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### Local Democracy and Education Policy in Newly Federal Nepal

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Local Democracy and Education Policy in Newly Federal Nepal

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## Abstract

In 2017, Nepal held its first local elections in twenty years. These were the first elections held under Nepal's new constitution, ratified in 2015, which transitioned the country from a unitary state to a Federal Democratic Republic. This case study analyzes the effect of the transition to federalism on decision-making and community representation in local governance in Annapurna Rural Municipality in West-Central Nepal. This study focuses specifically on education policy, one of the more public and contentious policy responsibilities devolved from the federal level to the local units under the new constitution. This research is based on interviews with government officials, teachers, and other stakeholders in governance and education policy. It finds that although there is general support and optimism for the federal transition, there remain many challenges to implementation, especially in terms of lack of capacity and the persistence of old institutions. These challenges limit the extent to which the constitution's goals of local democracy and inclusive government can be realized, especially in rural and mountainous areas of Nepal.

Keywords: Local governance, federalism, democracy

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## **Introduction**

In 2017, Nepal held its first local elections in twenty years. These elections were the first held under the country's new constitution, ratified in 2015, which transitioned Nepal from a unitary state to a federal democratic republic, with powers shared between the national, provincial, and local levels. Although the new constitution was designed with the goal of promoting an inclusive democracy and citizen involvement in the policy process, the implementation of federalism faces numerous obstacles, especially a lack of capacity at the local government level and the persistence of old institutions.

This study aims to analyze the effect of Nepal's transition to federalism on decision-making and community representation in local governance, using education policy as a primary lens. Education was chosen as a specific focus because it is one of the more public and contentious policy areas devolved to the local level. This study is based on fieldwork conducted in Annapurna Rural Municipality, located in Myagdi District of Gandaki Province, in West-Central Nepal. Three related primary research questions are behind this study:

1. How has the transition to federalism affected decision-making in local government?
2. How are local communities represented in government decision-making?
  - a. Is there significant community involvement?
  - b. Have quota rules improved representation of marginalized groups?
3. What are the most significant challenges facing education in Annapurna Rural Municipality?

This paper begins with a historical overview of government and education in Nepal, followed by a discussion of the new constitution and federal system. Next, a literature review examines the theoretical concepts underlying these research questions. The following section explains the research methodology behind this study and addresses limitations and ethical concerns. Next, I present an overview of findings from fieldwork conducted in Annapurna rural municipality. Finally, I analyze these results in terms of broader theoretical concepts.

## **Historical Context and Present Situation**

Any discussion of Nepal's present political and educational environment first requires a discussion of the history and context around these topics. This section provides a brief overview of Nepal's constitutional history, the origins of the new federal constitution, and the history of education in Nepal.

### *Nepal's Constitutional History*

Nepal's constitutional history began with the *Muluki Ain*, a legal code written in 1854 under the Rana regime, which ruled for nearly a century under a series of autocratic prime ministers. The *Muluki Ain* entrenched Hinduism as the state religion and formally imposed the caste system onto the Nepali population.<sup>1</sup> Nepal's first democratic constitution was adopted in 1951, after the overthrow of the Rana regime by an alliance of the Nepali Congress Party and King

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<sup>1</sup> David N. Gellner, *The Idea of Nepal, Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture 2016*, (Kathmandu: Social Science Baha, 2016), 16.

Tribuvhan.<sup>2</sup> This first period of multiparty democracy was short-lived, as in 1961 the monarchy under King Mahendra banned parties and established the Panchayat system of “guided democracy.”<sup>3</sup> Under Panchayat, which lasted for thirty years, Nepal’s government was highly centralized, with a hierarchical bureaucratic structure carrying out royal dictates.

In 1990, Panchayat came to an end and multiparty democracy was reestablished due to a popular movement joined by both the Nepali Congress Party and communist parties.<sup>4</sup> The 1990s saw a succession of ineffective and corrupt governments and a continued role for the monarchy. In 1996, Maoist insurgents launched a civil war against the Nepali government, seizing on widespread dissatisfaction with Nepal’s political and economic conditions. In 2002, a year after King Birendra and other members of the royal family were killed in a palace massacre, the new King Gyanendra dissolved Parliament and reasserted full monarchical control of government. In 2006, the Maoists and the main parliamentary parties signed the “12-Point Agreement,” which ended the civil war and called for abolishing the monarchy and electing a Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution.

The first Constituent Assembly (CA), elected in 2008 with a Maoist plurality, failed to agree on a new constitution before its term expired. A second CA with a Nepali Congress plurality was elected in 2013, and in 2015 finally adopted a new constitution. This document turned Nepal from a unitary state into

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<sup>2</sup> Girdhari Dahal, “Review Article - Constitution of Nepal and Political Development: Adaption and Challenges of Implication,” *Janapriya Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 6 (2017): 151.

<sup>3</sup> Gellner, *Idea of Nepal*, 16.

<sup>4</sup> Dahal, “Constitution of Nepal and Political Development,” (2017): 152.

a Federal Democratic Republic and finally ended the interim status that had existed for nearly a decade. A third of the seats in the CA were reserved for women, and other quotas set aside seats for dalits (members of the lowest caste in the Hindu caste hierarchy) and various indigenous groups. The constitution was passed by approximately 90% of the CA.<sup>5</sup> However, various groups objected to the constitution-writing process and especially to the new federal structure. The major parties were accused of a lack of transparency, as many contentious issues were decided in backroom negotiations between leaders rather than in open deliberation by the diverse CA body.<sup>6</sup>

### *Nepal's New Constitution*

The new federal constitution established seven provinces, which are subdivided into a total of 75 districts and 744 local units (see Figure 1). These units are classified either as metropolitan cities, sub-metropolitan cities, municipalities (*nagar paalika* in Nepali), or rural municipalities (*gaau paalika*) depending on their size and level of development.<sup>7</sup> Each local unit is further subdivided into anywhere from 5 to 33 wards, which are the smallest unit of government.<sup>8</sup> Wards consist of a chairperson and four members. Two seats in each ward are reserved for women, one of whom must be a *dalit* woman. Municipalities and rural municipalities are headed by a mayor or chairperson

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<sup>5</sup> Ambika Pokhrel, "Nepal's new constitution: a path to peace or further crisis?" Report, Peace Direct, Oct 20, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Prashant Jha, *Battles of the New Republic*, (London: Hurst & Co., 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Asia Foundation, *Diagnostic Study of Local Governance in Federal Nepal 2017*, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), *Elections in Nepal: 2017 Local Elections*, Report, May 2017.

(respectively), who are assisted by a deputy mayor or chairperson. Either the executive or deputy executive of each local unit must be a woman.

Prior to the new constitution, from the Panchayat period until 2015, Nepal had been divided into 3,157 Village Development Committees (VDCs) and 217 municipalities.<sup>9</sup> When the VDC terms expired without new elections in 2002, the government appointed bureaucrats to serve as local government officials. This system was criticized for its lack of accountability and poor citizen representation.<sup>10</sup> Nearly all policy was created at the Ministry level in Kathmandu and then implemented through unelected bureaucratic offices at each level.

