

Role of local government to combat global pandemic: a case of Birendranagar Municipality

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ABSTRACT

Nepal experienced power devolution as the country entered the federal system via the new constitution in 2015. The main goal of federalism is to restructure the state as people aspired to various social movements and a decade-long internal armed conflict. Although federalism is a very new concept in Nepal and is unfamiliar, it has great consequences. One of the major implications of power devolution has been observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The activism of local governments with the engagement of community members in Nepal has proven effective in order to control COVID-19. This study aimed to analyze the activities of local levels, particularly Birendranagar Municipality, to prevent and combat the global pandemic. This article employs interviews, focused group discussions, observation of holding centers, and analyses the policies and activities of Birendranagar Municipality related to combating COVID-19. The main objective of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of local levels and their receptiveness to global issues, and thus, the importance of power devolution and local administration to maintain peace and prosperity. The main finding is that actions undertaken at the local level are more effective and prompt than other forms of government and their agencies.

Introduction

In late 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) alerted people from around the world that the newly identified virus had just started its global tour (WHO, 2020). After that, the governments started building strategies to cope with the corona virus disease (COVID-19) the byproduct was fear among people. The fear of dying from the epidemic also contributed (Kossowska, 2022) to the death toll, it was 6.34 million by the end of June 2022 (John Hopkins University, 2022). Like others, the government of Nepal also went through lockdown, holding center, quarantine, and isolation in order to prevent and cure the patients of COVID-19. Later, the changing forms of the virus changed the government's strategies. This pathetic portrait of the pandemic has posed a range of problems for people and governments.

To manage these problems, national governments, international organizations, and civil societies have played crucial roles (Digital Medic, 2021). The international community, that is, international organizations, particularly engaged in building global policies and standards, while national governments were worried about their territory and aligned with global norms. At the same time, local governing bodies focused on handling people peacefully in their homes. The major implementing agencies of global standards of using facial masks and hand sanitizers and maintaining social distancing were local-level governments.

Nepal, which just entered the federal structure via a new constitution in 2015, has thus experienced power devolution during the pandemic; however, Karki (2021) accused the federal government of not

being that much federal. This study attempts to identify how local governments make quick decisions and prompt actions happen in order to save the lives of people during the pandemic. In addition, it analyzes how actions taken at local levels help contain the pandemic at the global level. This article also examines how the receptivity of global policies at the local level has helped the idea of *glocal* growth.

To this end, this article employs interviews, focused group discussions, and minute observations of holding centers and decision-making processes at the local level as methods of data collection. Secondary data from various sources were also used. Moreover, the case of Birendranagar Municipality has been presented to justify this argument.

The main argument of this study is that local-level governments are the most effective institutions to address people's problems and for service delivery. In this regard, local-level governments should be granted more autonomy and equipped with administrative appliances. Readiness in intention and promptness in action will help to deal with problems such as COVID-19 in the future.

The paper has five main parts: introduction, literature review, case study, results and discussion, and conclusion. The introduction consists of a rationale, objective, thesis statement, methodology, and an outline. The literature review covers theoretical and empirical stances, while a case study of Birendranagar municipality has been presented as a unit of analysis. The results and discussion section analyzes the essence of the local levels during disasters like COVID-19, followed by the conclusion.

COVID-19: A Global Epidemic

The global Pandemic is a serious health hazard that erupts in one place and passes across the globe. Merriam-Webster (n.d.) dictionary defines pandemic as contentious disease occurring over multiple countries or continents and affecting a significant proportion of the population. Human history has recorded global pandemics in various epochs (History.com Editors 2021). AIDS, Cholera, Ebola, FLU, Plague, Polio, SARS and Zika are some to name a few. Unlike human practices, the extraterritorial nature of a pandemic poses threats to governments worldwide, regardless of whether it is global, national, or local. COVID-19 is a global pandemic of our time after World War II, and the most destructive threat to national securities (Rajabifard et al. 2021), began in Wuhan, China as a health crisis, hit the socio-economic, environmental, and security sectors; no country or jurisdiction is left, hence a headache to governments around the globe.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, political borders mean nothing, and they have an effect on every society in some way (OECD, 2020). On the one hand, it challenged the governments to secure their citizens inside the territory by aligning with global standards. On the other hand, it has affected the global economy and existing production and distribution systems (Congressional Research Service 2021). R&D and the production and supply of medical equipment and vaccines once again verified the status of the countries. COVID-19 not only promoted competition among nations but also forced countries to choose cooperation and realize the responsibility to protect. Meanwhile, developing countries receive donations and support for medical supplies and vaccines from the developed countries.

