

“Co” As Governance: A Framework For Participatory Public Policy

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ABSTRACT

The daily life activities of common people are fulfilled via public policy action. Thematic analysis is the foundation for this paper. This paper aims to construct the concept of participatory policy actions for the governance-based practices. The governance-based framework is an action for the collective aims to meet societal goals. It synthesizes six interrelated dimensions as co-production, collaboration; co-existence, co-accountability, co-management and coordination into an integrated model. “Co” is communal and for the sake of common aims of the policy for the establishment of governance. It is conceptualized as the meta-principle of collective togetherness whose focus is on synergy, shared responsibility, communal ownership and responsibility among different stakeholders. In a holistic way, public policy is for the sake of participatory framework with the spirits of participatory governance. Working together is the basic foundation for governance to achieve preset policy goals. Public policy working for the collective actions to achieve common demands in daily life. The ultimate goals of community governance are feeling ownership over resources for the common purposes.

Introduction

In the present era of governance challenges, public policy goals can be achieved only by working together which means shared understanding of purpose, joint processes for planning, co-designing and co-determining decisions, right people with experience and capability, clear line of responsibility and accountability (Jones, 2023). The well designed participatory deliberative process can open up agenda-setting processes and enhance greater democratic responsiveness (Bua & Escobar, 2018). The policy cycle must be capable of identifying (a) the actors involved in the policy making process and the interest they pursue, (b) the institutions-societal, state and international- and their values which determine how a problem is defined, facilitate the adoption of certain solutions and inhibit the choice of other solutions, (c) discourse and deliberation surrounding a policy also constrain policy actors, (d) instruments- the range of instruments available to policy makers also constrain or facilitate their choices, (e) past experiences of the actors/ institutions/organizational learning/ memory (Knill & Tosun, 2012).

It is a driver of innovation in public policy and services in the public sectors (Sicilia, Sorrentino, & Howlett, 2018). Collaboration in governance focuses on public policies and related issues (Ansell & Gash, 2007) that works for the sake of an arrangement where the state and other stakeholders participate. 'Co' for all, and it accepts the existence of all for the sake of identity for all aspects. Walking and working together is the phenomenal and current demand in every step of governance's situation to provide quick and smart services to the people. The political action and policy framework for the rights in resource sharing is one of the popular concepts in the world. Co is a way to create decentralized forms in the process of resource sharing and resource distribution for the various stakeholders. Public policy is policies of the government for governance, which are run and managed by the government. Public policy is a way and practices in the daily phenomenon of the government.

The key actors are the individuals, collectivities or corporations involved in the policy making process and turn their preferences into public policy. Knill and Tosun (2012) identified three characteristics which we must pay attention to understand how actors might determine policy outputs. (a) Capabilities - resources at the disposal of actors, (b) Perceptions- how actors perceive a social problem and depending on their perceptions actors will review potential solutions to the present problem and decide which one is more desirable, and (c) Preferences- preferences can be stable or changeable. In addition, actors can be distinguished whether they are acting on behalf of the public or private (acting on behalf of their own preferences).

The elected officials, appointed officials, interest groups (business actors, labors, NGOs/civil societies), the public, political parties, research organizations/ think tanks and the mass media are the policy actors. Similarly, institutions are conceived as an established set of formal rules that influence an actor's preferences. The national institutions like the Constitution and the constitutional court, the executive, the legislative and the judiciary, the organization of the state (autonomy and capacity, intergovernmental division of power), organization of the society (fragmentation and cohesion) and organization of the international system (EU, WTO, IMF, WB, UN, WHO, OECD) plays vital role in the policy process.

In fact, the public policy and its action part are guided by the principle of participatory governance that has a contextual framework where participation from stakeholders is a way for the action part. It is basically about collectivism to meet the need and aspiration of the society but the traditional top-down or command and control system often have limitation to produce sustainable outcomes. Public policy itself is an embedded work for the pre-constructed objectives that reduce unnecessary jargon and ambiguity-it helps to meet the objectives of governance or let's say good governance. Different settings, like institutional, socio-political and economical are the conditions that influence effective implementation. Moreover, the effective implementation of public policy depends upon various factors where contextual variables matter a lot. This means that a policy successful in one context may or may not be successful in another because the economic and political condition, socio-cultural situation, capabilities of institutions and actors plays a vital role in the implementation of the policy.