Under the new system, policymaking power at the local level is constitutionally given to an assembly comprised of all ward members of the municipality/rural municipality along with the executive and deputy executive. Assemblies also exist at the district level, made up of the executives and deputy executives from each unit within the district. The main role of districts is coordination between local governments. Provinces were also given significant powers under the new constitution, but as with local governments they faced problems with infrastructure, staffing, and jurisdictional unclarity.<sup>11</sup>

The first local elections under the new constitution took place in two phases from May to June 2017, after a delay caused by Madhesi parties from Nepal's southern plains threatening to boycott the elections.<sup>12</sup> The election was marred by

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<sup>9</sup> Asia Foundation, *Diagnostic Study*, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Asia Foundation, *A Guide to Government in Nepal: Structures, Functions, and Practices*, (Kathmandu: Asia Foundation, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN), *Functioning of Local and Provincial Governments in Nepal- Periodic Report IV*, Apr 2019.

<sup>12</sup> IFES, *Elections in Nepal*, 2017.

sporadic violent clashes between supporters of different parties and a widespread lack of voter education.<sup>13</sup> These were the first local elections in Nepal since 1997. This twenty-year gap occurred due to the Maoist insurgency from 1996 to 2006 and the ensuing decade of unstable governments under the interim constitution.<sup>14</sup>

The constitution devolved considerable powers to the provincial and local levels, including budgetary allocation decisions and policymaking in areas such as infrastructure, health, and education.<sup>15</sup> In theory, policymaking at the local level is meant to rely heavily on community participation. Wards are required to hold community meetings to accept project proposals and requests from community members. The wards then prioritize projects and forward these proposals to the municipal assembly, where projects are selected and voted on.<sup>16</sup> In education specifically, the new constitution at least nominally devolved to the local level powers including curriculum design, teacher hiring and monitoring, school infrastructure construction, student examinations, and budget allocation.<sup>17</sup>

Implementing the new system, however, has been fraught with obstacles. While the quota rules were celebrated as a victory for inclusivity of marginalized groups in local decision-making, some observers have questioned whether this will lead to change in practice or if the new rules only provide token

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<sup>13</sup> DRCN, *Nepal's Local Elections 2017: Final Observation Report*, Nov 2017.

<sup>14</sup> DRCN, *Functioning of Local and Provincial Governments in Nepal- Periodic Report III*, Jan 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Constitution of Nepal, Schedule 8, (2015).

<sup>16</sup> DRCN, *Periodic Report IV*, Apr 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Bhinod Ghimire, "Local govts find it hard managing education sector," *The Kathmandu Post*, Dec 2017, <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2017-12-30/local-govts-find-it-hard-managing-education-sector.html>., DRCN, *Periodic Report III*, 2019.

representation.<sup>18</sup> For example, almost no women were elected to seats not specifically allocated to women under the quota rules.<sup>19</sup> Another challenge in the new system is that local governments often lack the infrastructure, training, and community participation to effectively implement projects.<sup>20</sup> There is also a tendency of centralized parties and local bureaucrats to try and bypass the elected bodies and continue working in a manner similar to the old system.<sup>21</sup> Because of these problems, it remains unclear whether the new federal structure can achieve its aim of increasing the ability of communities, especially marginalized groups like women, *dalits*, and indigenous people, to have ownership over decision making in their localities.

### *Education in Nepal*

These challenges are especially apparent in education, over which the central government maintained tight control for most of Nepal's history. Education in Nepal has historically been the responsibility of the central government. During the Rana regime from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, schooling outside of Kathmandu was sparse. Education was mostly reserved for members of the ruling family or other well-connected or wealthy individuals. When Nepal first became a multiparty

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<sup>18</sup> Tricia Taormina, "Quotas bring wave of Nepalese women into office. What they need next," *Christian Science Monitor*, Sep 2017.

<sup>19</sup> DRCN, *Nepal's Local Elections*, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Om Astha Rai, "Trial and Error Democracy," *The Nepali Times*, May 2017, <http://archive.nepalitimes.com/article/nation/trial-error-democracy,3713>.

<sup>21</sup> Iain Payne and Binayak Basnyat, "Federalism in Jeopardy" *The Nepali Times*, Aug 2017.

democracy and opened to the outside world in the 1950s, schooling expanded rapidly, although access remained an obstacle especially in mountainous areas.<sup>22</sup>

During the Panchayat era from 1960 to 1990, education was used as a tool of the monarchy and national parliament to impose a single “Nepali identity” over a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual state. Laws from this period, some of which remain in effect, centralized education policy and reduced the roles of local communities over school operations. The 1962 Nepal National Education Planning Commission decreed “one uniform system of education” and “instruction...in one language [Nepali] only” for the country.<sup>23</sup> It also gave the central government full control over education and mandated that curricula and textbooks align with the Ministry of Education’s directives. In 1971, the New Education System Plan was adopted, which eliminated the role of local communities in school management. District education offices were set up to run schools, and a government body was established to create a curriculum that would further consolidate the state’s goal of a single Nepali national identity.<sup>24</sup>

The end of Panchayat and the reintroduction of democracy in 1990 brought with it promises of reform. Policies were passed that spoke to the importance of multi-lingual education.<sup>25</sup> However, a succession of weak governments and the continued centralization of power meant that these promises

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<sup>22</sup> Phanindra Kumar Upadhyaya, *Politics of Hegemony and Denial in the Rhetoric of Language and Education Policy in Nepal: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Policy Documents and Government Sponsored Textbooks (1960-2009)*, Dissertation (2010).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 14.

were not implemented in practice. Nepali remained the main language of instruction nationwide and curricula were dictated by the central government.

The passage of the 2015 federal constitution again promised significant education reforms. Powers over primary and secondary education were officially devolved to the provincial and local levels. However, the transfer of these powers has been slow due to a lack of coordination between levels of government and delays in policies passed by the national parliament. Education has been one of the primary policy areas in which jurisdictional challenges have been brought to court, as new local laws sometimes conflict with older national policies. A Democracy Resource Center of Nepal study noted several instances of local education laws being challenged in courts by bureaucrats who felt that they were having their federally-approved responsibilities taken away by the new local authorities.<sup>26</sup> The education laws passed under the old centralized system, including the Panchayat-era Education Act 1971, remain technically still on the books, which limits the ability of local governments to make education policy that does not conflict with existing federal law.<sup>27</sup> The central government has been reluctant to give up all of their powers over education policy, with curriculum design not yet devolved to the local levels, bureaucratic District Education Offices retaining influence, and the federal government still controlling part of the national education budget.<sup>28</sup> Teachers Unions are another factor complicating the

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<sup>26</sup> DRCN, *Periodic Report III*, 8.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>28</sup>“Local levels to manage secondary education,” *The Himalayan Times*, May 2017, <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/local-levels-manage-secondary-education/>.

transition, as many teachers in Nepal are active in party politics and often form a strong lobby against decentralization, as many teachers view local officials as lacking the capacity to effectively manage local education.<sup>29</sup>

## **Literature Review**

### *Evaluating Democracy*

Democracy, a key component of the new Nepali constitution, is a broad and oft-debated concept. What democracy looks like in any given country depends heavily on political culture and historical context. Comparisons between the established liberal democracies of the West and developing countries such as Nepal are particularly challenging and often of little analytical usefulness. While a full analysis of the state of democracy in Nepal is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief discussion of how democracy is being defined here is necessary given the concept's centrality in Nepal's political transition.