COVID-19 not only challenged people but also provided opportunities to develop dashboards and fast track information systems, which helped governments tackle the risk and make informed decisions (Rajabifard et al. 2021). The largest exchange of scientific data and effective collaboration between the state and private sectors to deliver technology-based solutions are some models of cooperation. On the other hand, the United Nations notion—that 'no one is safe until everyone is safe'—has further pushed for global solidarity in order to save the lives of each individual. At the same time (not) new etiquette the

Namaste has been revived (Chang, 2020) and new health, hygiene, and food habits have been developed. COVID-19, as a disaster, appealed to the human heart to be humane once again.

Local Government: 'A Child with a Big Bag'

The local government refers to any specific institution or entity created by national constitutions or other legislation to deliver a range of goods and services to the people of a designated area (Shah, 2004). However, the idea of local governance is broader and can be defined as legitimate power to formulate policies and execute collective actions at the local level.

The rhetoric and practice of local (self) governance are opposite to the Hobbesian concept of Leviathan and the Machiavellian state of the prince. Unlike in war states, the idea of decentralization is to promote localism, and hence, democratization. Connolley et al. (2010) believe that local governments reflect the values of liberty and promote democratic practices at the bottom of society.

Undoubtedly, the power of local governments varies. Local levels, in the federal system, exercise legislative and, to some extent, judicial powers, beyond formulating and executing public policies as in decentralized units. In the United States, Agranoff (2014) argues that, despite their activism, local governments are less visible and less powerful political institutions than the states. However, the theory of decentralization is the process of better governance and deeper democracy at the local level (Grindle, 2007). It also makes public officials more accountable for their actions, and engages more citizens in local affairs.

It is clear that people's wants created the need for local government (Bingham, R.D., Bowen, W.M., Chandler, M.O. et al. 1991), and local levels now became operational venues for expanded government services. The subsidiarity doctrine of decentralization focuses on fiscal, political, market, and administrative affairs that should be operated by a lower level of government (Ryan & Woods, 2015).

Local governments are run by local political authorities; thus, the local people have a greater say in the policy-building process. With the help of public administration, local political leaders formulate and execute public policies at the local level. Stillman (1988) agrees that public administration is an executive branch of government that formulates and implements public policies and solves problems regarding human behavior and cooperative efforts. On the other hand, public administration is different from private administration in that it produces public goods and services. Therefore, local public administration plays a prominent role in the success of local government. Lipsky (1980) considers public administration at the local level as the everyday delivery of public "goods" to a diverse citizenry with equally diverse needs. Hence, Oates (1972) believes that local governments, as a way to improve resource allocation, need support from other inter-local Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and government partners in order to fulfill all the social amenities.

Moreover, local governments face numerous challenges from bottom to top to balance the policies and actions of federal statutes, most often providing the specific and concurrent roles of the different tiers of governments. Apart from the federal system, Weissert and Ice (2014) discovered that federal-state-local relationships are shaped by competition, functional assignment, and incentives through grants, cooperation, multilevel governance, and provincial-agent relationships. Thus, local governments advance competition for better services, and promote efficiency (economics) and democratic values (politics). Tiebout (1956), in his research, found that the movement of the residents of local communities based on the best fit of their service and taxation preferences. Krane et al. (2001) focus on local-level autonomy to uphold political decisions and set home rules to establish their own form of governmental organization.

Despite local governance facing both ease and impediment from federal and state governments (Weissert et al., 2014), there is no doubt that the local government is the most proximate and prompt to people. Oates (1972) stated that the local government understands the concerns of local residents and thus makes efficient, effective, and responsive decisions. Therefore, theories of decentralization, competition, motivation, innovation, and others solicit the effective management of public affairs at a local level.

The oath of office required of council members in the ancient city of Athens justifies that the governments at a local level are to make the cities improved, as it states- “We will strive increasingly to quicken the public sense of public duty; that thus... we will transmit this city not only not less, but greater, better, and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us”.