Public policy is governmental manifested activity and based on action and its implementation. Policy without implementation is shooting in the darkness; this indicates every policy should have consequences (Dye, 2014). This is important to understand: the aesthetic part of public policy is its implementation and meeting aims of any particular policy. So public policy making and its implementation are the action parts and participation of stakeholders in different ways. Each stakeholder has a meaningful part in public policy action and that should be based on "co," Because an individual is not sufficient nor able to carry out the public policy activities.

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No matter if it is formal or informal, without “Co.,” the expected result will not come as an outcome. Co is social, political and policy activities to make an approach that depends on both collective action and institutionalization (Rahman, Hickey & Sarker, 2012). In this way an individual is part of “Co.,” so here we can say it is the combination of individuals but for the sake of the groups and community. Co-participation, cooperation, coexistence, and co-production are a few examples, that shape the connectivity and linkage for the interest of the masses. It is the dyadic relationship in different contexts.

Co means participation of actors and stakeholders, and it is like a machine of problem-solving in societal functions. Participation in public policy and the way of governance are the fundamental ways for the sake of collective activities. The framework of such a collective activity is guided, managed and run under ‘the spirit of ours.’

Methodology

The data for this paper is exclusively based on secondary sources and literature in different ways. According to Tripathy (2013), the existing data can be useful for the analysis and then generate new ways to answer critical research questions. It is based on published literature and its thematic analysis. As per the nature and contexts, the data for research is guided by its principle theme; the theme of this paper is to analyze the thematic orders of a policy-based framework, which is based on the core of “Co.” The use of secondary data for thematic interpretation in this paper can be highly preferred to maintain the efficiency of the paper’s theme and it also gains geographical breadth (Cheong et al., 2023). More clearly, its use makes the broadening of the information from different geography and context making the framework to capture experiences from both national and sub-national levels. Additionally, this qualitative research serves as an appropriate method for theory building purpose as it helps in the refinement of analytical categories through reinterpretation of existing literatures (Tripathy, 2013).

First, the literatures were assembled based on purposive sampling method which is guided the structural dimensions of taken together or participatory governance. The literatures were identified through database search such as google scholar, scopus, research gate using the key words like collaborative governance, participatory governance, co-governance and so on. The related literatures were then systematically reviewed and initial codes were generated based on similarity and relatedness which was then clustered. The clustering of the codes was synthesized into six co-dimensions. The scattered knowledge is organized to develop a conceptual framework. To operationalize the co-framework, two conceptual diagrams were also developed where figure one represents the interconnection between governments, private sectors and the third sector and the second one demonstrates the multiple relationship of the co-framework as the networked system among the six dimensions.

Defining “Co”

Co is a model where government gives space for multiple stakeholders and accepts divers decision-making approaches to every stage of policies. Here, together we and together for us walk together and work for these types of concepts, which are based in the principle of “co.” Sectors, conditions and the people with different identity-based backgrounds are the guidelines for participation and foundation for public policy and its implementation. It is understood as the principle of meta-governance which is rooted in collective togetherness for achieving common good. It holds a greater philosophical orientation focusing truly on mutual ownership, shared decision making, accountability, synergy and responsiveness among different actors of policy. It believes that effective governance stems from collective actions and mutual understanding of different actors and institutions.

Unlike hierarchical or top-down approach to policy making, “co” represents more inclusive and participatory type of approach where togetherness is considered as both means and ends of public policy. “co” governance is a systematic technique characterized by shared decision making, authority and mutual accountability which essentially represents a collaborative mode of governance where multiple stakeholders collectively exercise their power, responsibility over resources, services or any other things despite having diversity in their interests (Jones, 2023). The six different dimensions of “co” discussed below are not independent but are mutually reinforcing and interdependent with one another which are identified based on their recurrence in the literatures and their relevance in the policy process. The various “co” dimensions are discussed below.

Co-production— It is a mechanism where joint design and delivery of public services takes place from the part of government, citizens, communities and other stakeholders. The crucial part is innovation in co-production. The role of co-production plays in forging services and policies in the public sector (Sicilia et al., 2018). It combines expertise, knowledge and experiences of different stakeholders where among them; it is the citizens who get the opportunity to move from passive recipients of policy to co-creators of services. The way how present research and studies are moving forward is getting meaning in co-production as a new paradigm in governance. In the field of governance and public policy, this is standard practice across the world for policymakers and implementers. Different types of knowledge are working together that promote and contribute to the collaborative relationship in the public policy area (Goulart & Falanga, 2022). Strong collaborative governance including co-production mechanisms significantly increases private investment in sustainable projects, particularly in lower middle-income countries (Bai et al., 2024). Similarly, Bianchi, Nasi & Riverbark (2021) stressed co-production as a tool of implementation in collaborative governance model to address wicked problems. Jones (2023), on the other hand, showed how co-production enhances credibility in multi-level systems. The structured co-production mechanism is required for improved policy outcome. However, weak mechanisms of co-production make the ideas of communities and citizens being captured by local elites resulting into serving narrower interests of specific group of people (Bua & Escobar, 2018; Bhusal, 2013). Therefore, greater standard of deliberative participatory process, and inclusiveness or incorporating democratic values serves as essential elements to avoid symbolic participation (Maysan & Rodenas - Rigla, 2024).

