.* (2017) assume. It was observed in many of the Tole Bhèlas in Butwal that the majority of the participants were unemployed (male), housewives (female), and a mixture of both genders with seemingly irregular, if not lower, incomes (field notes, 2014). When reporting about the participatory budgeting experiment in Porte Alegre, Baiocchi (2003) also reveals that people with lower incomes are more likely to participate in regional popular assemblies. Several reasons for why people from lower echelons of a society (in terms of wealth, education, and influence) tend to participate in Tole Bhèlas were observed in Butwal. These include (a) participants' available free time, and (b) the forums' informative and educative roles, (c) the design of Tole Bhèlas, and (d) the priority given to women and other marginalised communities to participate.

When it comes to the inclusive citizen participation process, a mechanism specifically designed to include those citizens who are traditionally marginalised during the decision-making processes, two different aspects of Tole Bhèlas suggest inclusion as of *procedural* importance. First, the governing constitutions of TLOs who organise Tole Bhèlas specify that the executive committees of TLOs must be inclusive, by making sure that at least 33% of the executive committee should be women, and a proportionate number of members must

be from marginalised communities and groups (Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City 2014). Inclusive membership of organising entities at the neighbourhood level has some implications for how the members of Tole Bhèla organising TLOs initiate invitations to their fellow constituencies in Tole Bhèlas. As observed in various Tole Bhèlas in Butwal in 2014, executive committee members play key roles in informing their neighbours before the meeting of Tole Bhèla. They visit door-to-door to ensure that all the residents are informed in advance about the Tole Bhèla. Special attention was given to women, and other individuals who were poor, uneducated, socially suppressed due to the caste system, and people living with disabilities. The exercise of communicating about Tole Bhèlas in advance suggests that executive members are attentive about the group they represent.

Secondly, such an exercise is made obligatory by the annual planning guidelines, i.e. TLOs must ensure the participation of marginalised communities in Tole Bhèlas (Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City 2015). The interviews suggest, “Any proposals prepared by Tole Bhèlas without a reasonable degree of participation of women, children and others representing minority communities are regarded as void”. However, there is a lack of a mechanism at any level in the municipality to examine the degree of inclusive participation. TLOs certainly keep records of attendees at the Tole Bhèla but such records do not exclusively categorise participants based on their identities: women, Dalits, ethnic and other minorities.

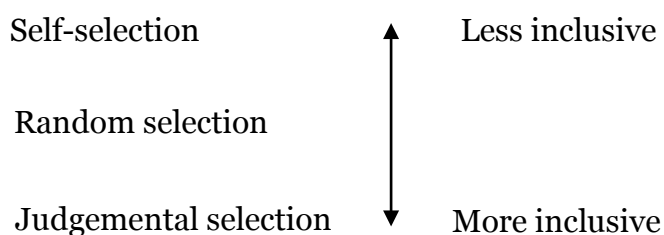
Ward Bhèlas, on the other hand, also offer unrestricted opportunities for all residents who are interested in participating in the process. Unlike Tole Bhèlas, the majority of the participants in Ward Bhèlas are the nominated representatives of TLOs whose main role is to (a) present the proposals that were prepared at Tole Bhèlas, and (b) participate in the deliberation at the Ward Bhèla. Nevertheless, Ward Bhèlas facilitate the participation of citizens in a relatively systematic manner and in many ways, structuring inclusive participation in the planning process. First, the ward committee secretariat carefully selects participants, ensuring that at least 33% of selected participants are women, and a proportionate number are from minority communities or groups. A range of other individuals are also invited who represent different policy areas such as doctors, teachers and foresters, interest groups such as user’s committees and political parties and social clusters such as mothers’ groups and children’s clubs. One of the limitations of the selection process, however, is that the ward committee secretariat cannot get into the depth of the targeted population which results in the selection of elite individuals²². Nonetheless, the majority of the participants in the Ward Bhèla were women, and to a considerable extent the

participation of other minority groups, especially ethnic communities was noted. The participant selection methods therefore can be regarded as instrumental in ensuring the *presence* of women and other minorities but, as the observation reveals, should not be the only method to ensure the participation of targeted populations (women, children and other marginalised communities and groups) (see also, Hartung 2017).

Literature on inclusive participatory processes, however, is dubious about the relationship between participant selection methods and the extent to which such methods foster inclusive participation (i.e. Michels 2017). Drawing upon Archon Fung’s (2006) democracy cube framework, three dominant approaches to participant selection can be taken (Figure 8.3): self-selection (voluntary), random selection and judgemental selection (see also Christensen & Grant 2016; Prosser *et al.* 2017 pp. 253-256, for updated overviews about Fung’s democracy cube framework). The first of these approaches is self-selection which is, as we saw previously, somewhat unsystematic in that it does not ensure systematic inclusion of those who may have been excluded from the process for a long time. Although Ward Bhèlas consist of a reasonable number of participants of this type, they do not meaningfully represent the communities or social class they come from.

Second is the random selection approach, which can be ubiquitously seen in many of the widely cited participatory processes. Fung (2006b) argues that the random selection of *participants from among the general population is the best guarantee of descriptive representativeness*. This approach was not adopted in the selection of participants in any of the public planning forums in Butwal. Interview data suggests that the organisers were not aware of the random selection process, and that even if some officials were mindful of it, they were not legally required to select participants randomly (Interviewee, local staff #001, 2015).

Figure 8.3 Participants selection in Ward Bhèlas



Source: adapted from Fung’s (2006) democracy cube framework

The final approach to participation selection is judgemental which was observed as one of the most effective ways in the Butwal municipality. Although the organisers were systematically selecting representatives from the most marginalised communities or social groups, it was noted that there remained the possibility of manipulating the selection criteria in order to avoid the participation of those who may (perhaps) oppose the organiser's view about the issues (field notes 2014, 2015). Hence, as Isaac and Heller (2003) have pointed out whilst describing the planning campaign in the Indian state of Kerala, participant selection (stakeholder identification criteria in their case study) criteria were to be 'publicised' and had to be written in the local (Malayalam) language so that people would know how participants would be selected.

In Butwal, the participant selection process in Ward Bhèlas was not required to be transparent in terms of how participants would be selected. Although the Local Self-Governance Act (1999) and its subsequent regulations and procedures expressly mentioned the type of individuals to be included in Ward Bhèlas, municipalities were still given autonomy in selecting participants according to their local circumstances (see also Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013). On the one hand, such autonomy was used to ease the selection process by, for example, including those who the relevant legislation had not specified as having to be involved. As some of the interviews with local officials suggest, some participants (who were not supposed to be selected) were invited also in relation to the possible support that authorities would need whilst implementing certain decisions. On the other hand, organisers could adopt a stealthy approach to prevent the participation of certain individuals (not the entire community or group of people though) by simply not inviting them.

In the IPFC, the participant selection process is clearly mentioned in the prevailing guidelines issued by the central government (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013). The guidelines aim to make the IPFC a representative body that is formed on an annual basis with a mandate to (a) condense all the proposals that are forwarded through Ward Bhèlas, (b) deliberate such proposals from a viewpoint of broader perspectives, and (c) recommend a set of policy and programmatic proposals to be approved by the municipal council. As a representative body, and also because of having relatively technocratic tasks to perform, local officials in the municipality tend to recruit participants from a range of issue/policy areas across different social classes who have a technical understanding of local planning (field notes, 2015).

All members of the IPFC were, thus, discretionarily selected by local officials, but careful consideration was given to at least 33% of the representation being made up of women, and a reasonable number of other participants representing minority groups and communities. The IPFC does not involve ‘elected representatives’ as its members, hence there emerges the question of the extent to which it is representative, and also of the degree to which the members of the IPFC are legitimate actors to take decisions on behalf of ordinary citizens (see Urbinati & Warren 2008, for a detailed account of the problems of representation).

This question is analysed from two aspects of IPFC membership: what makes the selected (not elected) members representative, and the extent to which such representation makes the IPFC inclusive (see Arnesen & Peters 2017, for a detailed discussion of representation). First, of the 36 selected participants in the IPFC in Butwal in 2015, there appeared to be three groups of representatives (Table 8.2): (a) a group of people who claimed to represent social classes (women, children, ethnic groups, Dalits, Muslim and people with disabilities), (b) a group that represented specific interests (political parties, NGOs and civil society organisations), and (c) a group that claimed to represent policy areas (health, education, community forestry and so on). The most important aspect of such representation was that IPFC members were selected as representatives not only of a single dimension (social class, specific interest and policy area) but overlapped with more than one dimension at a time.

Table 8.2 Representational membership in the IPFC in Butwal

Representative	Social class	Specific interest	Specific policy area (individual)	
			Specific	Overlapping
Women	11	7	3	8
Dalit	3	3	1 (education)	
Ethnic groups	9	5		3
Muslim	1	1		
Person with disability	1	1		1
Children	1	1	1 (education)	
Other	10	10		10
Total	36	30	5	22

Source: Attendance registers of the IPFC meeting, Butwal sub-metropolitan city, 2015

These different forms of representation in the IPFC prompt some thoughts about what representation is and how the IPFC was implementing representative citizen participation. Scholars of democratic representation have long argued about the impossibility of all affected people participating in decision-making, and hence, they regard, representation as

inevitable (Dahl 1971, 1994, 2000). However, often the concept of democratic representation is focused on territorially based *electoral representation*, people who come from a particular geographic location (Urbinati & Warren 2008). The other set of scholars who advocate for participatory representation argue that territorially based representation has been gradually challenged by new forms of representation such as policy or issue based representatives, most of which are evolving in *non-electoral domains* (Fung 2009; Pateman 2012), such as that of the IPFC in Nepal's participatory planning.

A second aspect of representative membership in the IPFC, however, is the extent to which the participant selection criteria of the IPFC ensures the representation in the planning process of marginalised communities in the planning process. Given the three-dimensional nature of representativeness in the IPFC i.e. social identity, specific interest and individual attention, the IPFC clearly seems to be inclusive in terms of group representation, as Young (2002, p. 122) puts it. It can be argued that in the age of electoral representation, non-electoral representation can also be strengthened although we must acknowledge the issues of legitimacy and accountability (see Pandeya & Shrestha 2016, for an overview of accountability in Nepal's local governance).

Unlike the methods of involving electoral representation in decision-making, methods to implement non-electoral representation are difficult because of very specific fundamental question: whether the common people need representatives to participate in decision-making that affects them. In this respect, Pitkin (1967, 2004) asserts:

The common people have no need of any special, anointed ruler of any special class to govern them; we all are capable of participating in political life, and entitled to do so (p. 338). ... [But at least three obstacles hinder common people from participating in public affairs] ... (i) enlarging scope of public problems and private power, (ii) the power of money, and (iii) difficult to designate by a single apt name (p.341) [therefore, representation of some kind is necessary] (words in the bracket are not of Pitkin). (see also, Rehfeld 2006).

To conclude, planning forums feature varying degrees of inclusive participation yet they are aggregately unsystematic. As the observation of Tole Bhêlas in Butwal municipality revealed, informal forums show more possibility of incorporating people from different identities and interests but they are not attractive spaces for all. Only unemployed men and housewives were found to be ubiquitously attending the forums, with the hope of being educated about municipal planning, rather than constructively contributing to the decision-

making process. Semi-formal forums in the planning process in Butwal look relatively systematic as they incorporate judgemental criteria to select participants from marginalised communities and other interest groups. The attendance of self-selected participants in Ward Bhèlas enriches the diversity of participants as both types of participants work together in the making of a broad list of policy and programmatic proposals. Finally, the IPFC as a formal forum seems to be cautious about representing participants not only from marginalised social groups but also about ensuring the representation of different issues across divergent policy areas. There is a question about the extent to which representation in the IPFC is genuine, however the observation of the IPFC in Butwal municipality suggests that a range of social and interest group representatives were transparently selected.

8.3 The implications of selection criteria for inclusive participation

While participating (or, not participating) in any planning forum is determined by the motivation of an individual who is either invited or wishes to participate (or not to participate), it is essential to examine the extent to which formal rules for selecting participants impact on the participation of marginalised groups or communities. This is particularly important here because as we saw in the preceding section formal rules are not always sufficient to encourage or enable the participation of marginalised communities and groups. In this context, this section now analyses two implications for selection criteria on citizen participation: presence and voice (Smith 2009). Based on Butwal municipality's observation of participant selection methods, presence is defined in terms of who participates (the face) and voice means the extent to which concerns raised by participants are heard (the responsiveness) in actual policy decisions.

8.3.1 Who participates: strategies to maximise inclusive participation

Enabling the participation of people from marginalised communities was one of the overarching aims of procedures in all the forums of planning. Several formal and informal procedures were available in all the forums of planning that aimed to reach excluded communities and groups. Formal procedures included: (a) the selection of participants from the most underprivileged communities and groups by using judgemental criteria, (b) provision of flexible working procedures so that the organisers of the forums could customise their process according to the local circumstances, and (c) the compulsory allocation of 35% of the budget to women (10%), children (10%) and minorities (15%). Informal procedures involve: (a) appropriate respect for the people who represent minority

groups, women, people living with disabilities and senior citizens, (b) assisting to explore and develop the preferences of such groups, (c) verbally acknowledgement (by organisers and participants from mainstream social groups) of the special needs and problems of, for instance, women, Dalit and children, and (d) providing equitable speaking opportunities (in terms of time, language etcetera) when participants of the minority groups initiate speaking in the forums (field notes 2014, 2015). However, such features vary significantly from one type of forum to the other.

In addition to these internal procedures, two relevant strategies of the planning process were found to be adopted to increase the participation of marginalised communities: capacity building and community mobilisation (Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City 2015, 2016a; Local Governance and Community Development Program 2008a; Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2014, 2015). On capacity building, the municipality was observed to have several extended training programs organised in various communities targeting women, children and other minorities²³. External resource persons, hired by the municipality and funded by the central government's Local Governance and Community Development Project (LGCDP), were found to be delivering information about the planning process, details of the mandatory reservation of 35% of budget and the role of targeted communities in the making of local policies and programs (field notes, 2015). Although it is hard to assess the extent to which such training had visible impacts on the formulation of focused policies and programs for, and by, targeted communities, it was learnt in several interviews that participants in such training were educated about the earmarked budget for a particular community or group and their rights as citizens (field notes 2015).

With regard to community mobilising, a female community mobiliser was deployed in each of the wards of the municipality as part of the local governance and community development project of the central government, with the aim of enlightening socially marginalised communities about the institutions and processes of municipal governance (Local Governance and Community Development Program 2013). These mobilisers were entitled to work as member secretaries of the Civic Awareness Centres (CACs) and Ward Citizens Forums (WCFs), community-based organisations formed in all wards of the municipality comprising about 20 members in average from different social and economic classes in the ward (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2014, 2015). During the planning process, the role of the mobilisers was to share the information about planning through organisations like CACs/WCFs about where the training programs were being organised,

how their participation in such programs could benefit them both individually and collectively and their role in utilising the reserved budget (Interviewee, Community Mobiliser #001, 2015). Again, the question of the degree to which such efforts (community mobilisation) had contributed to bringing the issues of socially marginalised communities into the forums of planning was unclear, as there appeared to be less connection between community-based organisations such as CACs/WCFs and planning forums.

8.3.2 Responsiveness: strategies to incorporate inclusiveness in decisions

Responsiveness is the obligation of state institutions and its actors to react to its citizens, or at least, to the relevant stakeholders in any specific decision. It has been increasingly adopted as one of the strategies to ensure inclusive decision-making in the context of participatory processes (Gaventa 2004). It was shown in the preceding section that selecting participants from marginalised communities for different types of planning forums was embraced both as process and strategy to enhance inclusive citizen participation, but, as Cornwall (2008) notes, initiatives to include the participants from marginalised communities are not adequate as a response. Other scholars of participatory governance have also continuously pointed out that responsiveness should be embedded as an inherent element in any participatory process so as to ensure that it connects the missing link between popular demands and policy decisions (Gaventa 2004; Gaventa & Barrett 2010; Sjoberg *et al.* 2017). Yet many public-sector institutions in the developing world, including Nepal, continue to fail to institutionalise responsive governance, despite the implementation of several reforms such as public hearings and accountability frameworks (Acharya 2016; Kaufmann & Kraay 2008; Narayan *et al.* 2000).

The analysis of the planning process isolates one key mechanism of inclusive decision-making in the attempt to be responsive at local government level: the compulsory allocation of 35% of the capital budget to women, children and other minority communities and groups (Table 8.3). As the annual handbook of policy and programs in Butwal municipality in 2015/16 shows, 29% of the earmarked budget was distributed to those policy and programmatic proposals that were specifically devised to be helpful to women; 28% to children; and the remaining 43% of the budget was allocated to minority communities or groups.

Table 8.3 Annual budget of the Butwal sub-metropolitan city 2015/16

Expenditure headings	Amount	Remarks
1. Total income	613,927,209.00	This is an estimated income from internal and external sources
2. Recurrent expenditure	492,104,000.00 (80%)	This figure includes the contribution (matching fund) of the municipality to externally funded infrastructure projects as well.
3. Capital expenditure	121,823,209.00 (20%)	
4. Targeted population (budget for women, children and minorities)	431,100,00.00 (35%)	This is 35% of the capital expenditure
4.1 Women	125,900,00.00 (29%)	Each of these numbers are 10% of the total capital expenditure
4.2 Children	122,250,00.00 (28%)	
4.3 Minorities	182,950,00.00 (43%)	This is 15% of the capital expenditure

Source: Annual handbook of policy and programs, Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City (2015)

This was noted as the most effective strategy to ensure responsiveness in terms of addressing the demands of marginalised communities and groups. Although allocating a certain proportion of the budget may not adequately answer the question of the degree to which the concerned municipality as an institution and its appointed officials as its actors are duly responsive to citizens (see also Sjoberg *et al.* 2017, for example), the provision of a mandatory budget allocation opens up possibilities to implement the demands that are generated by and for women, children and other minority communities and groups through the planning process.