Local Government in Global Pandemic: A Juncture

Local governments, during the COVID-19 pandemic, have accomplished three types of duties: first and foremost is about making mature decisions based on local context and needs; second, the execution of decisions collaboratively with the people and civil society organizations; and last but not least is the continuation of public services during the pandemic. To do so, local governments seem more effective and persuasive than other levels of government (Payne, n.d.).

For example, the federal government in Nepal decided to implement lockdown forcibly and mobilize security forces in the field, while representatives at the local level campaigned and convinced citizens to follow health cautions in aligning with provincial and federal governments. At the same time, the federal government of Nepal formed a coordination committee to cope with COVID-19 without having representations from other tiers of government, while local levels do the same with the coordination of stakeholders. Local levels seem to have used autonomy and conscience while deciding for the betterment of the people and analyzed the information received directly from global access.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, local levels worked effectively to establish holding centers, quarantine, and isolation, as well as actively engaged in contact tracing, testing, treatment, and vaccination. The major strength of local levels is the ability to identify persons and places that are to be looked after carefully. Autonomy, on the other hand, allows local levels to decide what they need and want. Although some of the local levels had contradictions with the other tiers of government, it has been proven that, at least in pandemics, the roles of local levels have been significant.

Despite the limitations of health and economic resources (Nepal, 2021), local levels in Nepal managed to create separate funds for COVID-19. Most of the local levels have been found accountable for the mobilization of funds; however, their effectiveness could be another topic for further research.

Local levels have been the most significant units for the most sensitive actions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The combination of efforts achieved by local levels is a vital part of the control of the pandemic. Local levels made people in ignorance aware, assisted people in need, and healed people in the hitch.

COVID-19 and coping strategies

Since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in December 2019, the WHO, with the assistance of experts, has published guidelines on testing, tracing and quarantine, safety measures of people, and care on the severity of illness (WHO, 2020). The responsibility to protect felt by the WHO and other international organizations helps build common basic guidelines regarding the protection of people's lives from COVID-19. On the other hand, decisions made by national and sub-national governments and

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the actions of front liners, such as media persons, health workers, and security personnel, have been crucial. Moreover, scientists regularly busied themselves to find ways of fighting the virus. Their contributions made by them are effective.

The prime action of people worldwide during the pandemic was to reside inside the house and, in the case of outside, wear masks and follow the norms of social distancing. The overwhelming support of media to spread messages, except mis(misleading)information, makes people alert and thus safe. Washing hands with soaps and using hand sanitizers regularly have been a human habit. Most guests were rejected in many houses during the pandemic period. Hotels were converted into quarantines, and the markets were closed. People were afraid of even watching infected people. Governments enforced limited participation during social life events, such as birth and marriage ceremonies and funeral processions.

On the other hand, generous donations and help from developed countries to developing ones once again prove the relevance of international cooperation. None of the countries were safe, while one was unsafe. This idea led to collective security in order to protect the national interest in keeping nationals safe. The world has creatively fought against COVID-19 for common humanity; however, inequality still remains.

Rights and Roles of Governments in Nepal

Nepal's constitution provided a three-tier government. Each federal structure, that is, federal, provincial, and local levels, has special as well as concurrent rights, roles, and duties.

The Federal Fond

The federal government looks mainly after national, territorial integrity, and security, and thus, war, defense, and peace. Issues of central planning, central bank finance, monetary policies, and foreign relations also fall under the federal government. Other health issues, such as policy, services and standards, and communicable disease control, are the scope of the federal government.

To execute the rights and ensure the lives of people during the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government of Nepal made a high-level coordination committee and later converted it into CCMC. The committee had the right to recommend the government regarding the pandemic and its required actions. Upon the recommendation of the CCMC, the government of Nepal imposed lockdown throughout the country without coordination at provincial and local levels. In addition, they issued orders to seal international borders and cease transportation.

The nature of the federal government, as in Karki (n.d.), remains the same as the unitary government. It gave orders to other levels of government instead of cooperation, though the constitution of Nepal focuses on the cooperative mode of federalism. Nonetheless, the federal government, as per constitutional rights, helps assist international trade of medical supplies and coordinate contact tracing, testing, and treatment of infected persons. Moreover, the federal government manages the availability of vaccines and their distribution to local levels via provincial governments.

Pro-Active Provinces

Seven provincial governments were active during the COVID-19 pandemic, although they lacked state machinery. As a completely new structure, provincial governments, on the one hand, have struggled for their own existence and have less legal and bureaucratic capacity.