Co-existence—In this way, individual existence does not matter here. All parties with their own functional identity and function have their certain sort of affiliation with each other. Like the executive and judiciary, the legislature is based on the check and balance (Montesquieu, 1989) practice in the contemporary debates. But they have reciprocal and conditional relations that drive the importance of existence with each other. The co-existence recognized the role and function of the legislature, executive and judiciary to maintain checks and balances and separation of power where the powers and authorities are describing and distribute on the basis of existence and co-existence. Effective governance requires mutual acknowledgement and accepted co-existence among the diverse set of actors and intuitions that may have competing interests and this is being recognized by co-existence. It holds the idea that right of different stakeholders exists which acts as the kind of cement that makes other “co” dimensions activate. It stresses on mutual recognition, constructive disagreement and check-and-balance; multi-governance system and trust among different stakeholders in a sustainable manner. Jones (2023) focused that co-existence lies at the heart of co-governance as the indigenous community of New Zealand and the state itself are learning to recognize the role of one another moving beyond the symbolic relationship and creating co-existence where their perspectives are acknowledged and respected. However, Nepal struggled with co-existence from a very long time, particularly from the Panchayat era for accommodating diversity in terms

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of ethnic, regional etc (Bhusal, 2023). For meaningful deliberation, respect for diversity is identified as the precondition in participatory process (Moysan & Rodenas- Rigla, 2024). Without deliberate design, co-existence does not occur leading powerful actors to dominate the weaker one or in other words elite capture would limit the powerless voice making co-existence to occur only in symbolic form.

Collaboration—This notion refers to collaborative governance. It can be understood as ongoing process of active involvement of governments, citizens, private actors, civil societies and other actors come together to define the problem, identify the probable solution and deliver desirable outcomes which is beyond the engagement of individual actor (Ansell & Gas. 2007; Bianchi et al., 2021). It is a trust based interdependent relationship involving sharing of risks, resources, responsibilities and decision making power. Collaboration is a mode of policy and service delivery that indicates a paradigm from traditional ways to a partnership mode where diverse actors are functioning together for accountable policy and public service delivery (Voets et al., 2021). This strength in participatory democracy and achieving legitimacy is put forth by the legal approach (Bouckaert, 2025). Collaboration is public governance guided by its democratic and legal process. This is also the way of inclusive governance. The real success takes place when people come together to build a shared understanding and strong commitment despite of differences in their interests. Bianchi et al., (2021) tried to demonstrate from multiple case studies that how collaborative model can be implemented successfully. On the other hand, there exists the difficulty in scaling collaboration from lower level of governments to higher level of governments (Bua & Escobar, 2018).

Coordination—Even non-governmental sectors should coordinate with government for governance. Within the government and outside of the government there are synergistic efforts for policy governance that meet the objectives of government where the welfare of the people is the hallmark. Coordination among agencies, ministries, different lines and levels of government collectively doing their functions (Cejudo & Michel, 2015). Coordination is simply the coherence across different stakeholders, alignment across different levels of governments, and mutual relationship between the private sectors, NGOs and communities ensuring timely sharing of resources and managing diverse and competing priorities of the stakeholders. Without sufficient coherence, elite dominated coordination often limits the weaker segment’s voice in the process of policy governance. In Nepal, coordination challenges can be seen across the political systems which have limited the role of participatory initiatives (Bhusal, 2023). Similarly, Bua and Escobar (2018) showed the weaknesses of poor coordination between the central and the local government led community proposals under sustainable community act to fades away.