Nepal essentially underwent two separate democratic transitions, once in the so-called "second wave" of democratization in the early 1950s and again during the "third wave" in the early 1990s.<sup>30</sup> While the "third wave" was initially hailed as a high watermark for global democracy, it has become clear that many countries with democratic constitutions and regular elections lack important

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"Local governments vow to improve education quality in public schools," The Kathmandu Post, Mar 2018, <https://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2018-03-11/local-governments-vow-to-improve-education-quality-in-public-schools.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Interview 8, Apr 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Dahal, "Constitution of Nepal and Political Development," (2017).

characteristics of democratic governance.<sup>31</sup> This is especially true of newer democracies in the developing world. The German political scientist Wolfgang Merkel's concept of "embedded democracy" goes beyond the standard democracy vs. autocracy dichotomy to analyze situations like this. Merkel includes five "partial regimes" in his definition of democracy: electoral system, political rights, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and the effective power to govern.<sup>32</sup> If a country's government lacks any of these elements, it is classified as a "defective democracy" rather than a liberal democracy. When Merkel first published this concept in 2004, he classified Nepal as an "illiberal" defective democracy. Illiberal democracies are characterized by a lack of accountability, poorly-established norms, and limited political and civil rights. An analysis written in 2000 on the state of democracy in Nepal by S.K. Khatri likewise identifies Nepal as an electoral democracy that has not yet transitioned to a liberal democracy with an established democratic political culture.<sup>33</sup> Despite the massive political changes in the near two decades since the publication of that piece, Nepal's democratic situation likely remains similar, with Freedom House's imperfect but oft-cited democracy rating considering Nepal "Partly Free."<sup>34</sup>

In Merkel's concept of embedded democracy, he stresses that defective democracies do not only exist in brand new democracies or transitioning states,

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<sup>31</sup> Wolfgang Merkel, "Embedded and Defective Democracies," *Democratization* 11, no. 5, (2004): 33-58.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Sridhar K. Khatri, "Democratization: The Global and Nepalese Experience," In *The Institutionalization of Democratic Polity in Nepal* (Kathmandu: Department of Political Science/Sociology, Tribhuvan University, 2000), 63.

<sup>34</sup> Freedom House "Nepal Profile," *Freedom in the World 2018*, (2018).

but rather can become entrenched over time.<sup>35</sup> One contributing factor is the persistence of informal institutions and habitual corruption outside of formal political structures. In states with high degrees of these informal political interactions, carrying out the tasks of day-to-day governance rely on institutions that are not legitimate or accountable to the electorate.

This sentiment is echoed in Sarah Byrne and Gitta Shrestha's 2014 analysis of local government in Nepal after the civil war.<sup>36</sup> Their study was conducted during the interim period before the new constitution when local VDCs were run by unelected bureaucrats. Byrne and Shrestha's main finding was that in authority in local government during this period was worked out through compromises based on consensus. These consensus-based decisions provided legitimacy in an environment where authority was held by appointed bureaucrats rather than democratically elected local officials. Development planning at the VDC level was highly informalized and fragmented between state and non-state actors. Byrne and Shrestha identified that future attempts at formalization could be hampered by this frequent modification of rules at the local level due to consensus-seeking by various actors.

Due to the ongoing nature of Nepal's transition to federalism, there is little academic literature on the effects of the constitutional change currently published. However, several NGOs have published reports on the challenges of the transition so far. The Democracy Resource Center of Nepal's report on "Functioning of

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<sup>35</sup> Merkel, "Embedded and Defective Democracies," (2004).

<sup>36</sup> Sarah Byrne and Gitta Shrestha, "A compromising consensus? Legitimising local government in post-conflict Nepal," *International Development Planning Review* 36, no. 4, (2014): 435-453.

Local and Provincial Governments” identified inadequate staffing and infrastructure, lack of public participation, and a lack of transparency as major issues facing the transition to federalism.<sup>37</sup> It cited education as one area in particular in which jurisdictional boundaries are unclear due to new local responsibilities conflicting with older federal acts.<sup>38</sup> The Asia Foundation, an INGO that works on governance as well as other issues in Nepal, also released a report on the state of the new local governments that came to similar conclusions.<sup>39</sup> As such, it is clear that “democracy” as it is broadly understood remains imperfectly implemented in Nepal’s political system.

### *Federalism and Democracy*

There is a debate in the academic literature concerning the relationship between federalism, defined as a system of political organization that allows smaller territorial units to maintain political integrity through the sharing of powers, and democracy.<sup>40</sup> One school of thought holds that federalism and democracy mutually support each other through several mechanisms. Federalism can increase the accountability of elected representatives to their constituencies by making units of government smaller and closer to citizens. Furthermore, different levels of government are able to check abuses by others, strengthening the rule of law and accountability in the entire system. Additionally, federalism can better

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<sup>37</sup> DRCN, *Periodic Report IV*, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Asia Foundation, *Diagnostic Study*, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> “Federalism,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2019.

represent the interests of varied groups in heterogeneous societies. Local units can be responsive to the specific interests or needs of their constituents, even if that group is a small minority within the entire state.<sup>41</sup>

However, other scholars posit that federalism can pose an impediment to democracy. In a federal system, elected officials cannot autonomously implement policies based on their constituents' desires alone, because they are constrained by other levels.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, federalism can inhibit the policymaking process when disputes between levels arise over jurisdictions or implementation. In a study by Arthur Benz and Jared Sonnickson, the authors conclude that federalism and democracy are independent processes not inherently correlated with each other in one direction or the other. Different types of this relationship stem from unique historical and constitutional contexts, and lead to different institutional challenges.<sup>43</sup> Through several case studies of established Western democracies, Benz and Sonnickson argue that a loose coupling between the regimes of democracy and federalism is least likely to produce tensions. Federalism is still very new in Nepal, so it is likely too early to determine what the eventual effect on democracy will be. However, early reports indicate that there are considerable tensions between levels of government due to a lack of jurisdictional clarity and a resistance to devolving powers from the central level.

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<sup>41</sup> Arthur Benz and Jared Sonnickson, "Patterns of federal democracy: tensions, friction, or balance between two government dimensions," *European Political Science Review* 9, no. 1, (2017), 3–25.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

## *Citizen Participation in Local Government*

Citizen participation and “proportional inclusion” in decision-making is a key stated goal of Nepal’s federal constitution.<sup>44</sup> An active citizen role in government decision-making is often viewed as a key component of effective democracy.<sup>45</sup> A 2010 study by Ank Michels and Laurens de Graaf supports the idea that citizen participation has a positive effect on democracy. This occurs through several mechanisms, including heightened feelings of citizen responsibility for public affairs, a wider array of opinions brought into public deliberations, and increased legitimacy of government policies. Notably, they find that citizens do not necessarily need to play a direct role in shaping policy, as the act of participation itself enhances the quality of democratic citizenship. Additionally, citizen participation has the potential to bring the interests of groups that are underrepresented in government into the official decision-making process. However, the authors also note that citizens who generally participate in local government initiatives, at least in the Western European context they studied, are generally wealthier, better educated, and more male than the population as a whole, indicating participatory governance efforts do not necessarily reflect the interests of entire communities.

Another challenge in participatory governance that that study identified relates to expectations. If local governments make an effort to include citizens in the policy process and participation fails to translate to anticipated results, citizens

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<sup>44</sup> Constitution of Nepal, Preamble, (2015).