Both the participants from the target population and local officials were observed to be positive and hopeful about the implication of mandatory budget allocations as a way of responding to marginalised people. For local officials, these arrangements also provide boundaries for the forums which hinder the intervention of external actors such as political parties, NGOs funded by international donor agencies, activists, and others who are demanding in terms of raising radical proposals through the planning forums. An official said –

If there would not be any provision to allocate 10% of the total budget to children, local elites [citing unelected political leaders as elites] would have definitely obliged the organisers to prepare a list of programs that would not directly benefit children. Instead, they would exert pressures on the organisers, particularly at the Ward Bhèla and Tole Bhèlas to shortlist and prioritise their own agendas. While the earmarked

budget has definitely helped advancing the lives of the targeted communities, it has also helped us to minimise unnecessary external interference in the planning process (Interviewee, Local Staff #001, 2015).

To civil society organisations, on the other hand, such arrangements pose a form of restriction on the targeted communities. It has been a trend for the last few years for local officials to believe that their responsibility is fulfilled when they allocate, for example, 10% of the capital budget to women. As observed in a Ward Bhèla in Butwal, the proposals prepared by Tole Bhèlas were incorporating much needed programs for women but due to the 10% cap in the budget, many women participants were unable to put pressure on the organisers to go beyond the limit of the compulsory allocation.

8.4 Conclusions

The empirical materials analysed in this chapter suggest that the process of planning is structured in a hierarchical institutional design in which informal, semi-formal and formal forums function bottom-up following some top-down processes. It is learnt that the hierarchy has created an environment in which planning forums work in a sequence. This gives an opportunity for citizens to participate in those forums where they are not prevented from participating. For example, if a participant develops his or her interest in further participating in other forums immediately after participating at the Tole Bhèla, the sequential form of the planning process allows him or her to go forward. In the Ward Bhèla, a range of Tole Bhèla representatives are selected to participate, present and defend their proposals while several other ordinary citizens can still participate on a voluntary basis. Moreover, participation in the Ward Bhèla creates chances to be selected as an IPFC participant although municipal officials discretionarily select participants in the IPFC. Given that the municipality has limited resources and capacity to address all the concerns raised by the participants across different forums, it would not have been possible to filter the proposals if the process were designed to work in a one-off meeting (Interviewee, local staff #003, 2016). Interestingly, breaking down the process into informal, semi-formal and formal settings has resulted in the expansion of the planning forums to include a wider spectrum of society.

Although most of the planning forums were organised as open meetings, the more the process progressed upwards the more the organisers selected certain specific individuals who were either representative of a particular group and cause, or technical experts in certain

policy areas. While adoption of pre-determined criteria to select participants was adopted as a method to select participants particularly in the IPFC and partly in Ward Bhèlas, the use of judgemental criteria in Ward Bhèlas was observed as essential element for inclusive citizen participation in the planning process.

In almost all the forums, it was observed in Butwal that the attendance of marginalised communities/groups was taken as a standard i.e. at least 33% should be women participating along with a reasonable number of participants from socially backward societies. Focusing on the participation of marginalised people in the planning process is an important starting point towards realising inclusive citizen participation, however the provision of 35% of the budget for women, children and minority communities/groups was understood as also a crucial strategy for inclusive decision-making. Additionally, the guarantee of the distribution of the 35% capital budget to a certain cluster of the society was noted as one of the ways of effectively responding to the demands of targeted populations.

Chapter 9

Policymaking functions in planning

The previous chapter examined the institutional design of planning. The analysis was framed in accordance with the first dimension of the analytical framework (Table 3.1) with the aim of understanding if, and how, the planning process facilitated citizens' participation in the municipal planning process in the absence of electoral politics. The insights show that, despite the dominant roles of appointed officials in many aspects of planning, the institution of planning was structured to offer varying degrees of participation opportunities to citizens.

This chapter examines the policymaking function of planning, the second analytical dimension of the analytical framework, to address the second research sub-question: if, and how, did the planning process facilitate citizens' participation in the making of local public policies? The analysis begins with an investigation of the institution of planning as a participatory policymaking process. Then it moves on to examine the policymaking functions of planning forums. The chapter concludes with the analysis of the decision-making styles that each forum adopts while performing their policymaking roles.

9.1 Planning as a participatory policymaking process

There are two ways to examine the institution of planning as a participatory policymaking process. The first is to investigate its legislative framework. In particular, the Local Self-Governance Act (LSGA) (1999) needs to be studied because this legislation, and its subsequent rules and regulations, provided a foundation for municipalities to implement the participatory planning process. Even in the absence of electoral politics, many of the reform measures introduced by the central government were in line with the LSGA, although the reformers did not limit themselves to following the provisions of the law strictly. For example, the provision of the IPFC was not envisioned in the law to be adopted in municipalities, however it was adopted as one of the most influential formal forums of planning in the period of electoral vacuum.

The second way to examine the institution of planning is to scrutinise the actual planning activities that were observed primarily in the Butwal municipality and also partially in other municipalities in Nepal. This is important for establishing the degree to which municipalities were actually following the legislative framework while implementing the planning process

in the absence of electoral politics. On the one hand, appointed officials were given an unprecedented range and number of roles to play autonomously in implementing the planning process, while on the other hand, a range of *control tools* were utilised by the central government as a way of organising the planning process in a consistent manner across all municipalities.

Legislative frameworks

Until 2016, the legislative arrangements of Nepal’s local governance were envisioned to be provided by the central government (Government of Nepal 1990b, 2007). As a result, the Local Self Governance Act (1999) was promulgated by actually condensing all the relevant statutory and administrative arrangements into a single legislative framework (Ministry of Local Development 2003). The law stipulated several obligatory provisions for municipalities to annually formulate local development plans by incorporating short and mid-term local public policies and small-scale development programs. The aim of these exercises was not only to formulate annual development plans but also to make possible the participation of citizens in exploring, developing and prioritising their needs (Government of Nepal 1999b).

While the law expected all the decision-making mechanisms to be open for all citizens, the planning process was specifically provisioned to include citizens’ voices in the making of annual development plans in a more or less systematic way. The following main tasks were articulated in chapter six of the LSGA and also in chapter six of the Local Self-Governance Regulation (LSGR) 2000 (Table 9.1).

Table 9.1 Statutory framework of participatory planning

Step	Task	Description
1	Preparation of resource map	Prepare a detailed profile of the municipality in terms of its boundaries, natural resources, state of infrastructure development, agricultural areas and so on.
2	Formulation of macroeconomic framework	Estimate the possible financial sources both endogenously and exogenously and thereby detailing the ceiling of the annual budget, project selection criteria and other policy related guidelines
3	Organisation of consultative forums	Consult with concerned organisations, consumers committees or groups, NGOs and residents

4	Submission of shortlisted policy and projects	Provide the list of demands (policies and programs) to the municipality from the ward committees, typically after consulting with elected representatives at the ward level
5	Consultation with sectoral entities	Discuss with the representatives of the sectoral bodies (i.e. agriculture, education, health etc.) of the government, as well as with NGOs (whose focus is on particular policy areas i.e. women, children etc.) before submitting the list to the municipal council
6	Decision-making	Make final decisions about local public policies, developmental projects and service-delivery related arrangements with details about the funding sources and implementation modalities

Source: adapted from LSGA (1999) and LSGR (2000)

Some analysts have explained these tasks in fourteen steps (Pandeya 2015). The fourteen-step planning process is, however, a national planning process that starts at the bottom-level in villages and municipalities in early November, and concludes at the national government level in June every year (see also, Thapa 2013). It is indeed an annual national policymaking process that is steered by the National Planning Commission (NPC). Perceiving the municipal participatory planning process as a fourteen-step process can, therefore, be misleading.

Table 9.2 Comparative insights into the planning process

<i>Municipality</i>	<i>Stage 1</i>	<i>Stage 2</i>	<i>Stage 3</i>
Butwal	Obtained the budget ceiling and policy guidelines from the NPC; organised a consultative meeting with the representatives of TLOCC-M and main political parties to decide ward-level budget ceilings and other policy level adjustments	TLOs were delegated to organise Tole Bhèlas, ward committee offices were asked to organise Ward Bhèla	The municipality organised the meeting of IPFC
Ramgram	Obtained the budget ceiling and policy guidelines from the NPC; organised a consultative meeting with the representatives of TLOCC-M and main political parties to	TLOs were asked to organise Tole Bhèlas, the municipality itself organised Ward Bhèlas and the IPFC	The municipality organised the meeting of IPFC

	decide ward-level budget ceilings		
Tilottama	Obtained the budget ceiling and policy guidelines from the NPC; and decided (by the officers) about the ward-level budget ceiling	Some NGOs and civil society organisations were informed to prepare a list from neighbourhoods	The municipality organised the meeting of IPFC
Resunga	Obtained the budget ceiling and policy guidelines from the NPC; and the Executive Officer decided the ward-level budget ceiling	The municipality itself organised Ward Bhèlas and the IPFC; no consultations at the neighbourhood level	The municipality organised the meeting of IPFC

Source: Field notes and interviews (2014, 2015, 2016)

Regardless of whether planning is analysed as a fourteen-step process or something else, a total of three interrelated stages can be identified here: adapting a macroeconomic framework in stage one; deliberating issues in neighbourhoods and wards in stage two; and making decisions in stage three (Figure 2.1). From the policymaking point of view, these three stages involve multiple activities: incorporating the first two tasks of Table 9.2 in stage one, three to five in stage two, and the sixth one in stage three. In recent times when municipalities were governed by appointed officials, the tasks listed in Table 9.1 were expanded to nine – by increasing the roles of civil society organisations in the planning process. As Figure 4.1 showed in Chapter 4, the expanded tasks were incorporated into each stage of the planning process.

The nine activities embedded separately in the three different stages of planning exhibit some participatory flavours, though the intensity of citizen participation in each stage varies significantly. From the citizen participation point of view, stage two is particularly important as it functions through the creation of informal, semi-formal and formal forums for citizens. As explained in Chapters 5-7, these forums offer varying degrees of participation opportunities to citizens of different types. From the policymaking point of view, however, these three stages are equally important to the extent that each stage contributes to sharing information (between officials and citizens), providing opportunities for officials to consult with citizens and for citizens to engage with officials in the making of local public policies.

To sum up, the available legislative frameworks that were either newly created or enhanced as part of managing the democratic deficit between 2002 and 2016 aim to make planning a

participatory policymaking process. Citizens were not only able to be involved in the planning process as argued in the previous chapter, their involvement was sought in the formulation and implementation, and even in the monitoring and evaluation of local public policies (Field notes, 2014-2016). Nevertheless, there are some obvious questions about the extent to which the involvement of citizens in each of these stages of policymaking (formulation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation) was fully realised, because, as Hallsworth (2011) points out, policymaking processes are generally dominated by technocratic apparatuses and procedures.

Actual activities of planning

This second way to examine the institution of planning is to investigate empirical materials collected and generated in the Butwal municipality, although other partially observed municipalities' activities also provide information on whether municipalities actually follow the legislative framework (Table 9.2). This is an important dimension for scrutinising the planning process because, on the one hand, the legislative framework gave considerable autonomy to municipalities in designing the planning process whereas, on the other hand, several measures to control planning activities were introduced by the central government. The implementation of the planning process in municipalities was seemingly affected by this contradiction. Rai and Paudel (2011) label these contradictions as 'ambiguities'. They claim:

The specific provisions of the Local Self Governance Act (1999) do not provide the lower tiers of governing units with autonomous powers in regard to formulating and implementing development activities (p.7). ... Its Article 50 mentions that Village Development Committees (VDCs) have a responsibility to follow the directives of District Development Committee (DDC) and the National Planning Commission (NPC) when it formulates plans and implements them. In the same way, the DDC is required to follow and respect any of the directives and orders from the central government/NPC (Article 122). Similarly, Article 207 (1 and 2) of the LSGA authorises NPC and central ministries to issue directives and orders to DDC in formulation and implementation of district development plans. Accordingly, the upper governing tiers have powers to control the development activities of lower governing units. Thus, the lower governing units cannot formulate and implement development plans independently and have to follow the directives and orders from higher authorities (p.8).

This statement confirms that the overall functioning of the planning process at the local level was controlled by the central government, though there is no clear understanding about the degree to which the controlling instruments of the central government were effective in

weakening (or strengthening) the legislative framework of the participatory planning process in municipalities. At the outset, two chief controlling instruments were observed in the case-study municipality and other partially observed municipalities: finance and personnel. These two instruments are helpful in claiming that the participatory planning was not being put in play as an autonomous process because of financial and personnel intrusion from the central government.

In financial terms, municipalities needed to obtain budgetary ceiling and other policy related guidelines from the NPC, a central government agency responsible for formulating national development plans, before the commencement of the planning process. The stage one of the planning process, in particular, involved three activities of which the first was to obtain the budget ceiling and policy guidelines from the central government. None of the other partially observed municipalities were autonomous enough to set their own budget ceilings and policy visions irrespective of the legislative statements about their autonomy. Not following the central government's budgetary framework would penalise municipalities which would result in the downgrading of the status of the municipality in terms of its ranking. The ranking was used by the Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission (LBFC) for grant purposes (Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission 2014a).

In terms of personnel, the period of political vacuum between 2002 and 2016 was remarkably detrimental to the exercise of autonomy in municipalities. The political powers of municipalities were handed over to centrally appointed bureaucrats (executive officers) (Government of Nepal 2003). An interviewee who had been working at the local level for over a decade mentioned that, "... executive officers are the representatives of the central government, whose main job is to 'control' us (the municipality) through the utilisation of a range of administrative instruments (Interviewee, local staff #003, 2016)." Moreover, the understanding and capacity of the executive officers would be decisive in handling the controlling instruments of the central government. The more the executive officer was capable of negotiating with the central government departments the more the municipality would benefit from exercising the autonomy that was coded in the LSGA (1999) and its subsequent regulations (Interviewee, local staff #002, 2016).

Observation of the planning process across a few municipalities between the years 2014 and 2016 showed some interesting insights about the degree of autonomy they were exercising in relation to the implementation of their planning process in 2014/15 (Table 9.2). First,

municipalities were seemingly following similar processes though there were some notable differences. For example, in stage one of the planning process, some municipalities were observed to have organised consultative meetings to make decisions about the ward-level budgetary ceiling and the adoption of policy guidelines while others were making such decisions without any consultation.

Secondly, the way Tole Bhèlas and Ward Bhèlas were organised seemed to be different from one municipality to the other. Some municipalities were observed to have organised Ward Bhèlas at the ward level while neighbourhood level discussions were not available in all municipalities. One of the reasons for such an inconsistency was noted as the presence of relatively less institutionalised civil society organisations such as TLOs in the Butwal municipality.

To sum up, the analysis of the legislative framework shows that there were elements of participatory policymaking both in terms of the structure and functions of planning. Although municipalities were observed to be implementing the planning process in accordance with the legislative framework, a range of control mechanisms embedded in the budgetary framework and policy guidelines of the central government were regarded as detrimental in enabling municipalities to implement planning as an autonomous participatory policymaking process. However, a separate analysis is required to establish a causal relationship between control mechanisms embedded with local governance reforms and the extent to which municipalities were affected in implementing planning as an independent participatory policymaking process.

9.2 Policymaking functions of the planning forums

As noted previously, planning forums have dual functions: the first is to provide participation opportunities for citizens of different types (lay people, members of political parties, experts and advocates to name a few); and the second is to engage these participants in various functions of policymaking. This section introduces the empirical materials presented in sections 5.5, 6.5 and 7.5 to analyse what specific functions the planning forums were performing in terms of their relevancy to the making of local public policies and small-scale development programs.

Two perspectives are utilised to analyse the policymaking functions of planning. The first is the examination of different functions of all the three planning forums from the viewpoint

that each forum is involved in performing only one function in the policymaking process. This perspective views Tole Bhèlas as problem identifiers, Ward Bhèlas as alternative developers and the IPFC as the alternative selector, although these functions were observed overlapping.

The second perspective is to see the policymaking function of the planning process in holistic terms. Each forum contributes in refining the problems, developing the alternatives and selecting the solutions although there are some ambiguities about the extent to which the functions of one forum affect the functions of the other. The field notes show that decisions made in Tole Bhèlas contribute to setting up agendas for discussions in Ward Bhèlas, and decisions made in Ward Bhèlas become agendas in the IPFC meeting. This is how each forum is functionally connected to the other.

Identifying problems

Each planning forum is involved in the process of identifying problems although problems identified in each forum were observed to have differing significance for final decision-making. For example, in Tole Bhèlas, participants can raise any of the issues or problems that they think are the most pressing in their neighbourhood but, as observed in the Butwal municipality, there did not seem to be any mechanism to explain whether the issues raised fall (or, do not fall) within the scope of municipal intervention. This suggests the possibility that municipal officials could easily bypass such proposals. Once issues that went beyond the scope of municipal intervention were raised, the other activities of the policy cycle of Tole Bhèlas were naturally affected, hence they risked their proposals being abandoned and not taken to upper-level planning forums.

In Ward Bhèlas, there are clearly two ways to identify problems. The first is to inherit those problems that are explored, developed and prioritised in Tole Bhèlas. Each representative of Tole Bhèlas in the concerned Ward presents these types of problems in the Ward Bhèla with the aim of further deliberation. The second is to generate new problems during deliberation in the Ward Bhèla. It was observed in the case study Ward in the Butwal municipality that invited participants often became involved in defending their proposals with the hope that their proposals would be prioritised for submission to the meeting of the IPFC.

In comparison to Tole Bhèlas and Ward Bhèlas, the meeting of the IPFC does not really become involved in re-examining the problems but it analyses whether the problems identified at the bottom-level forums are genuine, and whether the alternatives presented along with the proposals are feasible. Hence, the problem identification task of the IPFC is analytical, as Edwards (2001, p. 81) defines it in her framework for policy development.

Three key insights can be gained about the problem identification roles of the planning forums. The first is about *who raises* the problems. It is not surprising that it is claimed that not all participants in the planning forums can express themselves because, as Fung (2006) argues, the design of many planning forums does not suit all types of participants. Some choose to actively engage in raising issues, others choose to energetically support or oppose the issues, and still some others choose to remain idle. It was observed in many of the Tole Bhèla and Ward Bhèla meetings in Butwal that the majority of the participants were remaining idle while only those who were seemingly educated, or possibly confident in terms of their public speaking ability, were actively engaged in identifying problems. This triggers a concern about how organisers know whether the issues raised at the forums represent all the participants if a majority of the participants stay passive.