Along with others, the rights of health services lie under the provincial power. To ensure this, provincial governments have established ministries and other organizations related to health services.

During the pandemic, provincial governments in coordination with the federal government established COVID-19 hospitals and RT-PCR testing labs, managed health workers, including doctors, and mobilized them at the local level. Provincial governments have established quarantines and isolations within the respective provinces. They also coordinated the inter-province-, inter-district-, and inter-local-level transportation of individuals.

Provincial governments procured and distributed medical and food supplies to health centers. Despite the lack of their own security forces, provincial governments cooperated with federal security agencies, that is, the Nepali Army, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, and National Investigation Department.

Local Level Line Up

The local level has basic health, sanitation, and disaster management, among other powers, on the annexed list of the constitution. As health, hygiene, and sanitation are cross-cutting issues, they need basic standards and improvements in other related fields, such as production and distribution of food supplies, healthy behavior and sanitation, and water supplies.

However, local levels have less power to formulate policies on health issues they played marvelous roles during COVID-19 as they lined up with provincial and federal governments while executing the policies and strategies related to the pandemic.

Policies and Prospects

Policies adopted to cope with COVID-19 vary from country to country. The Federal Government of Nepal, for the prevention and control of COVID-19, formed a High-Level Coordination Committee (HLCC) under the convening of deputy prime minister and defense minister. The committee comprises other federal ministers and the chief secretary, and is mandated to recommend the government and carry out necessary functions related to COVID-19.

This ad hoc committee, formed on March 1, 2020, had no representatives from provincial- or local-level governments. Within less than a month, the HLCC converted into the COVID-19 Crisis Management Committee (CCMC) with a clear and detailed term of references and no spirit of federalism at all.

The Constitution of Nepal has provisions of special and concurrent jurisdiction to different levels of government. Health has been the concurrent power, as local levels focus on basic health and sanitation; the provincial government's rights are related to health services, while the federal government makes policies and standards of health and health services.

Karki (n.d.) opposed the top-down approach adopted to deal with COVID-19 in Nepal. He further proposed revisions of laws that have a unitary spirit of governance. For example, the two acts particularly concerned with COVID-19 were the Infectious Disease Act of 1964 and the Local Administration Act of 1971. Both laws provide power to the federation and its representatives to issue necessary orders. The federal government formed the CCMC at the district level, while all provinces and local levels replicated the CCMC at the center.

However, the government enacted the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Act in 2017 to respond to non-natural disaster like COVID-19, this act as not been attracted. The federal government imposed a nationwide lockdown, but some local levels did not test positive cases. Returnees

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from India and workers within the country travelled to their homes on their feet, which disobeyed the order of sealing international borders and ceasing internal transportation.

The very aggression toward the federal government thus converted into sympathy toward the local governments when people's representatives at the local level approached their people in an easier way.

Deputy Mayor of Birendranagar and the then ward chairperson of ward number 4, Mr. Nilakantha Khanal, agree that the local levels have played a significant role during COVID-19 as people have direct and two-way access to the local level leaders. It is straightforward for local levels to support people in need and to provide services.

Effectiveness of local level governments: a case of Birendranagar Municipality

Nepal entered the federal system through the new constitution in 2015. Its political and administrative structures were still immature in 2019, while the novel coronavirus started spreading worldwide in Wuhan, China. The first case of COVID-19 found in Nepal for the first time in January 24, 2020 (MoHP, 2022). To contain COVID-19, the government of Nepal launched a lockdown and sealed international borders on March 24, 2020. Following the recommendations of the HLCC, the federal government adopted some specific health measures to align with the global standards. Following the federal government's decisions, the seven provincial governments and 753 local levels were aligned with the decisions.

Table 1: The political profile of federal Nepal

Political Structure	Unit
Federal Government	1
Provinces	7
Districts	77
Metropolis	6
Sub-Metropolis	11
Municipalities	276
Rural Municipalities	460
Local Levels	753
Wards	6743

Source: Content analysis by Author

Birendranagar municipality, one of the 753 local levels and also has the provincial capital of Karnali, is a semi-urban area in the mid-west part of Nepal. As the capital and growing city, it has a larger population than other cities in Karnali. Birendranagar is also the main entrance for the remaining nine districts of the Karnali province. People most often travel across municipalities to reach their destinations. The excessive flow of people from outside during the pandemic posed threats to the locals during COVID-19 pandemic. To address the problems of people inside the city, the local government of Birendranagar municipality has taken the following decisions and accomplished the actions accordingly.