<sup>45</sup> Ank Michels & Laurens De Graaf, “Examining Citizen Participation: Local Participatory Policy Making and Democracy,” *Local Government Studies* 36, no. 4 (2010): 477-491.

may become disillusioned and unlikely to participate in future projects. An additional study by Michels of participatory governance initiatives found that they can lead to tensions between direct and representative democracy. Citizens themselves often do not lack the expertise to directly make policy, so forums that take citizen input as one piece of a broader decision-making process are often more effective.<sup>46</sup>

These studies as well as much of the rest of the literature on the relationship between citizen participation and democracy are focused on local government initiatives in Western European countries, where in some cases participatory government has been part of political culture for centuries. In Nepal, political culture is quite different, and is characterized by a “feudal” mindset in which government officials are perceived as gatekeepers to power rather than public servants.<sup>47</sup> As such, the new constitution’s focus on citizen participation will be hard to implement in practice initially, as neither citizens nor the state have experience with bottom-up forms of decision-making.

At least in the West, education has long been a forum for citizen participation in policymaking. An essay by Michael Mintrom lays out the academic debate over the merits of “local democracy” in education policy.<sup>48</sup> Optimists in this debate argue that local democratic control of schooling is healthy for democracy. Mechanisms for this include giving communities input into how

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<sup>46</sup> Ank Michels, “Citizen Participation in Local Policy Making: Design and Democracy,” *International Journal of Public Administration* 35, no. 4, (2012): 285-292.

<sup>47</sup> Interview 8, April 2019. (see appendix for explanation of interview numbers)

<sup>48</sup> Michael Mintrom, “Promoting Local Democracy in Education: Challenges and Prospects,” *Education Policy* 23, no. 2 (2009).

schools are run and building a shared identity between education and the community as a whole. Those arguing against this idealistic view cite practical concerns such as how disparities in local resources can lead to geographic inequality in educational outcomes.<sup>49</sup> In Nepal, communities have for decades had influence over school policy in the form of School Management Committees (SMCs), which gave parents and community members control over school policy independent of the state and powerful teacher unions.<sup>50</sup>

## **Research Methodology**

### *Case Selection*

This study uses a case study methodology to analyze the effects of Nepal's transition to a federal system on education policymaking. A case study methodology is best-suited for this research question for several reasons. First, Nepal is a highly geographically and ethnically diverse country, and attempting to answer any question on a national scale is inherently extremely challenging. Furthermore, the new federal constitution divides Nepal into 744 municipalities and rural municipalities.<sup>51</sup> While all local units confront many of the same challenges, each faces a different local context and has different resources available, making comparisons or broader analyses difficult. A case study can

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Interview 8, April 2019.

<sup>51</sup> RAP Nepal, "Local Level Authorities (Metropolitan, Sub-Metropolitan, Municipality, Rural Municipality)," 2017.

focus on the experiences in one specific rural municipality in an in-depth manner without trying to draw nationwide conclusions. Local governance and education are both highly context-dependent and involve many variables, making a case study methodology the best approach for this study.<sup>52</sup>The 2015 constitution devolves power over basic and secondary education to the municipality/rural municipality level, making this the most useful unit of analysis for analyzing this question.<sup>53</sup>

Annapurna Rural Municipality was selected primarily based off of convenience. I had previously met Captain Dam Bahadur Pun, the chairman of the Rural Municipality and the advisor of this project, while staying in Khibang village as part of the SIT academic program. Based on this initial contact, I was able to return to Annapurna with Captain Pun's support and assistance to conduct research on local governance and education in the rural municipality.

Annapurna Rural Municipality is located northwest of Pokhara, Nepal's second largest city and the capital of Gandaki province. It is the easternmost local unit within Myagdi District (see Figure 2). The *gaau paalika* contains eight wards and 17 villages (see Figure 3).<sup>54</sup> The local government is headquartered in the town of Pokhare Bagar, which is located along the Beni-Jomsom highway in the Kali Gandaki river valley. The rural municipality has a population of roughly 13,300.<sup>55</sup> A significant portion of the *gaau paalika* lies within the Annapurna

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<sup>52</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, (2009).

<sup>53</sup> Constitution of Nepal, Schedule 8, 8., (2015).

<sup>54</sup> Informal Conversation, April 2019.

<sup>55</sup> Annapurna Rural Municipality, Nepal Election 2074, *Kathmandu Post*.

<http://localelection.ekantipur.com/?pradesh=4&panto=myagdi&location=427&lng=eng>.

Conversation Area, which is the largest protected area in Nepal and seeks to promote conservation and sustainable development and tourism in the region.<sup>56</sup> As such, the area is popular with trekkers and tourism is a major portion of the economy for several villages. There are 36 schools in Annapurna *gaau paalika*, 10 of which are secondary schools. Primary schools offer nursery classes through Class 3 or Class 5, while secondary schools offer nursery through either Class 10 or Class 12.<sup>57</sup>

### *Data Collection*

The data for this study come from semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and observations conducted in Annapurna Rural Municipality over ten days in mid-April, 2019. Eleven interviews were conducted while in the field. Eight of these were with individuals, and three included two or three participants. Among the fourteen interview participants were nine schoolteachers, two School Management Committee (SMC) members, and three local government officials. Three of the teachers were head teachers for their respective schools. Local government officials included the municipality chairman, the municipality finance minister, and one ward chairman.<sup>58</sup> Informal conversation participants included other teachers, several civil society leaders, another SMC chairman, and another ward chairman who also served as the municipality education minister. Observations took place at six schools, one ward headquarters office, and in one

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<sup>56</sup> Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), <https://ntnc.org.np/project/annapurna-conservation-area-project-acap>.

<sup>57</sup> Interview 11, Apr 2019.

<sup>58</sup> See appendix for interview numbering explanation.

meeting between local government officials, representatives of a civil society group, and community members.

Interviews and observations took place in ten different villages across seven of the eight wards making up the *gaau paalika*. Interviews took place in schools, participants' homes, or in public areas at local guesthouses. Interview participants were all male except for one female teacher in a group interview. Participants in informal conversations included both male and female teachers. Interviews were conducted primarily in English, with occasional phrases or questions in Nepali. Two interviews were primarily in Nepali, one without a translator present and one with another participant partially translating to English. The duration of interviews ranged from roughly 20 to 90 minutes.

Participants were identified through a snowball sampling method, based primarily on contacts provided by two initial key informants. These key informants were introduced to me by Captain Pun, the chairman of the rural municipality. Several other participants were identified by convenience through encounters over the course of fieldwork.

### *Limitations*

This study's small scale inherently limits the conclusions that can be drawn from it. While I was able to conduct field research in most of the municipality's wards, this meant that I was only able to spend a small period of time in each location within the rural municipality. Because of this, my participants were restricted mainly to contacts provided previously by key

informants. The experiences and perspectives of my participants thus are likely not representative of all teachers, administrators, or government officials in the locality.

Additionally, the Nepali New Year holiday fell during my fieldwork, meaning many schools were either closed or just beginning the enrollment period for the new year during my visits. This made it difficult to conduct observations or meet with teachers while school was currently in session. Also because of my frequent travel around the *gaau paalika* and limited time in the field, I was unable to observe any official ward or municipality meetings or make a full visit to the municipality head office building. The rural municipality's education focal person, a key municipality-level staff member for overseeing education, was not in the area during my fieldwork, so I was not able to interview this individual.