The second insight is about the *definitional issues* of problem identification. Who determines whether the issues raised at different types of planning forums are genuine policy problems is something that was observed as blurred in the case of the Butwal municipality's planning process. In 2014, the shortlisted proposals prepared at Tole Bhèlas consisted of some issues genuinely important to Tole Bhèla participants yet many such proposals were regarded as of less importance in Ward Bhèlas. This reoccurred when the proposals were further escalated to the IPFC meeting. Obviously not all the identified problems can be solved within the scope of existing resources and the capacity of the municipality, hence some form of selection activity is essential. However, there seem to be some ambiguities as to how issues raised at different forums were defined as 'policy problems'.

The third insight is about the *scope of problems*. The problems identified at the bottom-level forums look relatively narrow in their scope as the participants in Tole Bhèlas are only from a small suburb, or a community. As the process progresses, broader and more complex problems appear because (a) upper level forums are entitled to tackle problems that are broader in their scope (geographic coverage, communities and policy areas), and (b) participants in upper level forums are relatively experienced and therefore enlightened in

terms of how they perceive policy problems. In other words, the scope of the problems identified across different planning forums vary significantly notwithstanding the reality that all three forums in diverse degrees contribute to making annual and mid-term public policies at the municipal level.

Developing alternatives

Before delving into the policy development functions of planning forums, it is essential to clarify what it means in the context of Nepal's planning process at the local level. This particular stage of policymaking, development of alternatives, is understood as the work of technocrats, experts and analysts (i.e. deLeon 1990); hence perhaps less is expected from ordinary citizens in this regard. However, this activity was observed as being shared by officials with citizen participants though officials (appointed administrators for the period between 2002 and 2016) obviously played dominant roles. Thus, the purpose of the participatory policy development process in Nepal seems to be to engage ordinary people, particularly the marginalised clusters, in order to ensure that communities can own decisions, and thereby collaborate and partner in the implementation process (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013; see also, National Planning Commission 1992).

Irrespective of each forum's diverse role in developing alternatives, not all the forums were equally empowered to, and capable of, developing alternatives. Several reasons were observed during the meetings of planning forums in 2014 and 2015. These include, for example, (a) participants in Tole Bhèlas were not expected to present ideas about how to solve problems but were asked only about their problems, (b) participants (only invited people) in Ward Bhèlas were asked to present only the list of prioritised problems prepared in Tole Bhèlas, though a project selection and prioritisation committee formed at the Bhèla had some role in suggesting alternatives, and, (c) although the main function of the IPFC is to develop policy and programmatic options to be approved by the municipal council, many members of the IPFC were noted as having less understanding of the policy development process hence they were heavily engaged in discussing fringe projects or issues.

Nevertheless, there is a question of the extent to which participants in the lower forums of planning are engaged in developing policy options. This is an important side to participatory policymaking in the sense that the function of each planning forum is to produce a list of demands and shortlist them on the basis of those criteria already set by the municipal

officials. Discussions among participants in almost all the forums were observed as being crucial in refining their demands (problems) however, it is hard to know whether such activities merit being labelled as a policy development process, or a process of developing alternative solutions²⁴.

In the Tole Bhèla, participants were mostly found to be active in expressing their concerns about public problems but seemed to be less vocal about providing their views on solving such problems. In the Ward Bhèla, participants were observed as having some knowledge about the problems and ways to solve them but they were still found to be lacking the necessary skills for the policy development process. Even the members of the project selection and prioritisation committee in the Ward Bhèla were found to be relying on the project selection criteria issued by the municipality. And, in the IPFC, surprisingly, a few members were genuinely vocal in analysing the problems (that were raised and forwarded through Tole and Ward Bhèlas) by, for example, relating the problems to the overall policy guidelines and macroeconomic frameworks. Presumably due to their long experience of participating in such meetings, or perhaps because of their sense of belonging to the social and political institutions in the municipality, the majority of the IPFC members were observed to be engaging in discussions beyond the project selection criteria (field notes, 2014, 2015).

The alternatives development process requires comprehensive information about policy problems and ideas to solve such problems, as well as technical and analytical skills, it was noted that participants in various types of planning forums lack such prerequisites. The informal forums were found to be operating without many of these preconditions. Municipalities were found to be circulating only a little information on, and more obligatory guidance to, the Tole Bhèlas, hence participants in the Tole Bhèlas were found to be less informed, and less aware of the technical and analytical aspects of the policy development process. The semi-formal forums were relatively better equipped with the required information yet many of the participants (both invited and uninvited) were noted to have fewer analytical skills. The formal forum was observed to be fully informed about the issues, and alternative ways to address them, and to some extent had the necessary power to develop alternatives on its own, however still there was a question of the degree to which the IPFC could overrule the municipal council in the making of decisions. Again, the majority of the participants in the IPFC meeting were seemingly less competent in regard to the policy development process.

What makes it difficult for participants to develop alternatives is not known; however, three procedural aspects can be regarded as responsible. The first is related to the roles of participants. Despite the participatory nature of the planning process, it is unclear why planning forums are designed to enable the participation of ordinary people when ordinary participants cannot play much of a role in the development of policies. From this perspective, planning forums look genuinely participative on the surface, but they are largely perfunctory when it comes to developing policy options.

The second aspect is the pervasiveness of the project selection criteria that apply to all levels of planning forums. Although such criteria help municipal officials to concentrate on the objectives of the planning process – particularly the budget allocation process for targeted populations (women, children and minority communities), having a set of predefined criteria was noted as diminishing the potential for participants to choose alternatives freely. A participant in the Ward Bhèla said:

It is not really a big issue when you ask about who participates and why, and how decisions are made. At the end of the day, the organisers have to choose those projects that fulfil the predetermined criteria that are circulated by the municipality in advance. What is most unfortunate is that stakeholders are not involved in developing such criteria; but are only informed (Interviewee, Ward Bhèla participant #021, 2016).

And, the third aspect is the difficulty in distinguishing between problem identification and the development of alternatives in the planning forum. Although the planning forums are organised in sequence, many of the planning meetings are organised as one-off meetings. Participants are given sufficient opportunity to express their concerns but only a few can continue to follow whether their issues are (or, not) addressed. This limits the ability of participants to stay connected in the successive discussions albeit the claims of the organisers that citizens can continue to participate in upper level forums. From the citizens' point of view, as stated above, planning forums merely provide opportunities for local people to let the organisers know about the problems, or concerns that they think can be resolved by the municipality. In other words, citizens think that their role is to help organisers identify problems. From the official's point of view, on the other hand, planning forums exist not only to identify problems, but they also select and shortlist the most pressing problems for further consideration.

To sum up, considering the policy development process as an analytical task, the planning forums do not provide much strong evidence about claims that citizens participate in the forums to develop local public policies. Except in the case of the IPFC, the functions of planning forums confine ordinary participants to the identification of problems, leaving the most important policymaking function either abandoned or in the hands of municipal officials. In the IPFC, however, much of the meeting time was observed to be consumed in developing alternatives based on the proposals forwarded through the informal and semi-formal forums.

Selection of alternatives

Before examining the alternative selection roles of planning forums, it is essential to understand what is alternative selection in the planning process. Three different sources are valuable here to create definitions about alternative selection: legislative frameworks, the views of municipal officials and the perceptions of ordinary people who participate in different types of planning forums. As noted earlier, neither the LSGA (1999) or the LSGR (2000) exclusively define what alternatives are, neither do the relevant official documents speculate as to how the planning process should allow participants to select alternatives. Nonetheless, these, and several other provisions articulated in other relevant legislation, regulations and guidelines motivate, and perhaps oblige, local officials to enable participants from different planning forums to get engaged in the alternative selection process (i.e. Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission 2014a; Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission 2015; Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013).

Having unclear, or ambiguous legislative arrangements about the alternative selection process means local officials have more prerogative power to play with. As observed in the Butwal municipality, alternatives selected by the IPFC meeting have implications for the annual handbook of local public policies and programs while alternatives selected at Ward Bhèlas only inform the decision-making process of the IPFC. Alternatives selected at the Tole Bhèlas were observed as having only nominal implications for the overall policymaking process.

Municipal officials view the uneven linkages between the alternatives produced at different types forums as creating *the complexity of the decision-making process*, which in their opinion, “ ... can only be handled by a few individuals representing political parties and established TLOs in the IPFC meeting (Interviewee, Local Staff #003, 2016).” In other

words, municipal officials' understanding of the alternative selection process is that many participants in the lower-level planning forums do not grasp the complex and often technical nature of policy problems, hence their role in the alternative selection process is relatively weak. However, municipal officials who dominate the alternative selection process were observed as publicly acknowledging that the actual decisions were mostly based on the problems identified in Tole Bhèlas and Ward Bhèlas²⁵.

Citizens' perspectives of the subject of selecting alternatives is mixed. Those lay people who participate mostly at the Tole Bhèla do not know enough about who makes decision and how they are made. According to a regular Tole Bhèla participant, "Decisions are made by those who are educated, wealthy and politically active (Interviewee, Tole Bhèla participant #003. 2014)." Another participant of a Ward Bhèla said, "Those who are invited by municipal officials in the Ward Bhèla and the IPFC meeting are responsible for making decisions (Interviewee, Ward Bhèla participant #017, 2016)."

These three views of the alternative selection task raise a question about the overall policymaking roles of the forums: do they actually select alternatives? The preliminary answer to this question is both 'yes' and 'no'. Yes, in the sense that all the forums have different roles in selecting alternatives, although clarification is required about (a) the extent to which alternatives selected by each forum are incorporated in the final set of decisions; and also, (b) the degree to which the annual handbook of policy and programs is affected by the alternatives selected at different stages of the planning process. The answer is no in the sense that the function of selecting alternatives is mostly carried out at the IPFC meeting yet selections made by the IPFC need to be approved by the (unelected) council.

However, analysis of the alternative selection process clarifies that lower-level forums are concerned only with preparing a list of small problems i.e. fixing street lights, maintaining water supply, and cleaning streets; hence their role in the selection of alternatives is relatively narrower than that of the upper-level forums. In the Ward Bhèla, although small-scale problems dominate deliberations, organisers often reminded the participants about the budgetary ceiling and policy guidelines. This indicates that even if participants are empowered to select alternatives, the requirement to follow budgetary ceilings and policy guidelines would limit the ability of participants to freely choose them.

The Figure 9.2 below presents a case of how an issue was raised at one of the Tole Bhèlas in the ward number 14 in the Butwal municipality, then forwarded to the relevant Ward

Bhèla for further deliberation, and ultimately got attention at the IPFC meeting. The case provides two insights about the policy development process: the first is about how each forum is involved in developing and selecting policy options throughout the planning process; and the second is the degree to which, and how, alternatives produced at the planning forums are incorporated in the actual decisions.

Figure 9.1 A case of the policy development process

On the 17th of December 2014, a Tole Bhèla was organised by the XXX Tole Lane Organisation in Butwal municipality's ward number 14. A total of 33 individuals participated in the Bhèla where they raised several issues and problems that they thought were the most pressing neighbourhood level problems. A majority of the participants agreed that the problem of fused lamps at many streets of their neighbourhood should be fixed soon. They decided unanimously to put this problem as the most prioritised one in the shortlisted proposals.

On the 7th of January, a Ward Bhèla was organised by the ward committee secretariat in the case study ward in the Butwal municipality. About 120 individuals participated in the Bhèla, most of whom were representing all 25 TLOs. It was interesting to see that a majority of the presenters submitted a problem of street lights though there were only a few of the TLO representatives who had prioritised this as the most pressing collective problem. The organisers did not decide anything on the day but formed a project selection and prioritisation committee to further deliberate the agendas raised in the Ward Bhèla.

The next day, the project selection and prioritisation committee met to shortlist and prioritise the proposals. Members of the committee were fully aware of the proposals so they agreed to put the problem of street lights as one of their shortlisted (but not prioritised) problems to be immediately solved by the municipality.

At the end of February 2015, the Butwal municipality organised a two-day meeting of the IPFC where a total of 36 selected individuals participated. Whilst deliberating the proposals forwarded through Ward Bhèlas, it was reported that some wards in relatively urban areas had raised the issue of fused lamps at their streets. A political representative in the meeting expressed an intellectual opinion on the problem, and proposed that the problem be addressed soon. He provided an alternative; that all TLOs should be given a fixed amount of money to buy bulbs with the responsibility to maintain the lamps. If the TLO members failed to maintain the lamps for the guaranteed (by the bulb company) time, it would be the responsibility of the concerned TLO to replace the other one. The municipality office was proposed as remaining as the monitor. This proposal was overwhelmingly supported by other participants, including the officials working at the municipality office. Finally, it was agreed that the responsibility to manage street lights was given to TLOs, and it should be incorporated in the handbook as a policy decision.

Source: Field notes, 2014, 2015; Annual handbook of policy and programs of Butwal municipality 2015

This case in the Figure 9.2 confirms that bottom-level forums are less influential in suggesting or selecting alternatives, but as the process progresses, the upper level forums can be expected to develop (as we saw in the previous section as well) and select different

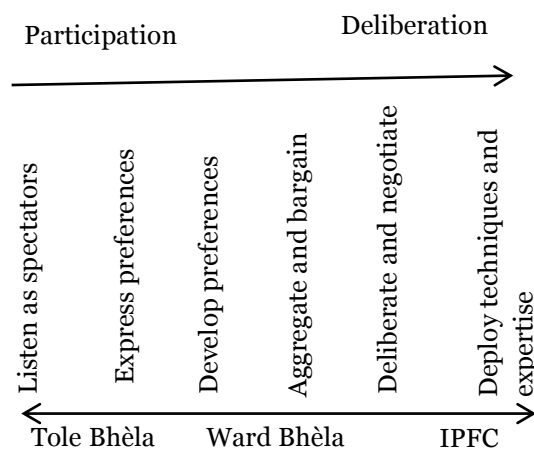
and sometimes innovative alternatives to solve the problems. The alternatives prepared in the IPFC meeting are subject to approval by the municipal council.

9.3 Understanding decision-making styles

Each forum of planning shows an institutional design type that offers avenues for citizens to *interact* and *contest* with each other and often *negotiate* with local officials. In other words, the institutional design of planning features some deliberative flavours to decision-making: participants have opportunities to directly engage with each other in the making of public policies (setting up agendas, developing alternatives, and selecting alternatives), though there are ambiguities as to whether there is any linkage between the level of citizen engagement and the extent to which their engagement impacts actual policies. Additionally, each forum incorporates deliberative ideals for decision-making yet significant variance across and between informal, semi-formal and formal forums persists.

Building upon Fung’s (2006) democracy cube framework, the decision-making styles in the planning forums can be previewed in the following illustration (Figure 9.2). The aim of the illustration, however, is neither to attest nor to challenge Fung’s approximation of the deliberative ideals that define different modes of decision-making. It is to show that different forums of planning are located at different positions on a spectrum.

Figure 9.2 Decision-making styles in the planning forums



Source: adapted from Fung’s (2006) democracy cube framework

Although Figure 9.2 puts the planning forums at different locations on the spectrum, it does not claim that, for example, participants in the IPFC do not express preferences, or participants in Tole Bhèlas do not deliberate or negotiate. Overlaps persist also in terms of

what participants do at different forums, but there remain differences across the forums when it comes to the style of making decisions. These variances can be examined by portraying the roles of participants across all the forums on a spectrum (Figure 9.2). Although the spectrum is devised by Fung (2006) while describing the communication and decision-making roles of participants, the way it progresses from the left to right features some elements of participatory deliberation, an institutional design of the decision-making process which enables citizens to participate and deliberate in multiple forums (i.e. Florida 2017).

In Tole Bhèlas, many of the participants were found to be mere spectators whose reason for participation was to get the benefit of information about ongoing local public policies and small-scale projects. Despite having opportunities to play roles in raising issues and developing them, the actual roles of the participants in Tole Bhèlas were not observed to be sufficient to characterise Tole Bhèlas as effective deliberative forums.

There are two obvious weaknesses of Tole Bhèlas showing why they fail to feature adequate elements of public deliberation as a way of decision-making. The first is the *unclarity about the decision-making styles* in Tole Bhèlas. It was observed in many Tole Bhèlas in the case study Ward in the Butwal municipality that none of the organisers (the TLOs) were aware of how they were going to adopt, or should have gone through, a particular style of decision-making. While decision-making in Tole Bhèlas was about identifying, shortlisting and prioritising the neediest projects for their neighbourhoods, it was observed that the organisers were concerned with the predefined project selection criteria (see Annex 5.1). Additionally, the majority of the participants in Tole Bhèlas were found to be only witnessing, rather than actively participating in, conversations between a few of the elite and the organisers.

The second weakness is related to the *capacity of participants* in exploring, developing and negotiating their demands with the organisers. It was seen that a reasonable number of women and individuals from other social groups were present in Tole Bhèlas, but the majority of them were unable to express their thoughts for a number of reasons. Some of them said that they were too shy to speak in public while others avoided talking because “they thought that their voices were not going be heard (Interviewee, Tole Bhèla participant #016, 2014).” The organisers were supposed to facilitate discussions, but they were found

to be concerned only with the budgetary ceiling and policy guidelines hence their role was noted as less facilitative than informative.

In Ward Bhèlas, invited participants perform two key roles: defending their proposals to their fellow participants, and negotiating their proposals with the organisers. In terms of defending proposals, a process was observed in the case study ward in the Butwal municipality where participants were required to (a) officially register their proposals (b) present their proposals in front of all the participants (c) describe how they prepared their proposals, and (d) argue why their proposals deserved to be selected. These four elements of the proposal were handled in a presentation format, which is insufficient to claim that it is an effective deliberative forum.

In terms of negotiation with the organisers, it was experienced in the same Ward Bhèla that the organisers were less empowered to make decisions. Perhaps to address the gap caused by the absence of electoral politics, the ward secretary was given the responsibility of proposing to form a project selection and prioritisation committee by involving representatives from different social and political organisations. The committee was the ultimate authority at the ward level for deciding which project to be shortlisted and prioritised. The committee organises its meeting in closed-session after the completion of the Ward Bhèla (which was noted as a hindrance for participants of both types, invited and uninvited) to effectively negotiate about their proposals with the organisers.