Co-management—This is critical point of governance that redefines the traditional function of top-down and hierarchical into more participatory. Under the co-governance framework, this represents one of the particle and most powerful dimension. It is the joint-management of services or resources by different stakeholders where authority and responsibility are shared among the actors rather than centralized action. This arrangement helps to address the core issues of who has the power to describe management goals (Khan et al., 2022). In the practice of policy-based governance, what we are seeking for a democratic system is fulfilled by the co-management. In the level of function of governance, this concept is based on joint management for all, like state and community-based resources from multiple governmental agencies (Carlsson & Berkes, 2005). It involves real sharing of powers where communities and governments come together to determine goals, priorities, actions and deliver results. Jones (2023) emphasized the joint role of state and the indigenous communities in managing natural resources. Similarly, as co-governance model, co-management has become successful in the community forest and watershed management at the local level (Bhusal, 2023). Trust among the actors and clearly defined roles among them deliver better results (Bianchi et al., 2021). However, if roles, rights and responsibilities are not clearly defined or an

imbalance in power exists, the institutions may dominate the power and communities remain only a passive participant in the process. Co-management in co-framework shows explicit concern about the shared authority of community and state to jointly manage the resources and its better management depends upon the appropriate guidance of the government with influence of communities as well as active participation of various segments of the society.

Co-accountability—Accountability here is the relationship between governance principles and their real implementation. It is answerability of outcomes to decisions and actions where all the stakeholders collectively are liable to answer. Accountability relationships and cultivating communication and information sharing on an open basis (Lee & Ospina, 2022). Information sharing gives space for all concerned parties in the decision-making and its implementation process. Co-accountability believes that not only governments can be hold accountable but all the participating members share equal risks or reward towards the outcomes. Jones suggests that a co- framework requires co-accountability where both state and the indigenous communities are jointly responsible for outcomes. However, weak answerability of many local governments' actors makes the local proposals to get lost without relevant explanation (Bua & Escobar, 2018) leaving local citizens powerless. Co-accountability as co-governance framework becomes successful when all the stakeholders accept shared responsibility among them and the process becomes more transparent with inclusive feedback mechanisms.

The abandonment of collection governance happened when public policy adapted to trial government as one of markers of its focus. Every co. and its defining notions are fundamental to establishing strong governance with people's voices that promote open choice. Without co-governance is like just defining it but lacking functioning. But the function gives the vindication on public policies and their implementation that is the ladder for the governance of people and governance for the people.

The emergence of co-governance framework can be better understood by dividing into three distinct phases. The intellectual foundation of co-governance can be traced back to the first phase, classical era of public administration thought where Weberian model of bureaucracy plays a dominant role which is characterized by the state being the sole actor of governance. The structure of governance is strictly hierarchical, top-down, command and control style of management where the state identified citizen's problems, design policies and deliver services through bureaucratic structures operating under formal rules of authority, impartiality, and accountability to elected officials (Dye, 2014). In this period, citizens were regarded as the passive recipients rather than the active participants of public policies.

Generally, the second phase, era of New Public Management arose around 1980s, characterized by market mechanisms and contractual arrangements, introduced private sector's ideas into public sectors, considered citizens as the customer of the services, marketization, competition, professionalism, performance management, result orientation etc. These are considered as the instruments for improvement in the governance framework. Incorporating market ideas not only improve efficiency but also created problems as there is existence of many service providers, coordination between them becomes more difficult. Moreover, as this phase treats citizens as customer that makes the relationship weaker to act together and make governments accountable which further undermine trust and legitimacy (Osborne, 2010; Bouckaert, 2025).

The main concern of this study is the third phase of co-governance which is characterized by the gradual beginning of the participatory, networked or collaborative governance to address the "wicked" problems. This governance framework shows that the governments, the markets or the third sectors in isolation cannot function effectively in diverse environments but requires synthesis of different co-dimensions

as collaboration, co-production, co-existence, co-management, co-ordination and co-accountability into a unified framework to address public policies and creates a participatory framework for co-governance.