### *Ethics*

This study was conducted with prior approval from a Local Review Board. All interview participants were informed of the purpose of the research and gave consent to be interviewed prior to the interview. Interview participants were also informed that they would remain anonymous in my submitted paper. The only name that appears in this paper is that of the chairman of Annapurna *gaau paalika*, an easily identifiable public official who gave express consent to be named. Despite efforts to maintain anonymity, other public officials may still be identifiable based on their position or statements. Interview transcripts were based on handwritten notes, and no audio recordings of interviews were taken. Interview

transcripts and recordings will be stored on a password-protected laptop only accessible by me. Data will be deleted within two years after completion of the project.

## **Research Findings**

In interviews, participants discussed a variety of perspectives on education, local government decision-making, and the transition to federalism as they relate to Annapurna *gaau paalika*. In this section, I will provide an overview of both the challenges and strengths of these processes and institutions as reported by interview participants. Findings have been broken down into four overlapping topics: the transition to federalism, capacity at the local government level, democracy and representation in decision-making, and the state of education in the rural municipality.

### *The Transition to Federalism: Challenges and Opportunities*

Most participant from all backgrounds were at least somewhat optimistic about the transition the new federal system of government. Reasons for this support varied based on participant. One commonly cited reason was the increased proximity of government to constituents. In the old unitary system, all decisions were made at the Ministry level in Kathmandu. Now, the *gaau paalika* is able to make policy and allocate budgets based on local needs and interests. One head teacher described the “supervision for education” from the local government as “from very close” compared to the “lot of distance” from the

central government previously.<sup>59</sup> Another head teacher also mentioned the increase of convenience in his job due to devolution.<sup>60</sup> Before, school officials would have to travel to the District Education Office in Beni, the capital of Myagdi district, to submit paperwork. Now, these tasks are carried out much closer in Pokhara Bagar. The role of the District Office in Beni has been reduced to coordinating between the seven local units in Myagdi District, and its staff has been greatly reduced.

The *gaau paalika* has established its own education department and appointed a resource person to oversee education in the locality. There is a separate position of local education minister, also selected by the *gaau paalika* chairman, who is an elected ward chairman. According to government officials, the resource person and education minister work together with representatives of the teachers' unions to decide education policy at the *gaau paalika* level. This replaces the previous system, in which policies were decided at the central government level and then implemented through a bureaucratic District Education Office in Beni. This shift was not instantaneous, as one participant who worked for an education NGO explained that there was a significant delay between the establishing of a local education department and the hiring of a resource person by the *gaau paalika*.<sup>61</sup>

At the local government level, all decisions must be approved by the *gaau paalika* cabinet. The cabinet consists of 42 individuals: the chairperson, vice-

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<sup>59</sup> Interview 6, Apr 2019.

<sup>60</sup> Interview 12, Apr 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Informal Conversation, 2019.

chairperson, and the five elected ward members from each of the eight wards. All of these individuals are elected, presenting a stark contrast from the bureaucratic system that characterized the previous structure. The local government also contains ministries focusing on specific policy areas. Ministers are appointed by the chairperson. Some are ward chairmen and others are unelected individuals chosen from the community based on their qualifications or connections. A smaller 16-member body - consisting of the chairperson and vice chairperson, the eight ward chairmen, and six other government officials – is responsible for making “visions” and then presenting these proposals to the full cabinet for approval.

Nearly every participant remarked that the transition was difficult to implement and was still incomplete, nearly two years into the first term of the elected local governments. This has resulted in a fragmented system where policymaking power is held by a variety of actors. One SMC chairman illustrated this system by describing three ongoing efforts being undertaken by the SMC: a new science lab, a new computer lab, and a vocational education program.<sup>62</sup> For the science lab, the SMC lobbied the local government, and was promised an allocation for it in the next budget. For the computer lab, the SMC went to the provincial government in Pokhara and was awarded a grant for the project. Finally, for the vocational education program, the SMC chair had recently returned from a trip to Kathmandu to apply for this program at the Ministry of Education. While in theory the constitution gives power over education to the

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<sup>62</sup> Interview 2, Apr 2019.

local governments, these powers are still shared by actors at all levels of government, complicating the task of improving education the local level.

### *Local Government Capacity*

News articles and NGO reports published since Nepal's federal transition have all emphasized the capacity issues facing the local level. The 2017 local elections brought to power many officials who had limited or no experience in government. This was unavoidable given that at that time there had been no elected local officials for 20 years. Findings from this study support these previous reports, as many participants identified a lack of experience in policymaking and lack of experience with the "rules and regulations" of governing as challenges in local government decision-making. This lack of capacity was perceived not only from teachers working outside of government, but also by government officials themselves.

Participants were divided over whether the failure of the local governments to be as effective as they could be was simply due to a lack of experience or due to a lack of budgetary resources as well. Some participants believed that the *gaau paalika* had adequate budget at their disposal but lacked the infrastructure to spend it efficiently on projects. One teacher said that "in our Annapurna *gaau paalika* we are rich in natural resources: tourism, hydropower, agriculture. We are very rich. But we have to do more work for maximum utilization of resources."<sup>63</sup> Other participants thought that the *gaau paalika*

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<sup>63</sup> Interview 1, Apr 2019.

lacked the necessary funds to accomplish all of their goals in education and other sectors, in part due to perceived corruption. One SMC chairman expressed frustration at the amount of money he was expected to raise independently of the government budget, as the school required more teachers than were paid for in the budget.<sup>64</sup>

One major result of the self-identified lack of capacity at the local level is a desire by government officials to bring in outside expertise. The *gaau paalika* chairman expressed a desire to bring in NGOs and especially volunteer teachers to support the government, as many local officials lacked formal education and, in his view, some were corrupt.<sup>65</sup> Just during the course of my fieldwork, a Nepali education NGO was conducting teacher trainings in the area, an organic agriculture program was meeting with government officials, and a volunteer foreign teacher had recently arrived to one secondary school.

Some schools also rely on NGOs to supplement government-provided budgets. During my visits to various schools in Annapurna, I observed buildings or initiatives funded by American, German, British, and Korean donor organizations as well as by local community donations. The Annapurna region has historically sent many young men to serve in *Gurkha* regiments in the British or Indian armies. These former soldiers and their families receive army pensions and thus often have higher incomes than the population as a whole. As a result, these families often contribute towards funds supporting schools in their home

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<sup>64</sup> Interview 5, Apr 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Informal Conversation, Apr 2019.

villages. One SMC member said that visiting trekkers are another source of donations to support schools.<sup>66</sup>

Participants of all backgrounds, including government officials themselves, considered politicians to be “uneducated.” Because of this, there was a perception that most people in government were incapable of solving problems on their own. *Gaau paalika* level officials were especially critical of the capabilities of the ward members. According to one participant, the full local cabinet of all elected officials rarely amends the proposals of the aforementioned “vision-making committee,” which consists of only the local executive, ministers, and ward chairmen. Most of the elected members, in this participant’s view, were simply “signing machines” who lacked the education and experience to come up with their own ideas or substantially amend projects proposed by the executive and ward chairmen.<sup>67</sup>

### *Democracy and Community Representation*

Participants were mixed on how the transition to federalism related to democracy (*loktantra* in Nepali).<sup>68</sup> Several teachers and people in civil society responded optimistically that the new system was more democratic than the old. One teacher specifically mentioned the increase in “discussion” at all levels – from the school to the community to local politics to national politics – that has

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<sup>66</sup> Interview 2, Apr 2019.

<sup>67</sup> Informal Conversation, Apr 2019.