The decision-making style in the IPFC features some attributes of public deliberation: agendas for discussions are set by participants; issues related to women, children and minority groups are considered seriously; and decisions made at the IPFC are converted into policies once the council approves them. In terms of agenda setting, it was observed in the Butwal municipality that the proposals forwarded through Ward Bhèlas were generally regarded as the points of discussion. However, some members were found to be interested in and vocal on more policy-specific discussions, hence new agendas were also allowed to be tabled for discussion.

In relation to inclusiveness, as analysed in the previous chapter, the IPFC deliberates the proposals in participation with the representatives of women, children and other minorities for whom 35% of the capital budget is reserved. These groups of participants not only participate for the sake of making the IPFC inclusive, but also actively engage in the

deliberative process. Not all the participants in these groups, however, were observed to have the verbal and intellectual abilities to defend their arguments.

Thus, it appeared that while Tole Bhèlas feature some attributes of participatory institutional design, they do not sufficiently consider public deliberation as a style of decision-making. To the maximum extent, decisions were obviously informed by participants of different types, organisers were seen to be selecting and prioritising the demands as per their own judgements. The Ward Bhèlas feature some degree of deliberative decision-making as they provide invited participants some opportunities to defend their proposals, still ordinary participants are not included in the process of selecting and prioritising projects. The IPFC features some useful elements of deliberative decision-making: participants can set agendas for discussions, diverse groups of participants get together, interact and compete whilst deliberating the agendas, and decisions made at the IPFC are generally approved by the council.

Both because of the working procedures and due to the differences in terms of the degree to which planning forums engage citizens in decision-making, the decision-making style in the planning process shows an empirical case of a *from participation to deliberation* spectrum. Citizens merely participate as spectators at the bottom-level forums while, as the process progresses upwards, they gradually develop the skills to deploy reasoned arguments at upper-level forums. Strategies such as the inclusion of women, children and other socially marginalised communities in the decision-making process were observed as motivational reasons for citizens to participate and engage. A compulsory allocation of the budget to these groups of people ensures that citizens continue to participate and engage with the hope that their engagement can impact on actual decisions.

To conclude, all the forums of planning involve citizens of different types in making decisions about local public policies, small-scale developmental projects and local public services. From this point of view, participatory decision-making is the fundamental principle of making decisions in the planning process. Moreover, the analysis of the decision-making styles of planning forums revealed that citizen participation in the planning process was oriented towards the meaningful engagement of various types of participants. In other words, the decision-making styles in the planning forums were observed to be gradually advancing from merely participatory to meaningful deliberative decision-making

forums. Nevertheless, there still remains the question of the degree to which decisions made at Tole Bhèlas and Ward Bhèlas were reflected in final decisions.

9.4 Conclusions

This chapter analysed the planning process in terms of its core function i.e. policymaking. It revealed that the existing legislative frameworks were helpful in characterising the planning process as a participatory policymaking process but municipalities were observed to have less autonomy in implementing some of the key aspects of policymaking. Nevertheless, the institutional design of the planning process seemed to be aligned with the ideal stages of policymaking.

It was noted that all the planning forums play varying roles in identifying problems, developing alternatives and selecting suitable alternatives, there were ambiguities as to why some forums were engaged more in just identifying problems while others were engaged in almost all of these three key activities of policymaking. The Tole Bhèlas were observed as extensively engaged only in identifying the problems; the Ward Bhèlas were found to be proposing some alternatives but the alternative development process there was not sufficiently citizen-friendly; and the IPFC was found to be relatively in better condition as it was observed to be involved in analysing the proposals forwarded through bottom-level forums and thereby making actual decisions about local public policies.

The policymaking activities in the planning forums involve decision-making as one of the main tasks. The way planning forums were making decisions was not observed to be consistent yet they showed some elements of public deliberation as a process of decision-making. The discussion in the relevant section above shows that public deliberation was conceptualised as a way of decision-making yet it was not realised equally in all the planning forums. In the bottom-level forums, organisers were observed to be making decisions in the presence of participants; in the middle-level forums, some form of representative participation was available yet participants were not given opportunities to adequately make decisions; and in the top-level forum, some characteristics of public deliberation were apparent.

Chapter 10

Discussion of citizen participation in policymaking

In the absence of electoral politics between 2002 and 2016, the participatory planning process was the only mechanism at the local level that was designed to offer opportunities specifically to ordinary citizens to participate in the making of annual and short-term local public policies. It is understood that the design of the planning process had features to facilitate participatory policymaking but there was a lack of clarity about the degree to which the participation of citizens influenced the way local public policies were formulated. In spite of this, the planning process has been instrumental in providing opportunities for citizens of different types to participate in the making of local public policies.

Three key findings of the analysis of the municipal planning process in Nepal are important. The first is that both piecemeal and comprehensive local governance reforms (2002-2016) were catalysts in changing the institution of planning at the local level. The second finding is that changes in the institution of planning have expanded the roles of appointed officials from managing planning activities to leading the design and functioning of the planning process. The third finding is that the changed institution of planning has not compromised the fundamental objective of planning though there are variances in terms of providing opportunities for citizens of different types in the making of municipal public policies, and short and mid-term developmental programs at the local level.

This chapter examines these three key findings in light of what has been learnt in chapters 5, 6 and 7 and analysed in chapter 8 and 9 of this thesis. It begins by offering an analysis of the local governance reforms that were supposedly changing the planning process between 2002 and 2016. Then it discusses the implications of such reforms for the roles of municipal officials, internal processes and the decisions of the planning process. This opens up discussion of the changed context of planning from the viewpoint of organisers (or, the appointed officials in municipalities) and the citizens (or, the participants of different types across the three main forums of planning). The concluding section summarises these discussions in light of what is significant to the notion of participatory policymaking at the local level.

10.1 Local governance reforms and planning

Local governance reforms implemented between the years 2002 and 2016 deserve special treatment for the analysis of planning at the local level because most of them aimed at increasing the chances for ordinary people to participate in the local decision-making process. As described in chapter 2 of this thesis, many of these reforms were introduced by the central government to be implemented by municipalities. Obviously, the relationship between the local governance reforms that aimed to increase the chances for citizen participation in local decision-making and the actual outcomes of such reforms is difficult to assess, as Halligan (1997) puts it, “the relationship between reform objectives and outcomes can be difficult to establish where reform has been comprehensive and ongoing.” Following the concept of arenas for comprehensive reforms suggested by Halligan (2013), local governance reforms of the past decade in Nepal can be characterised as comprehensive because they focused on both internal processes (intra-level) of municipal governance as well as external relationship (inter-level) between municipalities and the central government (Table 10.1).

Table 10.1 Local governance reforms: focus, aims and scope

Reform focus	Aims	Scope
Internal processes	(a) Delegate power and roles of elected entities to appointed officials	(a) Central government and municipalities
	(b) Improve management processes to facilitate participatory decision-making	(b) Municipalities
External relationships	(a) Introduce performance-based grant systems	(a) Central government and municipalities
	(b) Collaborate with civil society organisations to make and implement local public policies	(b) Municipalities

Source: Government of Nepal (2003) Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission (2013) (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013) (Local Governance Community Development Program 2013)

In terms of internal processes, local governance reforms of the past decade have aimed to delegate power, roles and responsibilities to appointed officials. The Local Self Governance Act (1999) assigns these power and roles to elected institutions such as the municipal

council. One clearly visible implication of these reforms is that they transformed the roles of bureaucrats to a mixture of both political and managerial. Consequently, the institution of planning was not only implemented by appointed officials, but they were entrusted with designing organisational structures and their processes to facilitate citizen participation in the planning process.

Secondly, the central government was implementing reforms that would maintain the relationship between municipalities and the central government on the one hand, while strengthening relationships between communities and municipalities on the other. The provision of measuring minimum conditions and the performance of municipalities by the central government was aimed to distribute both conditional and unconditional grants thereby establishing a financial relationship with municipalities (Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission 2017). The aim of encouraging municipalities to collaborate with civil society organisations in the making and implementation of local public policies is understood as a way of maintaining a functional relationship between communities and municipalities (Huntington *et al.* 1999). Because of these collaborative arrangements, it was observed in Butwal that communities were actively engaged in identifying and developing their needs while municipal officials were meaningfully partnering with stakeholders in selecting and implementing necessary projects.

Three key aspects of the planning process need to be analysed when it comes to what changes the reforms actually caused: organisations, process, and decisions (Table 10.2). These can collectively be known as institutional changes, the extent to which changes in the planning process in recent times have impacted on the organisational structures, procedural aspects and policy and programmatic decisions. In terms of organisations, neighbourhood level deliberative forums were created; ward level Ward Bhêlas were enhanced; and the municipal level IPFC was revitalised. In terms of processes, municipal officials were empowered to design the institution of the planning process. The community-based organisations were streamlined to work as official partners of the municipality to host, or lead public deliberations at various levels. In terms of decisions, all the planning forums would play different roles in exploring the demands of communities, developing such demands as feasible alternatives and selecting the most suitable alternatives to be decided/approved by the municipal council.

Table 10.2 Changes in the planning process

Changes	Initial setup	Changes
Organisational structures	Ward committee secretariat, municipal board (led by the Mayor) and the municipal council	Tole Bhèlas below the ward committee secretariat and the IPFC below the municipal council were created
Procedural aspects	Elected leaders would organise consultations across different wards	Citizens of different types are enabled to be engaged at Tole Bhèlas, Ward Bhèlas and the IPFC
Policy and program decisions	Annual and other short-term policies and programs, vision papers	Collaborative policy-making and implementation of annual and short-term developmental programs

Source: Local Self Governance Act (1999), Regulations (2000) and field notes 2015, 2016

As described earlier, changes in the planning process aimed for both strengthening planning forums as well as empowering citizens in the local policymaking process. The introduction and revitalisation of Tole Bhèlas at the neighbourhood level and Ward Bhèlas at the ward level are examples where citizens of different types were observed to be participating mostly without any hurdle. These entities clearly show, and support the argument, that local governance reforms in the past decade have focused on creating *informal methods* for enabling the participation of lay people, semi-formal methods for encouraging the participation of both lay and relatively expert people. Moreover, reforms aimed for strengthening planning forums enhanced *formal methods* for ensuring the wider representative participation of people who belong to diverse communities, groups and classes.

In terms of empowering citizens, it was noted that planning forums were made accessible, understandable and transparent though there were exception in the case of the IPFC (Table 10.3). Tole Bhèlas were designed to encourage the participation of lay people in neighbourhood-level planning forums who would generally participate as self-selected participants. Ward Bhèlas were structured in a way that cautiously selected participants would represent a range of issues and interests. Additionally, there was a recognition of the participation of self-selected participants in the Ward Bhèla. The IPFC, however, was organised to offer participation opportunities to selected individuals only though they were seemingly representing diverse policy areas, issues and interests.

Table 10.3 Varieties of participation methods across planning forums

Participation methods	Planning forums	Organiser	Scope	Participants
Self-selection	Tole Bhèla	Civil society organisations	Neighbourhoods	Lay people
Self-selection and criteria-based selection	Ward Bhèla	Ward committee secretariat	Wards	Mixture of lay and relatively experienced and educated people
Criteria-based selection	IPFC	Municipality office	Municipality as a whole	Nominated representatives

Source: field notes 2014-2016

Table 10.3 shows differences across informal, semi-formal and formal planning forums. These differences are based on the organiser, scope, method of participant selection and the type of participants. While all planning forums are organised for the same purpose, it is interesting to note that there were some significant discrepancies across these three. For example, Tole Bhèlas in neighbourhoods involved self-selected lay people as their participants, Ward Bhèlas in wards invited certain participants by using specified criteria although uninvited participants were also observed as participating, and the IPFC in the municipality allowed only selected participants.

Interestingly, there was a common element of citizen participation within these discrepancies: the innovativeness. The term innovation, as Smith (2009) defines it in the context of participatory processes, those processes which are specifically created or developed to increase and deepen citizen participation by challenging the traditional methods of citizen participation²⁶. From this viewpoint, local governance reforms have revitalised Tole Bhèlas and the Ward Bhèlas so as to *deepen* citizen participation although there is a question of how deepen is understood in the context of the democratic deficit at the local level in Nepal. If the inclusion of traditionally marginalised communities and groups in the process of planning (as analysed in chapters 8) is a way of deepening citizen participation in decision-making, these forums are obviously contributing to deepen citizen participation.

Two elements of the IPFC were relatively close to participatory innovation. The first is to regard IPFC as a deliberative forum (as explained in Chapter 7). Participants in this deliberative forum consist of those individuals who claim to represent a particular cause or interest in a given municipality. Representation of diverse policy areas, interests and issues in the IPFC can be regarded as another way of defining deepening of participation although, as explained earlier, there was a question of the degree to which the IPFC members were genuine representatives of citizens. The second element associates with what roles did the IPFC played in the absence of electoral politics. In many ways the functions of IPFC were innovative as participants were empowered to make decisions although decisions recommended by the IPFC members needed to be approved by the council.

10.2 The implications of reforms for participatory planning

The absence of electoral politics between 2002 and 2016 significantly changed the original institutional design of planning. Three key changes are distinguished. The first concerns the *roles of municipal officials*. In each of the three stages of planning, municipal officials were observed to be playing decisive roles in (a) adapting policy and budgetary guidelines circulated by the central government at the first stage, (b) determining the number, types and processes of public deliberations across various locations in the municipality at the second stage, and (c) articulating and translating public demands into actual policies and programs at the third stage. Although other actors in municipal governance were also involved in each of these stages, the argument here is that appointed officials were the most influential actors in the planning process.

The second change is in the *internal processes* of planning. As explained in previous chapters, the internal forums of planning are hierarchically structured; public deliberation is dominated by administrative rules i.e. participants must follow policy guidelines and budgetary ceilings; and decision-making processes are predominantly led by a set of criteria. It is interesting to note that none of these elements of the participatory planning process are exclusively coded in any of the obligatory statutes, meaning the municipal officials are relatively autonomous in designing the core processes of the planning process: organisation, deliberation and decision-making.

And the third change is in the *output of the planning process*. Based on the Local Self Governance Act (1999), the ultimate product of the annual planning process at the local level is the ability to make *political decisions* about local policies, development programs

and service-related reforms. However, as the annual handbooks of local public policies and programs of Butwal municipality in 2015 and 2016 show, there are fewer political decisions and more administrative decisions about local public policies. Incremental budgeting and the pervasiveness of less innovative alternatives are the two aspects of the decisions that characterise the output of the planning process as a set of administrative decisions.

In the context of the political vacuum at the local level for over a decade, these three changes are taken as attributes of the planning process that are helpful in defining planning as an administrative process. In the Butwal municipality, though there is a scarcity of reliable evidence, centrally appointed administrators were observed as influential in designing the organisation of the planning process from the early years of its establishment in 1959 (Interviewee, former mayor #001, 2015). Because Butwal has historically been the residence of relatively wealthy businessmen and literate people, both politicians and local administrators in the municipality have been, as witnessed by a senior citizen, influenced by rich and educated people (Interviewee, IPFC Participant #007, 2016). These experiences may provide some clues about the dominant roles of appointed officials in the making of local public policies through the participatory planning process.

The political vacuum in the later period of local governance further pushed the bureaucracy to the forefront of local governance processes. All the municipalities in Nepal were governed by appointed officials for about 14 years with the responsibility of working on behalf of the municipal council and board, though such arrangements were initially thought to be contingent and temporal (Government of Nepal 2003). Handing over political roles to appointed officials transformed municipalities from autonomous self-governing political entities to administrative agencies of the central government. In spite of it being a relatively political process, the participatory planning process was also affected to the extent that its institutional designs, internal processes and the linkages between planning activities and actual decisions were subject to administrative officials' discretion (see Pandeya 2015, for instance).

Looking at similar processes in other developing countries, it seems that political parties initiate the ideas for participatory processes, and later (if they win the elections) design the processes in such a way that politicians remain in charge and bureaucracies play only managerial roles. For example, the participatory planning campaign in the Indian state of Kerala was initially launched by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in 1996, which has

expanded to over 1200 local governments in Kerala alone (Isaac & Heller 2003; Williams 2008). Although administrative officials play key roles in the management of the planning campaign in India, they are not for example in charge of the institutional design.

In Brazil, the Workers' Party designed and implemented a participatory process that was based on the constitutionally guaranteed financial autonomy of municipalities (Smith 2009). It is reported that, prior to the commencement of participatory budgeting in 1989, Brazilian local governments were notorious for their clientelist and corrupt behaviour which was challenged by the political leadership of the Workers' Party. The implementation of participatory budgeting in Brazil is now institutionalised as the most celebrated case of participatory processes (Wampler 2012). Political leadership still plays key roles in implementing the process but as the process has been so stalwartly institutionalised, it seems less important whether appointed bureaucrats or elected politicians take the lead.

These two cases show that the political leadership generally initiates and leads participatory processes, because politicians can challenge the existing decision-making domains traditionally understood as the areas of technocrats, elected officials, judges and experts. However, the experience of Nepal's participatory planning process (2002-2016) suggests that the policymaking process at the local level was steered by the appointed bureaucrats, although the root of Nepal's planning process was conceived by politicians in the 1960s. Optimists about administratively steered participatory processes would see *hopes* that administrators can equally also protect the democratic rights of citizens to participate in the decision-making that potentially affects them (Warren 2009). Pessimists, on the other hand, would believe that as administrators have their own motivations and obligations to organise such processes, they are unlikely to achieve the political objectives of the participatory processes (Cupps 1977; Fischer 2016b; Yang 2005).

Citizen participation in administratively run participatory processes is not a new fashion. Ganuza and Baiocchi (2012) argue that many of the participatory processes at the local government level across the world have been introduced as part of administrative reforms. It is no surprise to see that the latter period of Nepal's participatory planning process was revitalised as part of the local governance reforms (Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013). These reforms have specifically envisioned the institutionalisation of the planning process as a *policy instrument*, a process to make connections between political actors (technocrats, elected officials, judges and experts) and civil society (the organised

form of civil societies, interest groups and minority groups/communities) (i.e. Lascoumes & Le Gales 2007).