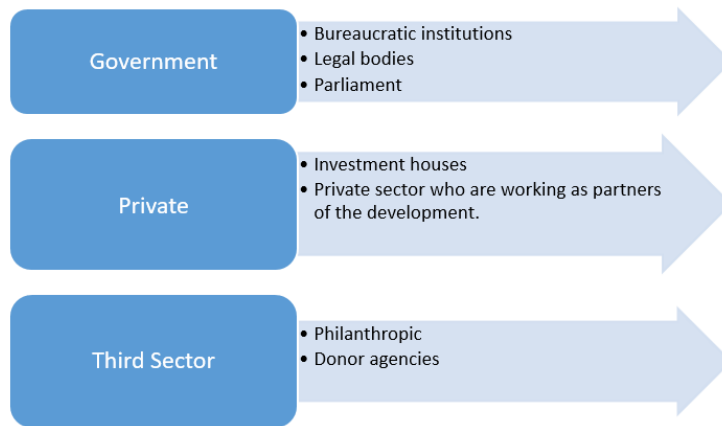
Framework for Participation

Here, the framework means functional relations between government, private sectors and third sectors. Governmental functions are supervised through the policy mechanism, where private sectors are working for profit through the market mechanisms, and the third sectors are donors and philanthropic sectors. The governmental function is guided by the concept of ‘watchdog’. The framework is based on a functional way. Juxtaposition with interorganizational and institutional levels, they are managed by various institutional contexts (Wang & Ran, 2023). In the modern concept of governance and policy, the roles of state and non-state actors are equally important. ‘Co’ in policy governance is ultimately to meet the principle of a welfare society where government alone is not sufficient, so government should collaborate with multiple stakeholders. In this way, the governmental stakeholders are bureaucratic institutions, legal institutions, parliament and local governmental bodies; they should create connections with each other at the same moments such institutions should make functional connections with other stakeholders such as private sectors and the third sectors. The figure represents the structural ground of co-governance framework based on the characteristics of different actors with their distinctive functions. The actors of co-governance include governments, private sectors and the third sectors. The government sector is at the apex which is mainly concerned with oversight function, regulation, accountability, redistribution and welfare provision. These functions clearly demonstrate that the government as an actor does not provide service directly but acts as a constitutional supporter of public welfare and regulatory body of governance system. The private sector, on the other hand, is mainly concerned with market mechanism and profit orientation that are considered as the legitimate actor in co-governance framework who can make a contribution in public service delivery through their technical expertise, innovativeness, investments and managerial efficiency. Unlike governments and markets, there is involvement of another sector called third sector which represents the non-governmental organizations, community based organizations, civil society organizations and the international development partners. The third sector is particularly connected with philanthropic functions.

All these sectors together reflect a non-hierarchical arrangement representing a co-governance framework where all these three are mutually reinforcing and equally significant, one cannot function effectively without the existence of other. The public – private – partnership represents the relationship between the government and the private sector and through their collaborative arrangements; co-production and co-management are supported and helps to achieve the shared objectives. Similarly, collaboration, co-accountability and community co-management arrangements are developed through the relationship between the governments and the third sectors. Moreover, the interaction between the humanitarian or philanthropic organizations and the market mechanism is represented by the relationship between the private and the third sector particularly in the form of social enterprise to achieve the outcome of participatory governance. Therefore, co-existence between the three sectors is essential and no sector can independently perform effectively without the support of other sector to deliver the outcome.

In a general sense there are two types of stakeholders: governmental and non-governmental. In this paper stakeholders are divided into three categories. Such categories are governmental actors that are based on service delivery obligations to their citizens through the executive, legislature and judiciary. The private sector is another pillar of the development where private sectors are doing collaboration

for their profit; for this, the market and its mechanisms are the basic dancing ground for it. The third sector means the agency without any administrative borders. The third sector is purely working for the sake of humanitarian practices. In the collective sense, the parent of all sectors is the governments where other sectors are working together. Policy engagement of stakeholders explores the role of dynamism that enhances participation in the decision-making processes (Guragain, 2024). Together means the “Co” for the governance purpose. The above framework indicates that modern governance is only possible through the connectivity between actors.



Source: Constructed by author/s through support of literature.

Connections and Interlinked for the functions

Individual working capacity does not give sufficient outcomes in policy and governance. The connectivity between various modalities is contextually and applicably useful for the running of the governance system. ‘Cos’ in the diverse ways are doing as per their perspectives. But one is linked with the other for the functional outcomes. Connections and linkages are based on network governance and collaborative governance (Wang & Ran, 2023). Collaborative networking has useful connections in the governance and policy studies.



Source: Constructed by author/s through support of literature.