<sup>68</sup> There are two Nepali words for democracy, *loktantra* and *prajatantra*. The former a government of the people while the latter means a government of citizens. *Loktantra* is a less formal word that has become the favored term. In interviews, even those mostly conducted in English, I used the word *loktantra* when asking about democracy to clarify the sense of my question.

increased democracy since the new constitution.<sup>69</sup> This was in contrast to the old system, which in that same teacher's perception was simply "orders from the top." Other teachers mentioned the ease of access that citizens now had to the government compared to the previous structure.

Several other participants also considered the new system more democratic but didn't necessarily consider this to be a positive development. Two respondents, one a teacher and one in government, lamented what they saw as a "lack of discipline" in Nepali society, which in their view was caused by an excess of democracy.<sup>70</sup> Several teachers responded that they did not see the new constitution as a change in democracy, and that democracy had existed in Nepal since the end of the Rana regime in 1951. One teacher said that while political rights have existed in Nepal for decades now, politicians have prevented broader "economic rights and education rights" to take root, which limits democracy.<sup>71</sup> Part of this problem, in his explanation, was due to citizens understanding democracy as only promises of "freedom" rather than a set of duties as well. In his view, proper education would solve this problem and allow a more meaningful democracy to develop.

When asked about the differences between the old and new constitutional systems, only one interview participant, a teacher, mentioned the new constitution's quotas for women and *dalit* women at the ward level unprompted.<sup>72</sup> In his view, this was an important component of local democracy, as it provided

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<sup>69</sup> Interview 4, Apr 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Interview 7, Apr 2019; Interview 11, Apr 2019.

<sup>71</sup> Interview 12, Apr 2019.

<sup>72</sup> Interview 1, Apr 2019.

better representation for women and low caste people, who had previously been marginalized from local decision-making. Other participants shared this support for the quota rules for similar reasons, noting that leaders of previously sidelined groups now had direct power in government rather than simply relying on unelected bureaucrats to look out for their interests.

However, nearly every participant acknowledged the difficulties of achieving the goals of the quota system in practice. One teacher said that the women in local government were “unable to do anything” because they were “uneducated and illiterate.”<sup>73</sup> An SMC chairman said that although the system was good for representation, women and low-caste people “have no idea” due to a lack of education and experience.<sup>74</sup> However, a ward chairman said that in his experience each of the four elected members in his ward carried out the same roles.<sup>75</sup> As noted above, I was unable to personally interview any female elected officials during my fieldwork.

As discussed above, in many participants’ views the community has much closer access to government decision-making under the new federal system. Some of the commonly mentioned methods of community input, however, have existed from before the new constitution. One is the selection of members of SMCs, which is outlined by federal education policy and has persisted from the previous state structure. SMC member selection is done by an assembly of all the parents of students at the school. While some schools have formal elections for these

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<sup>73</sup> Interview 7, Apr 2019.

<sup>74</sup> Interview 5, Apr 2019.

<sup>75</sup> Interview 9, Apr 2019.

positions, most of the schools represented in this study instead have a nomination process, where community members are able to identify “capable” individuals to serve on the SMC. One participant, a teacher, believed that this selection process differed between villages due to cultural differences.<sup>76</sup> He said that the villages that had formal contested elections for SMC positions tended to be populated mostly by high-caste Brahmin families. His village, in contrast, was mostly inhabited by ethnic Magar people, who in his view tended to prefer a consensus style of decision making.

The new constitution is designed to conduct policymaking in a participatory, bottom-up fashion, with community members providing proposals to the wards, who then select which projects to propose to the *gaau paalika*. Participant descriptions of the policymaking process did not necessarily match this model. Some participants lamented what they perceived as a lack of interest in education or governance among local people. Others believed that an interest existed, but a lack of education and experience within communities made it difficult for policies to arise from the bottom up. One head teacher contrasted the responsibility given to the grassroots level “on paper” with the reality that most decisions are made in meetings between the ward members and the *gaau paalika*. This same teacher felt that the new ward structure provided less community representation than the old VDC structure. “I can go and listen but I cannot vote. I am just a listener. So I feel powerless at that time.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Informal Conversation, Apr 2019.

<sup>77</sup> Interview 12, Apr 2019.

## *Schools and Teachers*

Captain Pun, the chairman of Annapurna *gaau paalika*, identified teachers as the number one obstacle to implementing his vision for local education policy. Teacher hiring in Nepal was historically very centralized, with the Ministry of Education in Kathmandu selecting teachers and assigning them to various schools through the Teacher Service Commission.<sup>78</sup> The new constitution, at least in theory, transferred this hiring responsibility to the local level. According to teachers, the local government does now administer teacher examinations and select temporary teachers. However, the Ministry of Education still has the final responsibility for selecting and assigning permanent teachers. One head teacher noted that while he was personally supportive of devolving hiring powers to the local government, teachers overall were split on the issue, with many believing that the Ministry was more capable of making hiring decisions than the local authorities.<sup>79</sup>

Participants in government and on SMCs identified Nepal's powerful teachers' unions as an obstacle to providing quality education. These unions exist at all levels, from the local to the national, and are often closely linked to political parties. Government officials complained that the political nature of the unions means teacher hiring is based on political connections rather than on merit. During Nepal's transition to federalism, the unions have resisted attempts to devolve teacher hiring decisions from the Ministry of Education to the local level.

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<sup>78</sup> Interview 2, Apr 2019.

<sup>79</sup> Interview 12, Apr 2019.

Most of the teachers who participated in this study, however, were supportive of the role of the unions. In their view, the unions were necessary for protecting the rights of teachers, especially those who are old and risk being phased out due to modernization efforts in education. Another teacher-identified role of the unions was to represent the concerns and suggestions of teachers to the local government.

Curriculum design remains a responsibility of the federal government. The Ministry of Education provides schools around the country with textbooks and lessons. Based on a policy that began prior to the new constitution, local units can choose to design 20% of the curriculum themselves, to meet local priorities or teach local languages. However, not all schools take advantage of this policy due to the challenges of creating a curriculum locally. Most participants did not see curriculum-design as a power that was necessary to be completely devolved, although some teachers expressed displeasure that topics such as agriculture, which is locally important, are not included in the centrally-provided curricula.

Some of the other participant-identified obstacles facing education in Annapurna *gaau paalika* stem from geography and demographics rather than political factors. Many participants, both teachers and government officials, cited the migration of young and educated people from Annapurna *gaau paalika* to large cities or foreign countries as a challenge. Another participant expressed frustration that many NGOs operating in Nepal focused their projects on populated urban areas, neglecting places like Annapurna.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Interview 11, Apr 2019.

School mergers, another significant political issue surrounding in education in Annapurna, are a result from these demographic changes. Some primary schools have attendance in the single digits due to the lack of young children in some villages. Despite low attendance, these schools are still assigned teachers from the central government, who are paid out of the local government education budget. This has caused a desire within the *gaau paalika* for merging these primary schools in rural areas with secondary schools in larger villages. Government officials were highly supportive of this idea, as it would save money to put towards other education projects. One SMC chairman also expressed support, as two nearby schools had low enrollment and were being considered for a merger with his school. This chairman relayed to me that the local government had even set up a reward system which would grant additional funding to schools that successfully merged.<sup>81</sup> Despite the local government desire for mergers and their constitutional authority over education, they were unable to merge schools without the approval of the central government as well as the SMCs of the schools involved.