As an administratively run policy instrument to formulate local public policies, Nepal's planning process at the local level inherently has unique structural and procedural features. In terms of structures, as explained in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis, three different forums are structured hierarchically, enabling citizens of different types to participate in the making of local public policies. Although governmental processes are often organised in hierarchical settings, the design of the planning process in a hierarchical structure seems to be aimed at facilitating bottom-up and top-down processes. The views and demands of the ordinary public flow from bottom-level planning forums to the top, and policy and budgetary frameworks flow from the top down.

In terms of procedures, municipalities enjoy considerable autonomy in selecting participants, organising deliberations and making decisions. Although the local administrators are obviously the key designers of such procedures, it was observed in the Butwal municipality that a range of consultative meetings were organised by administrators to obtain the views (on whom to select as participants, where and how to organise deliberations and how to make decisions) of other actors such as unelected politicians, leaders of civil society organisations and interest group representatives. A range of obligatory administrative measures were adopted to select participants, organise deliberations and make decisions. These include: specifying the type of individuals to select as participants; methods to conduct the meetings of Tole Bhèla and the Ward Bhèla; and criteria to select and prioritise demands. From the viewpoint of organisers, these measures were adopted to make the planning process consistent across all Toles and Wards while ensuring the effectiveness of the planning process. However, there did not appear to be any way in which such measures could be justified as facilitating the participation of ordinary people in the planning process.

10.3 Potential for and limitations of participatory policymaking

The inherent philosophy of participatory planning is to enable decision-making mechanisms for citizens to participate in and influence decisions. Irrespective of its administrative design type, as explained earlier, the institution of the planning process shows both potential and limitations for realising participatory policymaking at the local level. The interview data and observational notes of the field study reveal that the organisers (appointed municipal

officials) and participants (citizens of different types involved at various levels/forums in the planning process) unanimously view the planning process as an avenue for participatory policymaking while acknowledging several differing limitations. This section analyses these views by categorising them into two broad aspects of planning: process and outputs (Table 10.4). The underlying meaning of Table 10.4 is that both organisers and participants recognise that each aspect of planning has potential and limitations for participatory policymaking.

The views of organisers

The organisers can be distinguished at various levels of planning: neighbourhood, ward and municipal. Although perceptions of the processes and output of planning can differ among individuals at one or multiple levels, the interview materials generated for this thesis confirm that *organisers generally believe that the process has helped broaden the decision-making domain of the municipality*. The observation of the planning process in the Butwal sub-metropolitan city showed that traditionally marginalised communities and groups of people were encouraged to participate in the process. The mandatory provision of allocating a total of 35% of the capital budget to women, children and minorities was noted as a contributory factor to broadening the decision-making domain.

Table 10.4 Views of organisers and participants

Views	Process	Outputs
Organisers	<p><i>Potential</i> Broadens the decision-making domain of the municipality to marginalised groups and communities</p> <p><i>Limitations</i> Lengthy, hierarchical and multilevel process of decision-making</p>	<p><i>Potential</i> Decisions can be claimed as of decent quality and legitimate</p> <p><i>Limitations</i> Project selection criteria, policy guidelines and budgetary frameworks limit the possibility to freely articulate policy decisions</p>
Participants	<p><i>Potential</i> Offers mostly unrestricted opportunities to citizens for participating in the decision-making</p>	<p><i>Potential</i> A greater range of civil voices is reflected in the local public policies</p>

	<p><i>Limitations</i></p> <p>Key decision-making forum is limited – ordinary citizens cannot participate</p>	<p><i>Limitations</i></p> <p>There is no guarantee that organisers will include citizens’ voices in the actual policy decisions</p>
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Source: field notes and interview data, 2014-2018

Regardless of such potential, the municipal level organisers were particularly worried about the lengthy process of planning (more than three months). As analysed in Chapter 8, the planning forums operate in hierarchical structures which provide various opportunities for different types of citizens at different levels; but at the same time, demand that the organisers to be engaged in all the planning forums. All the planning forums are institutionalised in such a way that Ward Bhèlas need to wait until all the Tole Bhèlas are organised across all the relevant areas in a ward. The IPFC meeting cannot be organised until the ward committee secretariats complete organising Ward Bhèlas. In terms of making decisions, it was seen to be a lengthy process because the organisers of each of the forums were required to create an environment conducive to deliberation of the proposals.

In terms of the output of the planning process, organisers of various planning forums believe that the process is instrumental in producing quality decisions. It was noted that the contents of the annual handbook of local public policies and programs in Butwal sub-metropolitan city (2015) were predominantly identified, developed and prioritised by ordinary citizens at the bottom-level forums²⁷. Although the IPFC plays a considerable role in filtering the issues raised at Ward Bhèlas and Tole Bhèlas, it was observed that the organisers of the IPFC were cautious about excluding any issues in the decision-making process that emerged out of the planning process. Their belief was that issues raised and developed through bottom-level planning forums were genuinely demanded by ordinary citizens, hence they deserved to be labelled as valuable and legitimate decisions (Interviewee, local staff #002, 2016).

Irrespective of the good intentions of the organisers, particularly at the level of IPFC, it was noted that the pervasiveness of the policy guidelines, project selection criteria and ward-level budgetary ceilings were the three main procedural elements of planning that were potentially hindering the making of good quality decisions (Table 10.5). In terms of policy guidelines, planning forums were observed to be confined in their decisions by the boundaries of objectives set out in the policy guidelines circulated by the central government in advance. It was observed that organisers of planning forums were obliged to follow the

guidelines; otherwise decisions made by all planning forums would not be approved by the executive officer (Interviewee, local staff #002, 2016).

Moreover, it was observed that participants in various planning forums were required to make suggestions based on project selection and prioritisation criteria as well as the budgetary ceiling. For example, following the requirements set out by the Local Bodies' Resource Mobilisation Guidelines (2013), municipal officials had to allocate a total of 15% of the capital budget to programs that directly benefited women; but in reality such a provision was difficult to attain mainly because of the project selection criteria. It was observed that the criteria were too subjective and sometimes ambiguous to the extent that organisers could easily interpret them otherwise (field notes, 2015). One participant in the Ward Bhèla explained, "... If participants did not have project selection criteria imposed on them, discussions held in the Ward Bhèla would be much more meaningful (Interviewee, Ward Bhèla participant #017, 2016).

Table 10.5 Limitations to good quality decision-making

	Statutory requirements	Difficulties in reality
Policy guidelines	Municipalities must formulate those policies that are consistent with the objectives of national development plans as well as aims of the sectoral policies (health, education etc).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The LSGA provides some form of autonomy to municipalities about the local decision-making, but the reforms in local governance obliged municipalities to formulate policies and programs in accordance with policy guidelines. • Although municipal officials were cautious about objectives of the sectoral policies of the central government, they were quite unclear about how and in which way municipal policies and programs would impact on or contribute to attaining such objectives.
Project selection criterial	Preference should be given to those proposals that aim to (a) facilitate collaborative policy implementation, and (b) advance the lives of women, children and minorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no clear rules to help those stakeholders who were financially unable to collaborate with municipalities to implement certain projects. • The project selection criteria were subjective hence both organisers and elite participants were manipulating the

		criteria to influence the 35% of the reserved budget.
Ward-level budgetary ceiling	Each ward committee secretariat must be allocated a certain amount of the capital budget.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although the allocation of a budget ceiling to wards was helpful for participatory deliberations at neighbourhood and ward level forums, the tiny amount of the ward-level budget (compared to the overall municipal budget ceiling) was detrimental to producing good quality decisions. This was important because developmental needs and social problems to be addressed through that budget were overwhelmingly greater.

Source: Local Self-Governance Act 1999 and its regulations, Field notes 2014, 2015, 2016

The views of participants

The organisation of participatory planning across three interrelated forums involves different actors, each of whom might have differing perceptions about the process and contents (or, decisions). Consequently, it is hard to generalise, or draw conclusions about the degree to which participants view the planning process as a participatory policymaking institution at the local level. Complexity is, as was clear from some interview materials, generated when some participants especially at the upper level planning forums said, "... the planning process should be understood as a means, hence we should scrutinise the extent to which it is instrumental in providing opportunities to ordinary citizens for participating in the decision-making process. Because the making of local public policies inherently requires technocrats and experts to play big roles, ordinary citizens should not feel sad about why their demands were not incorporated in the actual policy decisions (Interviewee, IPFC participant #008, 2016)."

The collated interview materials actually suggest that ordinary citizens at the neighbourhood level (Tole Bhêlas) were relatively more optimistic about *process* (the organisational arrangements and their processes) while they were observed to be overtly pessimistic about *decisions* (contents of the annual handbook of policies and programs). This is an interesting finding as it raises the question of why citizen participants in lower and often informal forums are less optimistic about the fate of decisions. Although the existing literature is aware of this particular view, one of the potential reasons for such pessimism about

decisions is because of the disconnection between what is raised at the forum and what is eventually decided (Font *et al.* 2016).

Table 10.6 *Views of IPFC participants of the planning process*

Group	Views	Explanation
1	Openness of forums	Tole Bhèlas and Ward Bhèlas are open for all who want to participate.
2	Officials' obligation	Organisers must offer participation opportunities to different types of citizens.
3	Participation experience	Many IPFC participants have either participated in Tole Bhèlas and Ward Bhèlas or observed the process in different capacities.

Source: Field notes (2015, 2016) and interview materials

In contrast, it is interesting to notice that participants in more formal forums were more optimistic about decisions than process. Several reasons were explored as to why participants in the IPFC were relatively unconcerned about the process (Table 10.6). First, many of the IPFC participants were aware that bottom-level forums are open to all. Their views stress the fact that when planning forums are open to all, *the process itself becomes participatory* (Interviewee, IPFC participant #004, 2015). Secondly, some participants in the IPFC understand that the institutional design and processes are predominantly determined by appointed officials in the municipality concerned. Although appointed officials are always bound by legislation or other rules, as this group of participants believes, *they cannot put any hurdle before any citizens to prevent them from participating* (Interviewee, IPFC participant #008, 2016). And finally, a small group of participants in the IPFC mentioned that either they have participated or observed Tole Bhèlas and the Ward Bhèla. They believe, “The more you go down to bottom-level forums, the more you will find wider participation opportunities. You will not see any problem with the process (Interviewee, IPFC participant #007, 2016).”

To sum up, the perceptions of citizen participants of the planning in terms of process and output are mixed. The key message is that participants in the bottom-level planning forums are relatively less hopeful that their voices will be incorporated in the decisions while they are happy to be involved in the process because they think that the planning process itself is an opportunity to become informed about municipal budgets, policies and future

orientations. In contrast, participants in the upper-level forums are more focused on decisions because they believe that their engagement in the process produces actual policy and program decisions.

The analysis now turns to examine these two differing and juxtaposed views, and how these views can impact on the potential to foster planning as a participatory policymaking process at the local level. The following four key points are helpful in examining the causes and consequences of participants' views about the planning process.

View 1: Planning forums incorporate ordinary citizens at the bottom-level and then focus on involving elite citizens as the process progresses upward. In the absence of formal rules for selecting participants and specific requirements for deliberations, the organisers of the informal forums at the neighbourhood level focus on inviting ordinary people. In contrast, the Ward Bhèla are guided by the formal rules set out by the municipality although the organisers are given autonomy in selecting participants and setting the rules for deliberation. In the IPFC, both the participant selection process and deliberation take place more systematically than in the other forums as the function of the IPFC is to produce a list of recommended policy and program proposals to be approved by the municipal council.

The message of such a discrepancy in terms of participant selection and deliberation across the planning forums is that empowered forums are more elite dominated hence they mean a limited space for ordinary citizens to influence the making of local public policies. The more the process progresses upwards, the more the ordinary people lose the potential to influence both the process and the content of the planning process.

View 2: If the views of citizens are not included in the actual decisions, or at least they are not informed why their views were not responded to, they start to become cynical about the planning process. This argument is particularly expressed by those who used to participate in the planning process, but have stopped participating in any planning activity in recent years. In this sense, they are non-participants but still they represent a group which is obviously affected by the policies or programs that are carried out by the municipality through the participatory planning process.

The participatory planning process, as observed in the sub-metropolitan city of Butwal, does not seem to include any strategy to foster the participation of those who are relatively pessimistic about the process and the output of the planning process. A ward secretary in

Butwal points out that there are a group of people who have stopped participating in any of the planning forums despite many official requests to participate (Interviewee, local staff #001, 2015). The reason is that the planning process does not have any mechanism to inform citizens about why some of their views/demands were, or were not, acted on.

View 3: Representative participants in the upper level forums are more concerned about what decisions are made, rather than how decision-making takes place. This view represents a gap between what ordinary participants understand at the lower level forums and what the selected representatives understand about the planning process. As we saw in the previous chapters, ordinary citizens like to participate in the bottom-level forums because they believe the process of planning is an opportunity for them to participate (in the process) and influence (the decisions) of appointed officials in the municipality. They are faithful to the process regardless of the considerable gap in terms of the degree to which their demands/opinions are (not) incorporated in actual policy decisions. In other words, process matters considerably to the participants at the bottom-level forums.

The key message from this view is that elite participants' interest is more on the content, hence they do not intervene in the way problems are identified or deliberated, but on what issues are raised and picked up at different planning forums. It could be a challenging task for the organisers to balance these two contrasting concerns.

View 4: Process matters much more than decisions to some participants; while others believe that decisions are more important than processes. Although this seems very like the previous points of view, there is a difference between views 3 and 4. The interviews suggest that there are individual differences in terms of how citizens prioritise the importance of process and decisions. Even within a single forum, some are vocal about *what* is raised while many others are interested in *how* the issue is raised. None of the people in these two categories are either wrong or right; the message is that individual participants have differing understandings and foci when they are involved in the making of local public policies and programs.

10.4 Conclusions

The discussion in this chapter highlighted that the planning process has evolved as a participatory policymaking process, although there was some lack of clarity as to what extent citizens can influence the institutions and processes of policymaking. Local

governance reforms introduced after 2002 made significant changes in the polity, politics and policy of the planning process. In turn, implementation of the planning processes in the changed context of local governance resulted in them being an important mechanism for participatory policymaking.

One of the important implications of reforms is the changing roles of both organisers and participants in the planning process. Although many of the reform measures were introduced to help appointed bureaucrats in municipalities to organise the planning process in a somewhat regular basis every year, they were observed as contributory in changing the organisations and processes of planning. Apparently, the changes were catalysts in transforming planning forums from relatively traditional junctions for elites to make local decisions (see chapter 4.1) into innovative participatory forums.

Despite several potential to offer participation opportunities to citizens of different types, both officials and participants viewed planning forums both optimistically and pessimistically. The views of officials suggest that planning forums were generally helpful in reaching to diverse communities, but they were disappointed with the lengthy, costly and hierarchical organisational structure of planning. Citizens participants, on the other hand, considered planning as an authentic platform to explore and solve their problems with collective efforts. They were, however, cynical about the actual decision-making. In other words, while planning was generally favourable to both officials and citizens, both were relatively unhappy with its institutional design and some of the operational procedures.

Chapter 11

Conclusion

This thesis has examined participatory planning, a local level policymaking mechanism in Nepal, to understand how the planning process was organised in the absence of electoral politics at the local level for over a decade. The focus of the research was a municipal planning process organised in the Butwal municipality. It aimed to understand if and how citizens participated in the making of local public policies, and small-scale development projects.

This chapter concludes the thesis. It begins with a summary of how the research was carried out. In the second section, general findings of the research are presented. Then it moves on to discussing the key contributions of this research. Next it shows the limitations of this research followed by showing the scope for future research.

11.1 Researching citizen participation in Nepalese local governance

A single-case with a multiple-embedded units of analysis approach to research design was adopted in this thesis to understand if and how the changed context of participatory planning facilitated citizen participation in local policymaking. An analytical framework was devised to analyse two dimensions of the planning process: institutional design to gain understanding about what structures and process of planning were developed to offer participation opportunities to citizens; and policymaking as a function of planning to understand how structures and processes of planning were (or not) helpful to formulate local public policies and small-scale development programs. Data were gathered mainly through semi-structured interviews conducted for two years in 2015 and 2016 with the maximum focus on the knowledge gained through observation of planning processes in 2014/15 in Butwal municipality.

It was a stated objective of this research to incorporate a process-centric approach to analyse the municipal planning process in Nepal. The purpose of adopting this approach was to avoid difficulties such as, *inter alia*, complexities in establishing causal relationships between inputs (resources), process (participatory decision-making) and output (results of the process) and also finding and obtaining the necessary data (Fischer 2010; Osmani 2007). A process-oriented analytical framework has therefore been devised to analyse Nepal's planning as a *process* of policymaking.

As stated in the literature review chapter of this thesis, most of the empirical evidence about citizen participation in developing countries is generated in relatively successful cases of participatory processes. Acknowledging the difficulty in determining what constitutes successful participatory processes, this research was based on a municipality which had been labelled as relatively a successful municipality in terms of achieving minimum conditions and performance measures (Local Bodies' Fiscal Commission 2015). The Butwal sub-metropolitan city had been ranked as one of the top five highest performing municipalities since 2012, which provided a strong basis for selecting the case of participatory planning in a high performing municipality in Nepal.

Determining the unit of analysis was, however, a significant methodological challenge from two distinct perspectives of the institutional design of planning. First, selecting either one, two, three or the mixture of more than one stage of planning, or all stages of planning as units of analysis was a difficult choice. The three stages of planning were selected as its core analytical dimensions although the relative focus has been on the activities in stages two and three because they feature the most important aspects of participation and policymaking (see Table 4.1). The second challenge was to determine which particular organisational arrangement of planning was important to answer the main research question. Obviously, the analysis of three different forums (chapters 5, 6 and 7) provided insights on how each forum facilitated the participation of ordinary citizens in the making of local public policies. The analysis suggests that each of the planning forums offer elements for a comparative analysis. This research, however, has taken them as multiple embedded units of the case (Baxter & Jack 2008).