Despite a lack of coordination and resources, local levels in Nepal have played a crucial role during the COVID-19 pandemic (Payne, n.d.). They helped mobilize the local resources available within the territory. They also had strong coordination with other local governments and received support from the provincial and federal governments. The major tasks accomplished by the local levels during the pandemic were building local laws, creating a separate fund, making people aware of the transferability of the disease, distributing relief aid, and establishing holding centers, quarantines, oxygen plants, ICUs, and other health facilities.

The role of people's representatives at the local level seems significant. Recent surveys have shown that political leaders at the local level are more trustworthy than representatives at the provincial and federal levels (Kumar, 2022). The level of trust increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bhupendra Dev Giri, public health officer at Birendranagar municipality accepts that the readiness of the representatives to support the citizenry at the local level also motivated the public administrators during the pandemic.

By constitution, municipalities have distinct roles and duties regarding governance at the local level. The major duty of any local is to provide basic services to people at their doorsteps. The major decisions and actions regarding COVID-19 in Birendranagar municipality can be categorized into the following five subsections.

Decisions of the Municipality

This section contains the decisions of the Municipal Executive of Birendranagar Municipality from 2020, March 27, 2022, to June 6.

1. Alignment and authority

- Requests all people inside the city to implement the lockdown and other health safety measures adopted by the federal government.
- Delegating power to the wards to control the lockdown.
- Establish the COVID-19 Prevention, Control, and Treatment Fund (CPCTF) and authorize fund transfers even from salary heading.
- The ward chairperson is authorized to list the poorest and helpless (who cannot even make a call or have no phone) people inside the ward to provide relief.
- Allow the poorest workers to work by maintaining social distancing if they are unable to find jobs anywhere to provide them with food supplies.
- Quarantine was prepared using the halls of Bagina Samuha and the National Folk and Duet Song Academy.
- Form a ten member committee for the management of quarantines, contact tracing, treatment, and others.
- Exempt house rents for municipal buildings in the city.

2. Confidence building measures

- Provide motivation allowances to service staff while in the field.
- Cleaning and disinfecting the city using chlorine.
- Make arrangements of treatment for the free to those representatives and staff that are infected with COVID-19 and provide one million rupees to those who die while bearing the duty.
- Exempt house rent by the representatives, and also request other owners inside the city to free rent low-income (labor and students) people.
- Give allowances to the staffs and health workers that work for isolation

3. Coordination

- Appoint a focal person in each ward to coordinate with federal, provincial, and other agencies.
- Appeal to other organizations to deposit money on CPCTF.

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- Request city dwellers to reject guests at their homes and, if necessary, make arrangements for home isolation.
- The district security committee comprises representatives of the Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, Nepali Army, and National Investigation Department chaired by the Chief District Officer under the direct jurisdiction of the federal government.
- Provincial and federal governments are required to provide an RDT kit.
- Request landowners not to leave their land barren and let ward committees do more in this regard.
- Coordinates with the Karnali provincial government and federal government to send people from other districts.
- Requests non-government organizations to support the management of isolation houses.
- Requests people either to be isolated at home or go to pay isolation, and for the poorer people, payment will be made by the municipality upon the recommendation of the ward committee.
- Establish oxygen plant in city hospital with the partnership of CG Foundation and appeal other organizations to support for equipments
- Buy X-ray machine with the support of the Surkhet Society Australia, Heifer International, and others.

4. Direction

- Peoples' representatives and staff members involved in disaster management and the COVID-19 coordination committee should establish contact and coordinate for 24 hours in order to minimize the risk.
- Manage public hearings and social audits of relief aid distribution. If irregularities are found, both the recommender and receiver are punished and municipal services cease.
- Appoint the necessary medical staff in service contracts.
- Extend the date for incomplete infrastructure development projects and mobilize youths, returnees, and other persons who lost their jobs due to COVID-19.