Another significant ongoing education project in Annapurna *gaau paalika* is a “teleteaching” initiative. This project would involve equipping secondary schools with large television monitors and projectors to allow math and science teachers in other parts of the country to remotely teach classes in Annapurna via video link. Both teachers and government officials interviewed were highly supportive of this project as a way to address the shortage of qualified

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<sup>81</sup> Interview 2, Apr 2019.

science teachers at many schools and improve the incorporation of technology in the classroom.<sup>82</sup> While the local government has already provided secondary schools with high quality monitors and projectors, at the time of my fieldwork the project was not yet operational, as school staff lacked the technical capacity to set up and use the technology. This illustrates some of the capacity and coordination issues that are affecting education in the federalism transition period.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

It is difficult to draw any wide-ranging conclusions about the state of democracy or of education policymaking in Nepal from this study, given its limited scope. It is also clear from these findings that the transition to federalism is very much ongoing and incomplete. Depending on political events at the national and local level, the governmental situation in Annapurna rural municipality may look very different in four or five years. However, these findings from these interviews, conversations, and observations do point to some larger processes at play. Two major obstacles to the implementation of local democracy through the new federal constitution are a lack of local government capacity and the persistence of old institutions.

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<sup>82</sup> Participants were divided on the origin of this project. A teacher claimed it was the idea of the local teachers' union, while government officials and an SMC member claimed it was the idea of the local government leadership.

### *Lack of Capacity as a Barrier to Democracy*

The capacity problems facing the local government of Annapurna *gaau paalika* was a consistent theme among all interview participants. Teachers and school officials viewed capacity as a limit to the government's ability to improve the quality of education in the area, and government officials expressed frustration that they were unable to implement their visions and priorities. The lack of local government capacity poses an impediment to the bottom-up style of policymaking envisioned by the federal constitution.

The literature evaluating citizen participation in government makes clear that citizen proposals must be combined with government expertise to be implemented, given the average citizen's understandable lack of policymaking experience. In Annapurna *gaau paalika*, interview participants identified breakdowns in this process in multiple steps. First, participants believed that the lack of education among the local population led to either a disinterest in or inability to become involved in decision-making about education policy. Secondly, participants believed many elected officials also lacked the technical expertise to translate ideas into implementable policies. Budgetary constraints and the incomplete devolution of powers also contribute to this problem. This leads to a system in which it is both difficult for citizens to engage in the decision-making process and difficult for local officials to incorporate citizen concerns in their decision making. As a result, decisions are mostly made at higher levels of government and dictated to schools and communities.

A strong civil society sector is often considered a sign of a strong democracy, as NGOs and voluntary organizations can hold governments accountable and engage citizens. Participants in this study emphasized the large role that NGOs play in the Nepali government. This undoubtedly has many positive impacts, such as supplementing public budgets and bringing projects and technical capacity to the locality that would otherwise be unavailable. Government officials expressed their desire for continued NGO projects in the area and school officials stated the importance of outside donors to promoting education. However, government officials also stated their concerns that in Nepal governments were “controlled by NGOs,” and many political figures ran NGOs on the side.<sup>83</sup> This opens up the possibility that strong involvement of civil society may actually be hampering Nepal’s transition to a more decentralized and democratic system. A lack of capacity in government creates a need to import expertise and policy ideas from outside non-governmental actors. While many such projects may have beneficial effects, they are not necessarily based on community-identified priorities or accountable to voters in the way that community-initiated, local government-implemented projects would be.

### *Persistence of Institutions*

Nepal’s shift to a federal structure of government is still in its transition stage. As such, many of the formal and informal institutions of the previous system of government are still active, including those related to education. These

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<sup>83</sup> Interview 11, Apr 2019.

include centralized curriculum design and teacher hiring, the role of SMCs in school management, and the importance of informal connections and networks in implementing government projects.

This phenomenon gives support to Byrne and Shrestha's aforementioned hypothesis that Nepal's period of unelected local government, which operated through consensus, compromise, and informal networks, posed an obstacle to a transition to a more accountable and formalized system. Some participants spoke of seeking out informal conversations with government officials to secure projects or budgets rather than going through the bottom-up process from community to ward to *gaau paalika*. SMC members are also selected based on this consensus style of decision-making that remains common in Nepali political culture. While this system may be best suited to the local context, it also raises accountability and representation concerns in the absence of formal elections.

As previously mentioned, there is still a large amount of jurisdictional unclarity surrounding education policymaking, with the division of powers between the local, provincial, and federal level still not fully decided. Old federal acts remain on the books, and local units are still waiting for new legislation outlining the federal system. This structure limits the efficiency and productivity of the new federal system, with schools having to coordinate with various levels of government as well as outside actors to accomplish plans. This speaks to the policy deadlocks and counterintuitive lack of accountability and representation that can occur under federalism if not implemented smoothly.

### *Opportunities for Further Study*

This project's limited scope and the ongoing nature of the research topic makes this study a starting point for analyzing Nepal's federal transition rather than an end result. Further extensions of this research could conduct case studies in other localities in Nepal, such as those in urban areas or the densely-populated southern plains, where challenges may be different. Public opinion would be another dimension to add to this study, as this project focused on a limited number of interviews rather than a broad overview of citizen perceptions of governance and education. Finally, an analysis of the federal transition focusing on the national or provincial level would also be useful.

### **Conclusion**

Federalism in Nepal remains a very new system, and challenges to its implementation are unavoidable. This study has examined these challenges in one rural municipality of Nepal, specifically in the realm of decision-making surrounding education policy. As government officials, schools, civil society actors, and citizens gain more experience operating in Nepal's new constitutional environment, and as institutions evolve over time, some of these challenges will likely dissipate. However, if the Nepali constitution's goal of a more democratic, inclusive, and participatory government is to be achieved, there will have to be a concerted effort on behalf of governments and citizens to uphold accountability and clarity in government while gradually building up capacity. Education is both an arena in which these disputes play out as well as a potential solution, as schools can serve as training grounds to build democracy from the local level.

## Appendix

The following table associates the interview numbers used in the citations of this paper with the participant occupation and location of the interviews. Interview numbers were randomly generated and are not in order by date in order to preserve participant anonymity. Village names or ward numbers are not specified for this same reason. For interviews with multiple participants, participant occupations are divided by semicolons.

<b>Interview Number</b>	<b>Participant Occupation(s)</b>	<b>Location</b>
Interview 1	Teacher	Annapurna Rural Municipality
Interview 2	SMC Chairman	Annapurna Rural Municipality
Interview 3	Teacher; Teacher	Annapurna Rural Municipality
Interview 4	Head Teacher	Annapurna Rural Municipality
Interview 5	SMC Chairman	Annapurna Rural Municipality
Interview 6	Head Teacher	Annapurna Rural Municipality
Interview 7	Teacher	Annapurna Rural Municipality
Interview 8	NGO official	Kathmandu
Interview 9	Ward Chairman	Annapurna Rural Municipality
Interview 10	Teacher	Annapurna Rural Municipality
Interview 11	Rural Municipality Chairman; Rural Municipality Finance Minister; Teacher/NGO Official/Local Government Volunteer	Annapurna Rural Municipality
Interview 12	Head Teacher	Annapurna Rural Municipality