Since planning in Nepal's municipality is a government-sponsored participatory process, this thesis has recognised several methodological challenges in getting full and reliable data to support its claims. There were some significant issues in accessing data about/from a range of planning forums although efforts were made to obtain actual and reliable data (see chapter 3.10). Accessing data from Tole Bhèlas, in particular, was difficult as many of them in the case study ward were organised on the same day which made it impossible to attend all at the same time.

11.2 General findings of the research

Two dimensions of the planning process were examined: organisational structures and functions. With the first category, the aim was to understand the organisational arrangement

of planning. It is understood that three different yet interrelated planning forums: Tole Bhèlas, Ward Bhèlas and the IPFC were created to offer opportunities to diverse types of citizens for participating in the planning process. With functions, the objective was to get insights into the roles of such arrangements in making local public policies, short and long-term development plans and small-scale development programs. While each forum was dedicated to identifying public policy problems, developing alternatives, and shortlisting and prioritising alternatives to solve the problems, there were variances in terms of their actual influence in the making of final decisions.

The analysis of the planning process shows that local governance reforms have substantially changed the organisational structure and processes to adapt planning, so it can be steered by appointed officials. The changes have resulted in the creation of three diverse types of planning forums for citizens to participate in the making of local public policies and development programs. Although each of these planning forums perform similar functions, each varies significantly in terms of who participates, how decisions are made and the extent to which decisions made in the individual planning forum are included in the annual handbook of local public policies and programs. These variances, in turn, have some general implications for the study of Nepal's planning processes. These include: (i) the planning process being structured in a hierarchical institutional design; (b) bottom-level forums in the hierarchy being more open than upper-level forums for citizens to participate; (c) the more the process progresses the more it becomes formal; and (d) semi-formal and formal forums being more conducive than informal forums to inclusive and representative citizen participation.

Three key lessons are learnt from the analysis of the revised structure and process of planning in Nepal. First, although local governance reforms introduced between 2002 and 2016 were top-down, they contributed to changing the institutional design and processes of planning. Secondly, such changes have transformed the roles of appointed officials from managers to leaders in the planning process but there is a lack of clarity about to what extent changes obliged appointed officials to be accountable to local communities. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, both the changed institutional design of the planning process and the changing roles of appointed officials have widened the scope for citizens of different types to actively participate in the local policymaking process in municipalities.

11.3 The contribution of the research

This thesis has examined the participatory planning process at the local level in Nepal, particularly in a context where the intended organisational and procedural arrangements for citizen participation were defunct. From this viewpoint, the research has contributed significantly to broadening the empirical knowledge about Nepal's participatory planning in terms of how the planning process was organised in the absence of electoral politics. While analysing Nepal's planning process at the local level, a range of research gaps were encountered such as the lack of an analytical framework to assess participatory policymaking. Consequently, an analytical framework was devised to pursue the objectives of this research which advances the conceptual understanding of the assessment of participatory policymaking institutions and processes at the local level. The findings indicate that local governance reforms initiated by the central government were catalysts in changing the institutions and process of planning during the absence of electoral politics at the local level, and that such changes were conducive to engaging citizens in the making of local public policies. The following are the specific contributions the research has made.

Empirical contributions

This research is the first academic study to generate primary data on the planning process in the Butwal municipality when municipalities were run in the absence of electoral politics. The databank prepared for the sole purpose of analysing Butwal's planning process is rich in terms of how the institutional design of planning was contributing to operationalise participatory processes at its Wards and Toles when there were no elected authorities in power in the case study municipality. Although the collected data has its own limitations in terms of its type (qualitative) and scope (only a few Tole Bhêlas and some Ward Bhêlas in different locations), municipal officials in the relevant municipality will particularly benefit.

The empirical findings are significant in two main ways to the policy and practice of participatory planning in Nepal. In terms of policy implications, the findings suggest that although local governance reforms of the past decade were vocal about introducing and enhancing participatory decision-making at the local level, reform measures were observed to be inadequate for empowering municipalities to implement the planning process in accordance with their local circumstances. The message of this finding is timely and appropriate for reformers as the country has moved towards a federal structure of

governance where the role of federal government in introducing local governance reforms will continue.

In terms of the practice of planning, the research shows that many of the planning activities in Butwal were implemented by administrative officials using discretionary powers, though they were conscious of the legislative and other statutory provisions of the institution and processes of planning. While finding local administrators to be leading actors in the planning process is not unusual especially as planning was being operationalised as an administrative process for over a decade (see chapter 10), several questions emerge in relation to who should be the dominant actor in the operationalisation of the planning process. This research is an important empirical contribution for the practitioners of planning in Nepal, especially in the context of the recent revival of local elections.

Conceptual contributions

Citizen participation practices around the developing world are spreading faster as a way of local policymaking, though scholars continue to question the applicability of participatory processes in decision-making. While the focus has been on budgeting, planning, and in policy-specific mechanisms, there remain several conceptual ambiguities about two different dimensions of government-sponsored citizen participation programs: the institutional, and the procedural. Institutional ambiguities relate to the perceived paradoxes between representative and participatory democracy in which scholars often point out that institutions of representative democracy may not be facilitative in the practice of citizen participation. The procedural ambiguity is related to the question of whether and how participation of all affected people in decision-making is feasible, particularly in representative institutions of decision-making. Although many empirical studies of citizen participation programs reveal that successful participatory processes (eg. participatory planning in Kerala, India) are embedded with the representative decision-making processes (i.e. elected municipal council), there does not seem to be any standard procedure to enable citizen participation in representative settings (eg. Clark 2017; Lovan *et al.* 2004).

This research has contributed reducing the lack of clarity in relation to the institutional dimension of participatory processes, this thesis has demonstrated that offering opportunities to citizens in the making of local public policies is less to do with the external environment, and more that internal processes matter a great deal. Although the broader implication of the external environment of democracy cannot be undermined in the way

participatory institutions are designed and governed, the findings from Nepal's local level participatory planning reveal that participatory processes can play mediatory roles in bringing citizens' voices into the making of public policies even when the external environment of democracy is fragile.

In terms of procedural design for citizen participation, the research confirms that government sponsored participatory programs do not have problems with linking deliberations with decisions although such a conclusion has not been based on comparing government-sponsored and civil society-led participatory processes. Because the planning process was organised in a hierarchical setting (see chapter 8), civil society organisations were given adequate forums at various levels of the decision-making in the Butwal municipality, hence implementing participatory processes as government-sponsored programs can be regarded as instrumental in providing forums for civil society deliberations such as that of Tole Bhèlas organised by TLOs. In other words, government-sponsored institutional design can incorporate the views generated through civil society organisations if such organisations have been recognised and empowered adequately with resources.

Methodological contributions

While the existing frameworks recognise various dimensions of citizen participation and policymaking, they do not necessarily combine these two distinct yet interrelated dimensions of participatory policymaking. Informed by the literature of participatory governance and the public policymaking literature and building upon the inductive data generated from observation and interviews with both participants and organisers of the planning process in Butwal sub-metropolitan city in Nepal, this thesis constructs a participatory policymaking framework for the assessment of participatory planning processes at the local level. This is regarded as an important contribution to the citizen participation literature.

Another methodological contribution of this thesis is on the use of observation, a data generation method that has long been utilised in ethnographic research traditions (Li 2008) but has been increasingly adopted in social and political science research (Rhodes *et al.* 2007). This thesis has demonstrated that observation can be the best method to complement the data generation technique, particularly the semi-structured interviews (Aberbach & Rockman 2002). However, observing participatory processes can be a challenging task as

some of the decision-making forums (as shown in the chapter 6 of this thesis) can be difficult to access.

11.4 Limitations

Several limitations of this research project need to be mentioned here, particularly for the setting of boundaries. The first concerns to the research context. The thesis studies Nepal's participatory planning process which was implemented between 2002 and 2016 in municipalities. While all other local bodies viz. villages and districts were also implementing the planning process in a similar format, this research does not study the planning processes in villages or districts.

The second limitation concerns the data. As has been highlighted before, and is explained in chapter 4, the field study was conducted between 2014 and 2016. Although the study period is set between 2002 and 2016, it does not necessarily have longitudinal data to support its case. The data collected between 2014 and 2016 is the only source which means that certain arguments may not represent circumstances between 2002 and 2014.

The third limitation concerns the case. Although this study is about Nepal's municipal planning process, it is designed as a single case study research. It captures various dimensions of planning only in the Butwal municipality which is situated in the western part of the country. This municipality is distinct in several respects (see chapter 4 for details) and therefore does not represent all municipalities. Within the municipality, there are a total of 22 wards where each of the activities of planning are carried out separately though in a similar format. It was impossible for the researcher to observe the activities of all wards at the same time, hence one ward was focused on and almost all planning activities were observed there in 2014/15.

The final limitation of this research is that of language. Since all the activities, guidelines and outputs are in the Nepali language; it was a challenging task to convey this research in English. Careful consideration has been given whilst translating, transcribing and interpreting various data sources including interviews. It is recognised that some language gaps may have occurred. These have been minimised as much as possible.

11.5 Scope for further research

Following the end of the tenure of the last elected local governments in 2002, the government of Nepal handed over the duties, roles and rights of local electoral institutions to centrally appointed bureaucrats with the hope that local elections would soon resume (Government of Nepal 2003). All the local governance processes were redesigned to be run by Village Secretaries in Village Development Committees, Executive Officers in Municipalities and Local Development Officers in District Development Committees, although the fundamental institutions and processes which were articulated in the Local Self Governance Act (1999) remained unchanged (see Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development 2013). However, the entire local government system in Nepal has now been changed mainly in accordance with the new constitution which was promulgated in September 2015 (Government of Nepal 2015). The country has been transformed from a unitary system of government to federal, and all the previous local governments have been either amalgamated or restructured to be governed as per the principles of the new constitutional provisions. The most important development is that all the new local governments in Nepal have elected councils.

This research was commenced when local governance in Nepal was managed by appointed bureaucrats. Focusing on the participatory planning process in the Butwal sub-metropolitan city, its aim has been to examine the contribution of participatory planning in the facilitation of citizen participation in local decision-making, particularly in the absence of electoral politics at the local level. Findings have established very important conceptual and empirical insights about the institution and processes of planning which are certainly relevant for the advancement of the planning process in the new political environment of local governance in Nepal. However, both scholars and practitioners need to be careful drawing lessons from this thesis, as it has several areas to consider when doing similar research in the future.

First, the findings relate to the case study municipality only. Although a range of other local governments (villages, municipalities and a district) were observed to understand their way of implementing the participatory planning process, the analysis is based on the Butwal municipality. Any future endeavours to examine the planning process need to design a comparative research project to provide broader insights into the planning process at the local level. The new local governance landscape categorises municipalities as rural and

urban (Government of Nepal 2017a) which opens up an opportunity to compare planning processes across rural and urban municipalities.

Second, findings are derived from a process-centric approach to analysis, hence it does not analyse the outcome of the process. While the comparative research as suggested above can still use the same analytical framework as this thesis has devised, the output or outcome-centric approach might need a different approach with additional elements in the framework. These elements would preferably be quantitative in nature (Nabatchi 2012a) hence the research design may need to be revised significantly. Coincidentally, it is relevant to highlight that both in the previous setup of local governance and the new political environment of local governments in Nepal, the legislative arrangements of planning have aimed to increase participative opportunities to citizens in the making of local public policies, small-scale developmental projects and improving the delivery of local public services (Government of Nepal 1999b, 2017a).

The final and perhaps the most significant potential area for future research is to conduct case study research with the aim of comparing the institutions and process of planning between non-electoral and electoral periods. Although local governments in Nepal are relatively new and it is premature to assess their institutions, processes and outcomes, the available data generated in Butwal municipality provides an opportunity to compare planning without and with elected politicians. The future research in this endeavour could provide insights in terms of how the planning activities are structured and proceeded with within all Toles and Wards in Butwal and how they differ from earlier experiences. There also remains the possibility of conducting research to compare planning at the macros and or micro level.

11.6 Conclusions

This final chapter wrapped up the thesis by showing various methodological dimensions and the challenges of conducting citizen participation research. Studying government-sponsored participatory processes can be methodologically challenging both in terms of observing the process as well as obtaining the data. This thesis used observation as a way of gaining insights about various activities of different planning forums in the Butwal municipality where certain limitations on obtaining data were experienced.

Findings suggest that local governance reforms introduced by the central government were contributory in changing the institutional design of planning in municipalities. The changes in the planning process were observed as crucial in assigning political roles to administrators. And, the changed roles of appointed officials were generally favourable for citizen participation in the planning process, but there was a lack of clarity as to what extent participants in the planning process were influential in making actual decisions.

This thesis contributes to broaden the knowledge of Nepal's participatory planning from a number of perspectives. They include an empirical contribution in terms of generating and archiving primary data of a participatory planning process in the Butwal municipality in Nepal; a conceptual contribution in terms of whether and why citizen participation programs can be successfully implemented at the local level even when the broader democratic environment is not directly conducive to citizen participation; and a methodological contribution in terms of highlighting the importance and limitations of the research that aims for studying government-sponsored participatory processes.

Finally, the thesis recognised the limitation of the research and thereby pointed out directions for future research. This includes the need for and possibility of conducting comparative research to equate planning with and without elected politicians, across municipalities and between the rural and urban municipalities. The analytical framework used in this thesis can still be utilised in conducting some research in the future, however, a different analytical framework may be needed if future research is oriented to grasp an output/outcome-centric approach to the assessment of the planning process at the local level in Nepal.

Annexes

Annex 1.1

Clarification of key terms

The thesis has encountered the following key terms either as interchangeably used or giving an elusive message hence they are clarified here.

Planning, planning process and policymaking

The thesis has used the term ‘participatory planning process’ and ‘planning’ interchangeably. It is recognised, however, that different disciplines use planning as one of the functions of the planning process. In the participatory governance literature which this thesis is built upon, planning is understood as a process through which citizens of different types, capacities and interests exercise their citizenry over the making of local public policies. Policymaking, therefore, is used as a process of planning that is organised to make local public policies in municipalities.

Municipality

The thesis has interchangeably used municipality and sub-metropolitan city to refer to urban local governments in Nepal. The LSGA (1999) classified different types of urban local government mainly in terms of the size of the population, level of social and infrastructure development, and state of internal revenue. This has been recently further clarified in the Local Government Act (2017). The biggest municipalities are known as metropolitan cities, medium-sized municipalities are sub-metropolitan cities, and small-sized urban areas are municipalities. At the time of this research, there were 6 metropolitan cities, 11 sub-metropolitan cities and 276 municipalities in urban areas and 460 villages in rural areas in Nepal.

Wards

Each municipality is divided between 9 and 35 wards, mainly depending upon population size and density, geographic speciality, socio-economic and linguistic diversity, and the existing status of infrastructure development (Government of Nepal 2017b). As per the LSGA (1999) and the Local Government Act (2017), each Ward has its own Ward Committee which is comprised of elected members. In this thesis, wards are interchangeably used to refer to the Ward, Ward Committee and Ward Committee Secretariat.

Tole

Tole is a Nepali term which refers to neighbourhoods. Toles are equivalent to a group of residents inhabiting a street. The size of a Tole could, therefore, be as big as the number of houses are in the relevant street, although for the purpose of forming Tole-level organisations in the Butwal municipality, it was noted that residents of more than one street were given membership to one organisation which are known as Tole Lane Organisations (TLOs) (Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City 2014). At the time of this research, there were from a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 54 TLOs in different wards in Butwal.

Bhèla

The term Bhèla literally means *mass gathering* in Nepali language. This thesis has used Bhèla (or Bhèlas) to refer to the public meetings that are organised at Toles (Tole Bhèlas) and Wards (Ward Bhèlas) as part of the planning process. Nevertheless, Bhèla is not associated only with the planning process; whenever community members or municipal officials wish to have public discussions on any issue they think is important, they organise a Bhèla at the most convenient place – preferably public premises and in open space. While the term sounds to be an informal gathering, it can be formal too, depending upon who, why and where the Bhèlas are organised.

Annex 3.1

Observational activities

	Observation types						
Activities	Participation in all steps of Butwal Municipality's Planning Process (as a participant)	Observation of planning process of three village development committees in Gulmi District	Observation of planning process of two newly established municipalities (Resunga in Gulmi and Tilottama in Rupandehi district)	Observation of planning process of Ramgram Municipality in Nawalparasi District	Partial observation of district level planning process of Gulmi District	Observation of General Assembly of a TLO in Butwal	Participation in a monitoring team of central government (MoFALD) led by an under secretary
Rationale	Focused Municipality of the study	Comparison purpose (particularly of WCFs)	To understand how PP is streamlined in new municipalities	To understand how WCFs and TLOs work more harmoniously than in other municipalities	For comparative purposes	To understand how the forming, norming and functioning procedure of TLOs work	To understand how the central government monitors the participatory planning process

Annex 3.2

Interview questions asked during the first field visit (2014/2015)

1. Have you ever participated in the planning process? If yes, where, when and in what capacity?
2. How do you define the planning process (based on your experience)?

3A. To organisers (central government employees, executive officers, and other local officials)

- How do/did you organise the planning process?
- What do you think about the institution of planning? Is it properly envisioned in the law? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the institution of planning as such?
- What do you think about the extent to which municipalities are given autonomy in the design of planning?
- To what extent do you think that the planning process respects and materialises inclusion?
- Can you tell me the degree to which ordinary citizens can control the process?
- Do you believe that people (participants) can use their judgements whilst taking or recommending to take decisions? How do citizens take decisions in the process?
- How do you define the level of transparency?

3B. To supporting organisations (donor agencies, I/NGOs)

- Why are you interested in supporting the planning process? What are the modes of your support? Whom do you support and why?
- To what extent has your support helped municipalities in strengthening their planning process? Do you have any evidence?
- What are the barriers of your support?
- Do you have any conditionality of support? (For example, you might ask the officials to ensure inclusion, transparency and so on!)