5. Public service delivery

- An emergency telephone line was established for No. 101.
- Make arrangements for buying utilities from home during lockdown. For this purpose, the municipality has established a call center at the local level.
- Establish a fast-track system for the procurement and management of health supplies.
- Receive the name list from Tole (the minimum unit of a ward) and send it to the municipality after discussion and verification by the ward committee.
- Distributing relief to poorer people.
- Quarantine 60 beds in public schools inside the city.
- Establish health desks and provide services at all four entry points in the municipality.
- Make arrangements for health workers and medicines at isolation centers.
- Ensure field observation for the inspection of infected people and actions regarding relief distribution.

- In order to cease the food crisis and continue the food supply chain, farmers are motivated to produce, providing 80 percent subsidy on seasonal seed, 50 percent on chemical fertilizer, and 50 percent for fruit farming.
- Continued services from the municipality and ward offices.
- Make isolation home in 9 public schools in different wards
- Provide necessary equipment to health posts.
- Establish a COVID-19 city hospital and make health personnel and medical supplies available

Along with the above-mentioned municipal executive decisions, Birendranagar municipality also coordinated with the Nepali Army to manage quarantines, and with the Armed Police Force and Nepal Police for security arrangements. The municipality also provided land and other rudiments to the quarantines managed by the Nepali Army.

Actions of the Municipality

Moreover, the readiness of representatives, including the Mayor, Deputy-Mayor, Ward Chairperson and Ward Members, in making decisions and the promptness in action helped impede the infections. The activism of public administrators and health workers, on the other hand, helped manage COVID-19 ailments and their effects. Despite the high number of population, than in other cities of Karnali, Birendranagar declared complete vaccinated area in March 26, 2022. This result proves that actions at the local level are the most effective.

After May 25, 2020, when the first COVID-19 case was found in Birendranagar, the municipality implemented the following actions to combat COVID-19.

1. Public awareness

The municipality notified people about COVID-19 using various means of communication, including FM radio, newspapers, advertisements, and miking in the communities.

2. Disinfection

The municipality disinfected all areas within each ward by spraying chlorine and other chemicals and requested people to maintain safety within their periphery.

3. Relief distribution

The municipality distributes food supplies to poor people who abode.

4. Health Desk

The municipality established health desks at all entry points and provided health check-up services.

5. Holding centers, quarantine and isolation

The municipality formed a COVID-19 prevention and management committee in each ward, appointed the heads of health centers as focal persons, and mobilized women health volunteers and representatives to manage and monitor holding centers, quarantines, and isolations. The table below contains the types of services and the number of clients in the municipality during the pandemic.

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Table 2: Activities to prevent and cure COVID-19 in Birendranagar Municipality

Type of activities	Number of clients
Bagina holding center	5960
Buspark isolation	262
Home quarantine	813
Returnee under surveillance	2373
Quarantine at 9 schools	1682
Food and shelter for passerby	8373

Source: Birendranagar Municipality

6. Extra hour office at health centers

All health centers inside the municipality provided prolonged health services for four months (April to July 2020), from 7 am to 6 pm, and even on public holidays.

7. Antigen and PCR testing

The municipality extended the scope of RT-PCR testing at the community level and antigen testing at every health center in each ward. The following table shows the total tests, test types, and positive cases.

Table 3: Testing of COVID-19 in Birendranagar Municipality

Type of test	Total	Positive cases
PCR	12321	4432
Antigen	5214	1178
Total	17535	5610

Source: Birendranagar Municipality

8. Medicine and Hygiene kit distribution

The municipality managed to distribute the necessary medicines and hygiene kits to infected individuals who were in home isolation.

9. COVID-19 Hospital

Despite the Karnali Provincial Hospital being located in Birendranagar, the municipality established a separate COVID-19 hospital under its jurisdiction. The COVID-19 hospital provided services to 161 chronic cases and provided them with medical facilities along with oxygen and food supplies.

10. Free ambulance

The municipality operated a 24 hour free ambulance service for the treatment of COVID-19. Overall, 111 clients took this service during the pandemic.

11. Vaccine

The Birendranagar municipality, with supplies and support from federal and provincial governments, initiated the vaccination program on January 17, 2021. People, on their choice, cooperate to the local level's initiative and get vaccinated with a variety of vaccines, that is, Covishield, AstraZeneca, Vero Cell, Johnson and Johnson, Moderna and Pfizer. The details of the vaccinated persons in the health centers of Birendranagar are presented below.