Figure 1 – Nepali Federal Structure

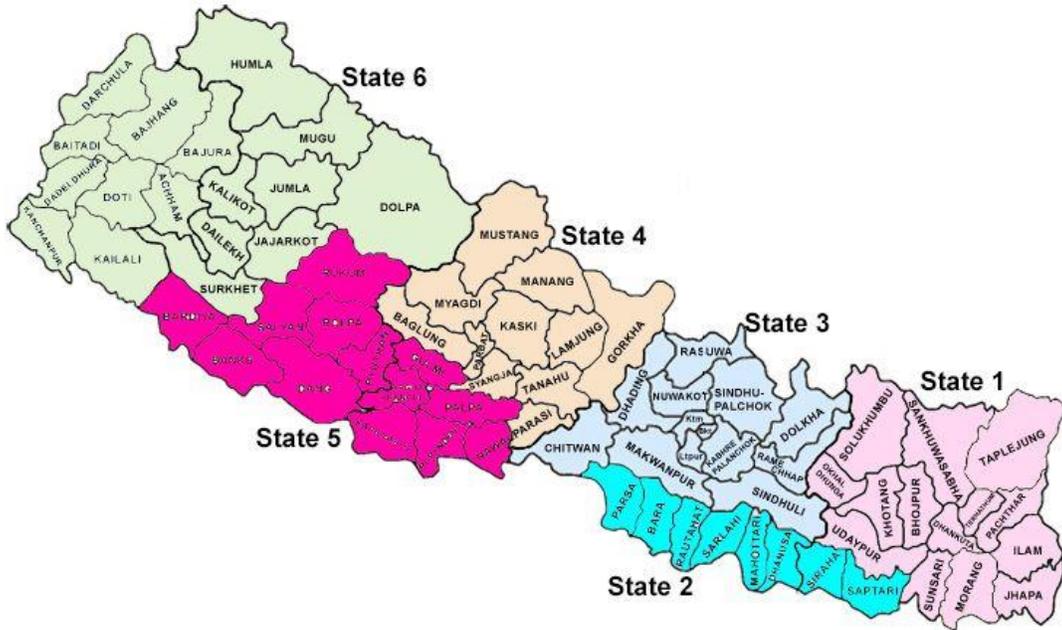


Figure 2 – Myagdi District

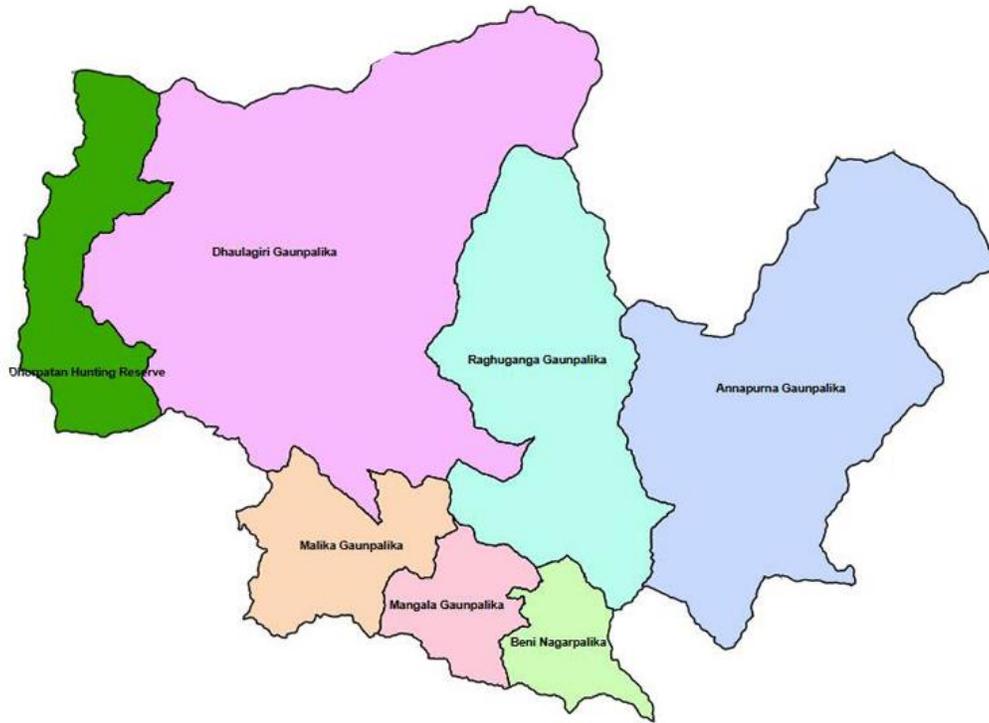
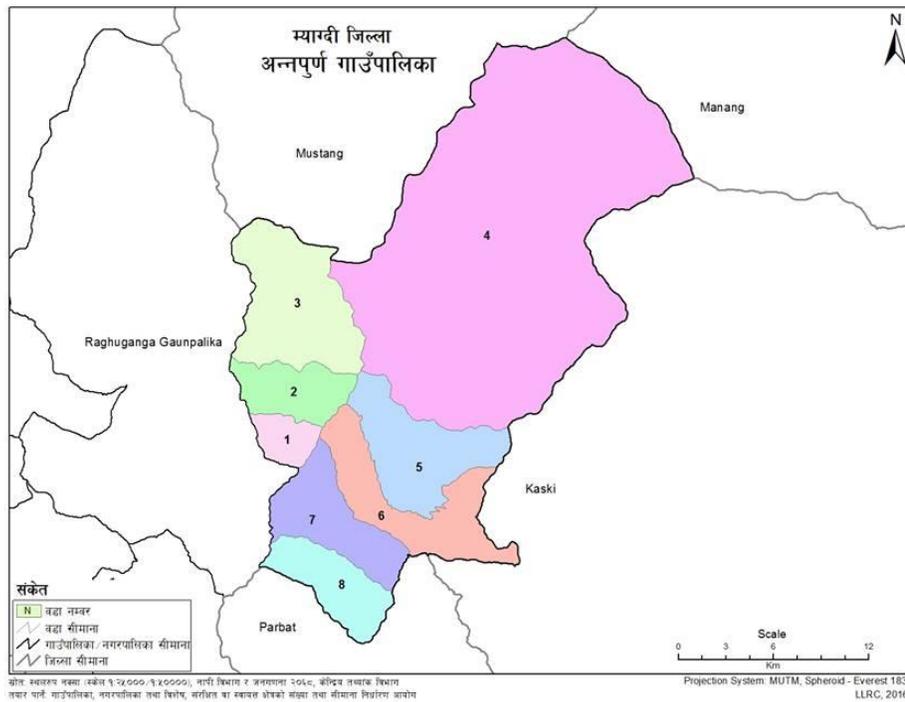


Figure 3 – Annapurna *gaau paalika* with wards labelled



## Glossary and Key Terms

*Gaau paalika* – rural municipality. Nepal is divided into roughly 750 local units classified as either municipalities, rural municipalities, metropolitan cities, or sub-metropolitan cities.

*Loktantra* - democracy, government of the people

*Dalit* – a member of the lowest caste in the Hindu caste hierarchy. Dalits have faced historical marginalization and discrimination in Nepal.

School Management Committee (SMC) – a nominated body consisting of 7-9 members from among the parents of students at a specific school. SMCs are responsible for crafting school policies and serving as a liaison between the community, teachers, and government. Ward chairmen are by law automatically granted.

Ward – the smallest level of elected local government. Consists of a chairperson and four members. By law, two members must be women, one of whom must be a *dalit* woman.

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