3C. TLOs/WCFs/CSOs/Political parties

- Why do you participate in the planning process?
- Do you think that your organisation represents a certain cluster of the community or geographic area? What are the basis of your claim?
- How do you bring issues to the process? How do you deliberate them there? And to what extent do you believe that your voice is heard in the process?
- What is your stake about inclusion? Do you think the way people from different walks of life are appropriately included in the process?
- Do you believe that people like you have given some right to control the process? To what extent can you use your judgements in the making of decisions?
- What is your view about the transparency of the process?

Annex 3.3

Interview questions asked during the second field visit (2016)

1. 1. Have you ever participated in the planning process? If yes, where, when and in what capacity?
2. How do you define the planning process (based on your experience)?

3A. To organisers (municipal officials, ward committee secretary, TLO/WCF coordinators)

- How do/did you organise the planning process (Tole Bhèla, Ward Bhèla and IPFC)?
- What do you think about the institution of planning? Is it properly practised in your municipality/Ward/Tole? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the institution of planning as such?
- What do you think about the extent to which municipalities or TLOs are given autonomy in the design, or operationalisation of planning?
- How do you select participants?
- To what extent do you believe that the participants' voices are heard in actual policies?

3B. To invited participants

- What do you think why you are invited to participate in the process?
- Why are you interested in participating in the planning process?
- To what extent does your participation make a difference in the way (a) the planning process is operationalised, and (b) the way decisions are shaped?

3C. To uninvited participants

- What do you think why you are not invited to participate in the process while some of your fellow neighbours are invited?
- Why are you interested in participating in the planning process regardless of not being invited?
- To what extent does your participation make a difference in the way (a) the planning process is operationalised, and (b) the way decisions are shaped?

Annex 3.4

Application to the TLOCC-M

To,

The Coordinator,
TLOCC-M,
Butwal sub-metropolitan city, Butwal
Nepal.

Subject: request for being available for discussions.

Sir,

I am a full-time PhD student at the University of Canberra, Australia. Currently I am observing the planning process in Butwal. My research broadly focuses on how the participatory planning process is being operationalised in Butwal.

I am informed about your monthly meeting at the municipality meeting hall on the 12th of February 2015. May I please take this opportunity to request with you to allocate an hour of time for my research.

In the meeting, I will present my preliminary impression about the planning process in Butwal. Next, I will ask with your fellow members to express their opinions on the issues of planning. Their opinions will be kept safe and not be disclosed to any unauthorised individual organisation. Whenever their opinions are used, the actual identity of the members will be hidden, and due acknowledgement will be given by masking their identities.

I look forward to seeing you in the meeting.

With many thanks,

Thaneshwar Bhusal
11th February 2015
Butwal. Nepal.

Annex 3.5

Consent for conducting interviews

I,, resident of, aged, gender, am fully aware with the research project that Mr. Thaneshwar Bhusal, a full-time PhD student at the University of Canberra, Australia has been conducting. I have agreed to have conversation with him in relation to his research on the ground that any material produced out of this conversation will hide my identity, and wherever my opinions are used, due acknowledgement will be expressed.

Interviewee Name:

Signature:

Date:

Annex 3.6

Interviewees cited

SN	Code	Introduction	Description
1	Tole Bhèla participant 003, 2014	An active female who has been working in a TLO in Butwal-15 for over 6 years. She represents Magar community.	She informed about the meeting processes particularly of Tole Bhèla. For last 10 years or so, she has been involved in organising or helping to organise Tole Bhèla in her Tole. She feels that she is respected by her fellow community members, and they trust her whilst organising such public meetings. On the other hand, as informed by the Ward Secretary of ward no 15, she has been well reputed in terms of her understanding of the municipal decision-making process. No political identity was revealed though.
2	Local Staff, 001, 2015	A ward secretary who has been working in a specific ward for over 10 years. He is also a local resident of the same ward.	He has been a focal person to my research, particularly during my second field study. He has provided official minutes, helped identifying and contacting participants of Ward Bhèla and supported in organising focus group discussions. He has been very helpful in introducing me to different personalities in his ward.
3	Ward Bhèla participant, 001, 2016	An ordinary participant of the Ward Bhèla who has been participating in different forums of planning for over a decade.	He is relatively well educated. He is interested in understanding how municipality-communities jointly work.
4	Ward Bhèla participant, 002, 2016	A Dalit participant who has participated in the Tole Bhèla and Ward Bhèla in 2015 and 2016.	She represents a Dalit community in Ward no 15. She was an ordinary member of a TLO until 2015, but then was selected as executive member of her TLO in 2016. She heard about that mandatory budget provision in 2015 when she participated in the Tole Bhèla for the first time. In 2016, she told that she had really played a key role in bringing the issues of her

			community in the deliberation at the Ward Bhèla.
5	Local staff, 002, 2016	An executive officer who has worked in a number of local bodies over the last few years	He leads the municipality as an administrative chief. He also represents central government in this particular municipality.
6	Tole Bhèla participant, 016, 2014	An individual in his mid-40s who used to participate in the process but didn't attend this year (2015).	He seems quite informed on the issues that are subject to public deliberation in different forums of planning. He is, however, pessimistic about the procedural aspect of planning due to his feeling that not all citizens are equally treated.
7	Ward Bhèla Participant #021, 2016	A lady who is well educated (a master's degree) and active in her society on social issues	She has been participating in the planning meetings very often. She has experience of leading various community based programs/campaigns such as literacy, vaccination and so on. She did not indicate the name of the political party but mentioned that she belongs to a political party.
8	Ordinary Male Participant #002, 2016	He is a teacher by profession.	He is always invited to participate in such meetings. By participating several times, he says, that he is very aware of different types of consultative meetings that the municipality organises.
9	Tole Bhèla participant #001, 2014	She appeared to be politically active but didn't disclose her party's name	She was engaging very heavily in the Tole Bhèla meeting but she was entirely out of the context. I picked her to interview because I thought she had not been given adequate training or awareness raising information about the planning process.
10	Tole Bhèla participant, #002, 2014	He is a school teacher who participated in the Tole Bhèla	He was chosen because he seemed to be more mature in expressing his opinions. He represents a professional group too. He has been continuously participating in the planning process for several years, mainly at the Ward Bhèla but I spotted him participating in the Tole Bhèla.

11	Tole Bhèla participant, #005, 2014	He is a retired civil servant who worked for the central government for decades. He is in his 60s.	I chose to interview him because he appeared to have systematic knowledge about planning and budgeting, but his focus was always on the National Planning Commission, or national budget. Finding a person with a broader knowledge about planning and budgeting is worth for my research.
12	Local Staff, 003, 2016	He is a senior officer of the municipality, who has been working there for over 12 years.	He has been involved in almost all levels of planning meetings during his 12 years tenure. These include his participation in the Tole Bhèla (where his home is located), many Ward Bhèlas and the IPFC. He is selected because he could inform about what happens in all of these three levels of planning.
13	Local politician, #001, 2016	She was an elected member of a ward in Butwal and now she belongs to a political party's ward committee	I spoke to her because she raised some serious problems about the decision-making (in the Tole Bhèla). She tried to compare what used to happen in the electoral period of local governance in the 1990s and how severely the situation deteriorated after 2002.
14	Ward Bhèla Participant #017, 2016	He seemed to be aware of the problems his communities have been facing, and therefore, raised some alternative solutions in the Bhèla.	As I introduced myself and asked for his input, he briefly introduced himself by putting emphasis on the fact that he was not an invited participant. I listed him as one of the uninvited participants under a group of lay participants.
15	Ward Bhèla Participant, #003, 2015	He expressed cynical impressions about the way the planning process was being operationalised, but still was active in the ward Bhèla meeting.	This participant of the Ward Bhèla was chosen based on the expressions he made in the Bhèla. He was too sceptical about the processes and outcomes of the Bhèla. He had some solid examples for his arguments.
16	Central government	He was a senior public servant	He worked as one of the national program directors for an externally funded project about

	employee, #001, 2015	working for the National Planning Commission.	the local governance in the 1990s. He has recently submitted his PhD on community mobilisation. His work experience and intellectual exposition made me to select him as an interviewee.
17	Central government employee, #002, 2015	He works at the municipality management division at the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development	He has worked at a municipality for over three years and has gained experience of executing the planning process for three consecutive years. Currently, his role has been to supervise, and facilitate municipal processes in, mainly, implementing the projects that are granted by the central government.
18	IPFC participant, #001, 2015	She represents municipal level TLO coordination committee to the IPFC	She is well educated, and mostly concerned about the local policies. While her role in the IPFC was similar to other participants, she expressed her opinions, mostly in a detailed and systematic way, more often than others. I chose to interview her based on such impressions of her in the IPFC meeting.
19	IPFC participant, #002, 2015	He is from an ethnic minority community	He appeared to have much less knowledge about the exact roles and functions of the IPFC. Each and every time he spoke in the IPFC meeting, he was simply raising the issues of his own neighbourhood. It was interesting for me to learn his views because members of the IPFC were supposed to have a broader understanding about the issues, and raise such concerns. But he was only focusing on the local level issues.
20	IPFC participant, #003, 2015)	He represents a ward-level TLOCC, and this is his third time being nominated as an IPFC member	He disclosed to me (personally) that he was a politician in the past, but due to certain obligations, he no longer represents any political party. Hence, he carries dual experience as a politician and a civil society member with no political identity.
21	IPFC participant #004, 2015)	He is a chairperson of municipal committee of a political party.	He has been participating in the IPFC for the last 4 years. According to a local staffer, who spoke to me informally, this political man has got the potential to win the position of Mayor if local elections happen. I found him

			experienced, educated and having a good understanding of the municipal planning process. While some of his counterparts were focusing on projects/programs to be recommended, he had been consistently raising policy issues in the IPFC.
22	IPFC participant #005, 2016)	She is one of the executive members of the TLOCC-M.	She is generally vocal about the issues pertaining to women's problems. But when asked about why she was always critical towards politicians, she expressed her feeling that there must be some kind of hidden relationship between politicians and local staff. She argued that her participation in the IPFC or other municipal meetings is always overlooked by municipal staff.
23	Resource Person #001, 2015	He is a training consultant for the municipality	He specialises in organising training programs for local staffs, and community members. He has been working as a consultant for many years, across different jurisdictions of local governance. The LGCDP also has some contracts with him to provide training for the members of WCF/CAC in different villages.
24	Former Mayor #001, 2015	He was one of the elected mayors of Butwal municipality in 1992	He was well-known for his long political career in Rupandehi district and around Butwal municipality. He was a former MP of the national parliament in 1999. He passed away in August 2015.
25	IPFC Participant #007, 2016	She is relatively aged yet an active citizen.	She was found to be active in the IPFC meeting in 2015, but I was unable to reach her to conduct an interview at that time. In the second round of field study, I was able to contact her and chat about many aspects of municipality's decision-making processes particularly from the historic point of view.
26	Community mobiliser #001, 2015	She has been working as a community mobiliser in the case study ward since 2014	She was observed as playing key roles in the organisation of several Tole level meetings (Tole Bhèlas) and also at the Ward Bhèla in the case study ward

27	Tole Bhèla participant #014, 2014	He leads a TLO in the case study ward	He was selected because he had been the coordinator of a TLO for over 6 years (three terms), and during these 6 years of service in a TLO, he had been participating in a range of meetings organised as part of the planning process. This includes participation in the IPFC in 2012, and in the Ward Bhèla almost every year.
28	Ward Bhèla participant #009, 2015	He was observed as an experienced participant in the Bhèla	Perhaps he was in his mid-60s when he was seen participating in the Ward Bhèla. He was suggested for getting his views on the historic aspects of Ward Bhèla in the Butwal municipality
29	Local politician #002, 2016	He represents a local committee of a political party in the case study ward	He was an elected ward committee member during the last tenure of elected local governments. He had been participating in the Ward Bhèla for over a decade, mostly as an influential politician there.
29	IPFC participant #010, 2015	He represents the area forestry office established in Butwal as a service delivery agency of the central government	He was spotted participating in the IPFC meeting in Butwal in February 2015. Despite the expectation that he would share policy and program information about forestry, he was unable to do so. This made him to be selected as an interviewee.
30	IPFC participant #012, 2015	He was nominated as a participant in the IPFC to represent the district-level NGO Federation in Nepal	He was noticed as having sound knowledge about the role of NGO in municipal governance.

Annex 4.1

Participatory governance in different Constitutions in Nepal

Constitution	Preamble	Statutory directives
Government of Nepal Act (1948)	WHEREAS through the resurrection of our ancient ideals of the Panchayat and other similar institutions, it is our declared policy to provide for the increasingly closer association of our beloved people in every branch of administration and thus bring about enhanced prosperity and happiness to our people	-
Interim Government of Nepal Act (1951)	-	-
Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal (1959)	-	-
Constitution of Nepal (1962)	WHEREAS we are firmly convinced that such arrangement is possible only through the partyless democratic Panchayat System rooted in the life of the people in general, and in keeping with the national genius and tradition and as originating from the very base with the active cooperation of the people and embodying the principles of decentralization	<p>Article 19 (2) The political objective of the Panchayat System shall be to mobilise, to the maximum possible extent and on a voluntary basis, the national genius and resources for the setting up of a society as envisaged by clause (1) by associating, through gradual decentralisation, the maximum number of representatives of the people at all levels of the administration and by making the general public vigilant and conscious</p> <p>(4) The economic objective of the Panchayat System shall be to establish a system that will provide</p>

<p>Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal (1990)</p>	<p>-</p>	<p>maximum participation of the general public in the economic uplift of the country</p> <p>Article 25 (4) It shall be the chief responsibility of the State to maintain conditions suitable to the enjoyment of the fruits of democracy through wider participation of the people in the governance of the country and by way of decentralisation, and to promote general welfare by making provisions for the protection and promotion of human rights, by maintaining tranquillity and order in the society.</p>
<p>Interim Constitution of Nepal (2007)</p>	<p>Guaranteeing the basic rights of the Nepali people to frame a Constitution for themselves and to participate in the free and impartial election of the Constituent Assembly in a fear-free environment</p>	<p>Article 33 (3) ... to adopt a political system which fully abides by the universally accepted concepts of ...people's participation, neutral, competent and clean administration and to maintain good governance by eliminating corruption and impunity</p> <p>(4) ...to carry out an inclusive, democratic and progressive restructuring of the State by eliminating its existing form of centralized and unitary structure</p>
<p>Constitution of Nepal (2015)</p>	<p>Protecting and promoting social and cultural solidarity, tolerance and harmony, and unity in diversity by ...resolving to build an egalitarian society founded on the proportional inclusive and participatory principles</p>	<p>Article 50 (1) The political objective of the State shall be to establish a public welfare system of governance, by ...incorporating the principle of proportional participation in the system of governance on the basis of local autonomy and decentralization.</p>

Annex 5.1

Estimated number of participants in Tole Bhèlas in Butwal

Ward	Population		TLOs	Average members of TLOs (13 per TLO) ²⁸	Number of additional participants (estimated) ²⁹	Total participants per Tole Bhèla (estimated)
	Households	People				
1	205	980	3	39	39	78
2	189	1053	4	52	52	104
3	240	1337	3	39	39	78
4	1491	6487	18	234	234	468
5	3039	10842	24	312	312	624
6	2368	9603	15	195	195	390
7	669	3202	7	91	91	182
8	1598	6787	18	234	234	468
9	2631	10597	35	455	455	910
10	3175	11942	32	416	416	832
11	2445	9170	18	234	234	468
12	1114	4361	10	130	130	260
13	7258	28193	51	663	663	1326
14	1566	6542	21	273	273	546
15	1674	7366	25	325	325	650
16-22			-	-	-	
Total	30437	118462		3692	3692	7384

(Source: Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City 2016b; Central Bureau of Statistics 2012)

Annex 5.2

Project selection criteria

Butwal sub-metropolitan City
Proposal Form for Tole Lane Organisations

SN	Project/program	Status (new / regular / maintenance)	Budget	Directly benefiting communities														Gender budget			Remarks
				Dalit		Ethnic		Children		Madhesi		Muslim		Marginalised		People living with disabilities		Other		Total	
				M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F				

Source: Field notes 2015

Annex 5.3

The prioritised list of demands prepared at the Tole Bhèla

अनुसूची ५
कार्यविधि नं. ६ (ख) तथा ७ को (क समेत) ताल सामन्धि,
बुटवल, नगरपालिका

१/२

टोल विकास योजनाका लागि प्रस्ताव फारम
वडा नं. १ जम्मा घरधुरी संख्या: ६७

क्र.सं.	विषयगत क्षेत्र	प्रस्तावित योजनाको नाम	आयोजनाको स्थिति (नयाँ, क्रमागत वा मर्मत संभार)	आयोजनाको अनुमानित अवधि		माग गरिएको जम्मा रकम (कटेन्जेन्सी सहित)				लाभान्वित घरधुरी										लैङ्गिक लाभान्वित	कैफियत
				शुरु मिति	सम्पन्न मिति	उपभोक्ताको योगदान	न.पा.	अन्य	जम्मा	दलित	आदिवासी	जनजाति	मुस्लिम	भिच्छा वर्ग	अन्य	जम्मा	महिला	पुरुष	जम्मा		
१	परिवहन	अभ्यासती, केक, नुवाकोट		२०१४/१५	२०१६/१७	१०,०००	२०,०००		३०,०००	५	३	६०	४०	१२	९			१०५	३०	३०	६०
२	परिवहन	कुलाप, महेल	अपेक्षा लगाए	२०१४/१५	२०१६/१७	१०,०००	१००,०००		११०,०००	५	३	६०	४०	१२	९			१०५	३०	३०	६०
३	परिवहन	नेत्रव, धामाकोट		११	११	१०,०००	२०,०००		३०,०००	५	३	६०	४०	१२	९			१०५	३०	३०	६०
४	परिवहन	विजोप्रेत, खेडा, जंगल	अपेक्षा लगाए	२०१४/१५	२०१६/१७	१०,०००	६०,०००		७०,०००	५	३	६०	४०	१२	९			१०५	३०	३०	६०
५	परिवहन	गौरनाती, जेठा, जंगल	अपेक्षा लगाए	११	११		१००,०००		१००,०००	५	३	६०	४०	१२	९			१०५	३०	३०	६०