Table 4: COVID-19 Vaccination in Birendranagar Municipality

First dose	113119	113%
Second dose	118946	119%
Booster	24874	25%

Source: Birendranagar Municipality

According to the public health officer of Birendranagar municipality, Mr. Bhupendradev Giri has been found to be cooperative during the vaccination program. The municipality, amid a program, also awarded some individuals and institutions that had played a significant role during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, 21 NGOs and 11 educational institutions, including Midwest University, that had direct support for the initiatives of the municipality, were appreciated. All 16 ward offices and at least 20 individuals from municipal staff and other members of civil society also received a letter of appreciation from the municipality. This action of reward boosted the morale of individuals and institutions for further cooperation.

Discussion

Despite the excessive use of authority by the federal government (Karki, 2020), the decisions and actions made by local levels seem to have fair intentions to help people during a pandemic. The municipality, based on constitutional rights, tried at least to use autonomy and self-governance. The municipal arrangement for disseminating information and support programs within the city was quick and creditable.

The readiness of the representatives and service delivery by the municipal staff were functioning. In this regard, the municipality also coordinated with other NGOs and individuals within and outside the local level, who have special skills and sources.

The consciousness of local-level leaders regarding irregularity in fiscal behavior also justifies that they are accountable to the governed; however, it lacks clear and mature guidelines for spending, and no cases have been reported filed against indiscretion.

Despite their varying capacities, the local levels in Nepal have played a significant role in saving people's lives during the pandemic.

Giri responded that the federal practice has perfect provisions of acting quickly and it is also essential to respond the disasters like COVID-19 pandemic. Giri further adds that the public health system should be strengthened, as the municipality always puts it in the least prior list.

The current mayor of Birendranagar municipality, as well as the then-deputy mayor, Ms. Mohanmaya Dhakal, remembers the activism of people's representatives, and the staff is praiseworthy. She further adds that without the intention to help people and prompt actions, it would not have been possible COVID-19 to contain in the city. She also accepts that the health issues were not in that much priority, as the municipality has numerous areas to work with.

Following this information, it can be concluded that the federal mode of governance, particularly in Nepal, has positive impacts, at least in emergencies, on serving people. On the other hand, this demands more capable and resourceful public administration to provide better services to citizens.

Glocalization: An Imperative

Societies today are hybrid, and thus, questions concerning coexistence have been raised repeatedly (Meyer et al. 2022). However, each society has its own pace and mobility, which is affected by global phenomena. Current developments in the fields of communication, the Internet revolution, and transportation have played a crucial role in making a local to the global. In contrast, the flow of information and receptivity at local levels have thus enacted global policies. The phenomenon of being well informed about global issues and making decisions as per the needs and context at the local level helps the idea of glocal to grow.

Common actions across the globe during COVID-19 were washing hands with soap, using sanitizers regularly, wearing face masks, making social distances, and others. The (Social) media has played a crucial role in making continuous connections in the world. Moreover, the idea of managing global problems in unison cemented the idea of glocalization. COVID-19, as a global pandemic, once again raised global consciousness, forcing people to work together.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The idea of local governance, and thus local government and local administration, is to help people promptly and efficiently. This concept has been applied in many countries regardless of whether some of them have devolved power via the federal constitution or whether others have statutory provisions of decentralization. Hence, local-level governments, both theoretically and empirically, are considered the most effective in mobilizing people at the local level. Despite the local levels enjoying autonomy, their ability to act differs owing to the available resources and management style they follow.

In Nepal, the federal constitution (2015) has provided plenteously annexed political power to local levels. Local levels have just experienced the second periodic election and will undeniably take time for political maturity. The immaturity of local levels, on the one hand, causes problems during decision making and proper use of available resources, and simultaneously, they lack (proficient) public administrators and (generous) resources on the other. Despite the roles and responsibilities of sub-national governments, the federal government again adopted the centricist approach for the prevention and control of COVID-19. For the fair function of federalism, the empowerment of subnational governments would be the next agenda.

By the case of Birendranagar, it can be concluded that a local level has both the rights and abilities to accomplish its duties during disasters and emergencies and both normal and new normal phenomena. It is easier for local levels to identify people's problems and respond to them in a more prompt and trustworthy way than other levels of government. Birendranagar, with its available resources, both human and non-human, managed to control COVID-19 and cease it from spreading into larger communities.

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