नोट: माग गरिएको रकम अन्तर्गत अन्य शिर्षकमा माग गरिए सो निकाय कुन हो सो को विवरण कैफियतमा उल्लेख गर्न सकिने।
माथि उल्लेखित विवरणहरू सम्बन्धित सदस्यहरूसँग छलफल गरी सर्वसम्मत आधारमा तयार पारिएको हो। यसमा उल्लेखित योगदानका लागि हामी प्रतिवचनदाता जाहेर गर्दछौं।
नाम: दिनेश श्रेष्ठ पद: अध्यक्ष संस्था गणेशगोपन खोले हस्ताक्षर: दिनेश
मिति: २०७२/११/१८

Annex 7.1

List of members of IPFC

1. Mayor or the person who is delegated to work as Mayor	1
2. A woman representative from community based organisations	1
3. A representative from NGOs (nominated by NGOs)	1
4. A Dalit representative (nominated by Dalit's organisations)	1
5. Representatives from women's groups/organisations	2
6. A children's representative (nominated by children's clubs)	1
7. An ethnic minority representative (nominated by the organisations of ethnic minorities)	1
8. A representative of socially backward communities	1
9. A representative of the Chamber of Commerce	1
10. An individual who has a good reputation in the municipality (senior, intellectual etc)	1
11. A woman representative from the Ward Citizens Forums	1
12. A woman representative from the Civic Awareness Center	1
13. A representative from the group of people living with disabilities	1
14. Each representative from all active political parties in the municipality	9
15. Executive Officer of the municipality	1

Annex 7.2

Training syllabus for women (in Nepali)

बुटवल नगरपालिकाको आ.व.०७१/०७२ को महिला लक्षित कार्यक्रम अन्तर्गत नेतृत्व विकास तथा योजना तर्जुमा सम्बन्धी अभिमुखीकरण कार्यक्रममा समावेश गरिएका विषयबस्तुहरु ।

- १ परिचय, कार्यक्रमको उद्देश्यबारे जानकारी
- २ नेतृत्व विकासको अवधारणा/महिला नेतृत्वको अवस्था (बुटवल नगरपालिकाका विभिन्न समिति, समुहहरुमा)
- ३ बजेट तर्जुमा सन्दर्भमा वडा नागरिक मञ्च, नागरिक सचेतना केन्द्र, टोल विकास संस्था, टोल विकास संस्था समन्वय समितिको भूमिका ।
- ४ सहभागितात्मक योजना तर्जुमाको अवधारणा
- ५ योजना तर्जुमाका विभिन्न चरणहरु (१४ तह)
- ६ नगरपालिकाको बजेट निर्माण प्रक्रिया (बजेट बाँडफाँड)
- ७ एकिकृत योजना तर्जुमा समिति,
- ८ लक्षित समुहका कार्यक्रमहरु
 - भौतिक पूर्वाधार
 - सामाजिक विकास
 - सीप विकास
 - संस्थागत विकास
- ९ टोल विकास समितिले योजना /कार्यक्रम माग गर्दा गर्नुपर्ने फारमहरुका बारेमा जानकारी/टोल टोलका लागि फारम वितरण समेत गर्ने ।
- १० नगरको समग्र विकासमा नगरवासीको भूमिका
 - राजस्व परिचालन
 - स्रोत वृद्धि
 - राजस्व संकलन
 - सूचना संप्रेषण
 - पूर्वाधार निर्माण तथा सञ्चालन
 - कार्यक्रममा सहभागिता
 - फोहर व्यवस्थापन, सरसफाई
 - खुल्ला दिशामुक्त अभियान
 - पूर्ण साक्षर नगर
 - पूर्ण खोपमुक्त नगर
 - राष्ट्रिय भवन संहिता कार्यान्वयन
 - लक्षित समुहलाई लाभ पुग्ने योजना कार्यक्रम सञ्चालन तथा सहयोग

Annex 8.1

Annual budget ceiling for wards in Butwal 2014/2015 (in Nepali)

बुटवल उप महानगरपालिका कार्यालय, बुटवल
आ.ब.०७२/०७३ को वडागत बजेट सिमा कायम

वडा नं.	बजेट शीर्षक	केन्द्रीय अनुदान	आन्तरिक श्रोतबाट केन्द्रिय अनुदानमा स्याचिड.	आन्तरिक श्रोतबाट अन्य कार्यक्रमका लागि	जम्मा रकम	कैफियत
१	शसत निशत अनुदान, भौतिक पूर्वाधार, लक्षित र प्रवर्द्धनात्मक कार्यक्रम	३००,०००.००	१००,०००.००	१००,०००.००	५००,०००.००	सडकबोर्ड र मर्मत कोष समेत
२	शसत निशत अनुदान, भौतिक पूर्वाधार, लक्षित र प्रवर्द्धनात्मक कार्यक्रम	३००,०००.००	१००,०००.००	१००,०००.००	५००,०००.००	सडकबोर्ड र मर्मत कोष समेत
३	शसत निशत अनुदान, भौतिक पूर्वाधार, लक्षित र प्रवर्द्धनात्मक कार्यक्रम	५००,०००.००	२००,०००.००	२००,०००.००	९००,०००.००	सडकबोर्ड र मर्मत कोष समेत
४	शसत निशत अनुदान, भौतिक पूर्वाधार, लक्षित र प्रवर्द्धनात्मक कार्यक्रम	७००,०००.००	२७५,०००.००	१,०००,०००.००	१,९७५,०००.००	सडकबोर्ड र मर्मत कोष समेत
५	शसत निशत अनुदान, भौतिक पूर्वाधार, लक्षित र प्रवर्द्धनात्मक कार्यक्रम	७००,०००.००	२७५,०००.००	१,०००,०००.००	१,९७५,०००.००	सडकबोर्ड र मर्मत कोष समेत
६	शसत निशत अनुदान, भौतिक पूर्वाधार, लक्षित र प्रवर्द्धनात्मक कार्यक्रम	७००,०००.००	३००,०००.००	७००,०००.००	१,७००,०००.००	सडकबोर्ड र मर्मत कोष समेत
७	शसत निशत अनुदान, भौतिक पूर्वाधार, लक्षित र प्रवर्द्धनात्मक कार्यक्रम	५००,०००.००	२००,०००.००	३००,०००.००	१,०००,०००.००	सडकबोर्ड र मर्मत कोष समेत
८	शसत निशत अनुदान, भौतिक पूर्वाधार, लक्षित र प्रवर्द्धनात्मक कार्यक्रम	७००,०००.००	२००,०००.००	३००,०००.००	१,२००,०००.००	सडकबोर्ड र मर्मत कोष समेत
९	शसत निशत अनुदान, भौतिक पूर्वाधार, लक्षित र प्रवर्द्धनात्मक कार्यक्रम	६००,०००.००	२००,०००.००	३००,०००.००	१,३००,०००.००	सडकबोर्ड र मर्मत कोष समेत
१०	शसत निशत अनुदान, भौतिक पूर्वाधार, लक्षित र प्रवर्द्धनात्मक कार्यक्रम	६००,०००.००	२००,०००.००	३००,०००.००	१,३००,०००.००	सडकबोर्ड र मर्मत कोष समेत
११	शसत निशत अनुदान, भौतिक पूर्वाधार, लक्षित र प्रवर्द्धनात्मक कार्यक्रम	१,०००,०००.००	४००,०००.००	५००,०००.००	१,९००,०००.००	सडकबोर्ड र मर्मत कोष समेत
१२	शसत निशत अनुदान, भौतिक पूर्वाधार, लक्षित र प्रवर्द्धनात्मक कार्यक्रम	१,०००,०००.००	४००,०००.००	५००,०००.००	१,९००,०००.००	सडकबोर्ड र मर्मत कोष समेत
१३	शसत निशत अनुदान, भौतिक पूर्वाधार, लक्षित र प्रवर्द्धनात्मक कार्यक्रम	७००,०००.००	६,०००,०००.००	१,५००,०००.००	१४,५००,०००.००	सडकबोर्ड र जंगोडा कोष समेत
१४	शसत निशत अनुदान, भौतिक पूर्वाधार, लक्षित र प्रवर्द्धनात्मक कार्यक्रम	३,५००,०००.००	३,५००,०००.००	१,२००,०००.००	८,२००,०००.००	सडकबोर्ड र जंगोडा कोष समेत
१५	शसत निशत अनुदान, भौतिक पूर्वाधार, लक्षित र प्रवर्द्धनात्मक कार्यक्रम	२,५००,०००.००	२,५००,०००.००	१,२००,०००.००	६,२००,०००.००	सडकबोर्ड र जंगोडा कोष समेत
	जम्मा	२१,०००,०००.००	१४,६५०,०००.००	९,२००,०००.००	४५,०५०,०००.००	

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Notes

¹ Although Graham's definition is about identifying what democratic innovations are, it is recognised here in this thesis that the attributes of democratic innovations and other participatory processes are quite similar, often overlapping with each other. By adopting his definition, however, it is not intended to generalise that all the participatory processes are democratic (or, non-democratic) innovations.

² A loosely translated (from Nepali to English) version of the request letter is attached in Annex 4.4.

³ A similar request letter (Annex 4.4) was submitted to the office of the ward committee secretariat prior to the FGD in a case study ward in Butwal.

⁴ These authors have proposed a total of four different elements of focused group discussions: focused research, group interaction, in-depth data and a humanistic interview (pp. 9-13). The participants of the FGD in the case study ward in Butwal were told that the research was focused on participatory planning, that participants were expected to have group interaction (rather than interaction with the moderator/researcher) and that they were expected to discuss something concrete about their own locales.

⁵ This research does not discuss the village and district planning process. However, it is recognised that the objective, timing and institutional design of the planning process is almost similar in all three different types of local bodies. The only difference in planning among these bodies is the local context that is determined by several socio-economic factors including the demographic distribution and domestic income of the local body.

⁶ The original institution of municipal council, as envisioned in the Local Self Governance Act, 1999, was supposed to have been led by the mayor and the deputy mayor, all the elected ward chairpersons of ward committees and a few nominated individuals representing women and minority communities would be the members. In the adapted design of planning, however, the power, rights and duties of the council were contingently delegated to the appointed executive secretary (Government of Nepal 2003), hence the council had become a single-man authority.

⁷ The prevailing civil service law obliges the executive secretaries to be accountable to their supervisors upward in their hierarchy, mainly to the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (Government of Nepal 1990a). Other local staff are also accountable to the executive officer (Government of Nepal 2000). The heads of line agencies at the local level are directly answerable to their respective departments in the centre.

⁸ When people talk about planning in Nepal, it has been a buzzword to hear about the 14-step planning process. While the national planning process is carried out every three or five years, there do not seem to have been any exclusive 14 steps that characterise the process. Often, it has been a subjective phenomenon. However, Nepali scholars like Thapa (2013) and Pandeya (2015) acknowledge that 14 steps or more can be counted if we consider planning activities that start from a neighbourhood, and end up at the national development council.

⁹ In other partially observed municipalities, it was informed that different forms of civil society organisations were given responsibility for informing residents about the planning process. Unlike in the Butwal municipality, community based organisations including cooperatives were not entrusted to host deliberative forums in neighbourhoods in other municipalities. This indicates that municipalities were utilising those community-based organisations which were relatively more institutionalised than others.

¹⁰ The term collaboration has been understood, in this thesis, as a process that brings relevant stakeholders and the municipal authority to a common-place where they share a standard contribution of financial investment in implementing locally identified small-scale developmental projects. Many communities in the Butwal sub-metropolitan city have already shown exemplifying

evidence that they have contributed up to 70% of total investment in the implementation of some small-scale developmental works initiated by communities through the planning process (Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City 2016a).

¹¹ The executive committee of TLOs consists of 9 to 11 members from a specific neighbourhood. The TLO (Registration and Mobilisation) Procedures of the Butwal municipality states that members in the executive committee must be reshuffled every two years. The TLOs must organise a general assembly every two years to select, and sometimes elect, the executive committee members.

¹² This information is drawn based on the attendance register obtained from a Tole Bhèla in a ward in Butwal sub-metropolitan city. While participants significantly vary from one Tole Bhèla to the other, these people represent a general trend of who participates in the Tole Bhèla.

¹³ The term ‘elite’ has been used in this thesis in different contexts. When it comes to ‘elite participants’, it is aimed at describing those individuals who are wealthier, better educated and mostly belong to upper castes in the society. This group of individuals are easily distinguishable in public meetings such as in Tole Bhèlas as they are good at public speaking, express their opinions with some form of verbal and intellectual dominance over other participants, and are seemingly influential in terms of what they speak.

¹⁴ The term inclusion has been in practice in Nepal’s public sector management for over a decade. This term was specifically introduced in the Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007 which envisaged all public sector agencies would give emphasis to women, ethnic minorities including Madhesi and Dalits, people living with disabilities and those who live in the remote rural hills. A number of strategies such as the quota, reservation and affirmative actions are in place.

¹⁵ The term financially viable has been borrowed from the annual policy and budgetary guidelines for fiscal years (2014/15) that was prepared by the Butwal municipality. According to the policy guidelines, financially viable demands are those projects/demands that can be implemented within the allocated ceiling of the budget.

¹⁶ In one of the Ward Bhèlas that was observed in Butwal in 2015, almost all participants agreed that they were having problems with their road lights. According to them, the road lights had been provided by the municipality office for many years. Whenever the lights were fused, it would take a long time to replace the bulb because the municipality office had its own (long) procedures to purchase lights and supply thereafter. While all the participants agreed on the problem, there appeared to be dozens of alternative solutions to managing the road lights but they could not reach a consensus at the end.

¹⁷ There is a question of whether the Ward Bhèla actually prepares a refined list of proposals. Generally, the organisers do not share the actual list of proposals with participants so it is hard to claim that the proposals that are submitted to the organisers are refined ones. However, as it was observed in the Butwal municipality, the ward committee secretary lists the proposals for the purpose of submitting them to the project selection and prioritisation committee. When asked about why certain proposals that were presented in the Ward Bhèla were not included in the list, one of the ward secretaries said that participants in the Ward Bhèla were expressing dissatisfaction with that particular project.

¹⁸ In addition to the selection of specified representatives to be involved in the IPFC meeting, municipal officials were reported to be involving all the community mobilisers, ladies who were funded by the central government to work at the ward-level to help communities to explore their problems and thereby tell the ward committee secretariat to address them. In 2016, municipal officials in Butwal decided to involve one community mobiliser from one ward. According to a municipal staff member, a total of 22 community mobilisers were selected as invited participants in the IPFC. Generally, they were not supposed to bring new issues but to ensure that they could be vigilant about those issues that were deliberated at other planning forums in their respective wards.

¹⁹ As the formation of such sectoral committees is not an obligatory function, many municipalities do not form such committees. Instead, departmental heads of the municipal office are assigned the

task of preparing an evaluation of a report of their areas which are then presented in the IPFC meeting. In Butwal, there were only three such sectoral committees, out of which the Revenue Advisory Committee was the most active.

²⁰ Politicians have been involved in a range of municipal decisions for over a decade, despite their unclear status in local decision making because they were unelected. In some decisions, they are invited by municipal staffs so they are invited as witnesses to certain decisions; in others, they are given a special responsibility, such as facilitating collaboration between a third party and the municipality. In legal terms, nonetheless, they are not held accountable. However, forums like the IPFC provide opportunities for some selected citizens to ask about their involvement and the consequences. Other forums like the Public Hearing are broader in terms of holding politicians accountable.

²¹ The term ‘marginalised people’ is used to recognise those Nepali communities which have long been regarded as oppressed based on gender, religion, caste, ethnicity, geographic location, intellectual and physical ability and wealth. Lawoti (2008) conceptualises such groups as excluded people. The government of Nepal has framed these groups into six categories: women, indigenous communities, Madhesi, Dalit, people living with disabilities and people who live in rural high hills (Government of Nepal 1990a) for allocating quotas in public sector positions to the individuals belonging to these groups. Indigenous communities are further categorised into five sub-groups: endangered, highly marginalised, marginalised, disadvantaged and advanced (Bhattachan 2012 p. 5). Moreover, the government regularly updates the list of marginalised castes for certain purposes such as reserving quotas in the elections (Ministry of Home Affairs 2017).

²² The term ‘elite’ has been understood, as the Oxford online dictionary defines, in terms of a group or class of people who seem to have social power and influence, particularly on account of their caste, gender, educational level, vocal ability, wealth and other privileges such as the membership of a certain political party and so forth.

²³ I, as researcher, had participated in one of the training programs organised at the case study ward in Butwal sub-metropolitan city. A municipal staff member was facilitating the training program in which all the participants were women. I was given an opportunity to listen to what resource persons were explaining about the planning process, and also to speak to participants. Though I did not use formal interview methods to speak to them, informal chats with participants revealed that they were benefitting from such programs to the extent that they would confidently raise their concerns (over the earmarked budget) in the planning forums they participated in.

²⁴ A loosely translated version of such criteria has been presented in Annex 5.2 while describing the project selection methods at Tole Bhêlas.

²⁵ A loosely translated official statement from Nepali to English in the annual handbook of public policies and programs of Butwal sub-metropolitan city (2015) says, “... decisions articulated in this handbook are broadly informed by participants at different planning forums across many communities, hence we believe that the handbook is the product of ordinary citizens, political parties, civil society organisations, private sector and, of course, the municipal officials.”

²⁶ Graham Smith (2009, p.11) proposes to adopt six criteria to assess any participatory institution to label it as a (democratic) innovation: inclusiveness, popular control, considered judgement, transparency, efficiency and transferability. Archon Fung and Erik Wright (2003, p.5) assert that participatory innovation should rely upon the commitment and capacities of ordinary people to make sensible decisions through reasoned deliberation and to be empowered because they attempt to tie action to discussion (see also, Williamson & Fung 2004).

²⁷ A total of 1001 subjects were submitted to the office of the Butwal sub-metropolitan city in February 2015 before the commencement of the IPFC meeting.

²⁸ This is a median number of TLO members. There are some instances where members could range from 9 to 15 depending upon the demography of the particular Tole.

²⁹ This column suggests the estimated number of participants (i.e. double the number of executive members of the TLO). The numbers have been estimated based on interviews (rather than based on actual attendance of participants).