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The above diagram represents different “Cos” as co-production, collaboration, coordination, co-management, co-existence, and co-accountability, arranged in a network which indicate multiple relationships between each other by a bidirectional relationship developing a non-linear synergistic structure. It does not progress sequentially but it immediately activates other dimensions when we work in one dimension. For instance, when a government and the community organization are engaged in co-production, it does not remain independent to other dimension but creates demand across the framework such as it needs mutual recognition, constructive disagreement and check-and-balance; multi-governance system and trust among different stakeholders in a sustainable manner which is co-existence. Similarly, it requires a trust based interdependent relationship involving sharing of risks, resources, responsibilities and decision making power which is collaboration. Moreover, it requires coherence across different stakeholders, alignment across different levels of governments, and mutual relationship between the private sectors, NGOs and communities ensuring timely sharing of resources and managing diverse and competing priorities of the stakeholders which is coordination. Additionally, it needs a real sharing of powers where communities and governments come together to determine goals, priorities, actions and deliver results which is co-management. Furthermore, it requires answerability of outcomes to decisions and actions where all the stakeholders collectively are liable to answer and this is co-accountability. The six dimensions Co-governance in public policy is not the result of a single domain, but it has wider and deeper connections with other things. Every aspect has meaning in a collective way rather than a single way. The networked relationship between the six dimensions is based upon the strength of its relationships with other dimension. Therefore, if any one dimension is weaker then it affects the entire co-governance framework.

It can be seen from the above picture, one is interlinked with the other, and there is no single meaning of any aspects. Policy and governance are the collective forms of various activities with different forms. This is a way that helps to alleviate policy and governance-related issues. This way also ensures citizen engagement in the social and developmental activities. The participation of citizens ultimately meets the practices of real capacity building in the public sectors and public service delivery.

There are linkages and connections; the dependency of each on the other is very interesting and complex. This is very complex and multidisciplinary (Bianchi, et al., 2021). Different areas of research and study are interlinked within the same umbrella. Collaborative governance theory, propounded by Ansell and Gash (2007), as per this theoretical foundation, working with the multiple stakeholders for a common aim. This theory helps to justify the above picture where diverse stakeholders are connected together to form for communal functions.

Discussion

According to Horald Lasswell, in 1956 he coined the concept of policy sciences and its importance in the policy process. In Lasswell’s concept policy implementation is the very necessary step (Deleon & Deleon, 2002). Governmental activities frequently share space for regulation with each other (Bils, 2020). This conditions brings connection of authorities from the very first step (popularly known as problem identification) to evaluation of public policy. In this way, the connectivity between stakeholders has shared perspectives for what every stakeholder would like to achieve through collaboration. Public policy is the collaborative functions of domains but the ultimate objectives are to provide public service and realization of good governance in the field level (Ansell & Gash, 2007).

This is the merging process of different knowledge systems, from political and technical to local knowledge, which can be used in the policy-making process. Such a merge of knowledge improves the ownership over policy-making and implementation of the outcome of public policy that can be enjoyed (Goulart & Falanga, 2022).

Co-governance is the principle of meta-governance which is rooted in collective togetherness for achieving common good. It holds a greater philosophical orientation focusing truly on mutual ownership, shared decision making, accountability, synergy and responsiveness among different actors of policy. It believes that effective governance stems from collective actions and mutual understanding of different actors and institutions. As the co-dimensions developed in this study serves as essential and not mutually exclusive dimensions its togetherness enhances the sustainability and effectiveness of participatory governance model. Moreover, in a federal governance structure like in Nepal, the co-governance framework helps to strengthen coordination through shared ownership and synergistic relationship between the state, private sector and the third sector. The model developed here depicts that the welfare oriented present governance system cannot only rely on governments as the sole actor but it demands a resilient and interdependent relationship between the three sectors of governance.

Public policy and governance are deeply connected with different aspects that bring additional value to academia and researchers (Voets et al., 2021). Co is not an individual area, or work in isolation rather it has multiple connections in function and different sectors and parties across the world can learn lessons from this. This is a process of understanding the cross-cutting and complex challenges in partnership in the governance and its implementation (Bianchi et al., 2021). Public policy and governance are positive supporters of each other. The vindication of these subjects can justify a collaborative approach. But this is not an easy job, so we need a deeper understanding of it. There are different political, social, cultural and administrative connectivities in “co” so there is a need for rigor in this matter.

Collaboration in the public sector brings new theoretical lenses into the practice. This is a shift from traditional administration ideologies to the new one, like New Public Administration; this is driven by theory (Bouckaert, 2025). Policy and governance are working together in Co-senses that in the present practice bring new theoretical bases.

The governance activities are guided by policy action and implementation, which is based on information and knowledge exchange. This also defines rules and responsibilities for each stakeholder (Cejudo & Michel, 2015).

The circumstances for governance are to meet and manage a social-ecology system under socially accepted values and politically driven practices and legally interpretable conditions. There are foundations in this context; in the governance and policy-level partnerships of various stakeholders, they are walking together for common-pool resources (Carlsson & Berkes, 2005) among strata of governments. The nation's resources are being managed for the sake of the welfare and quality of life of people. The distribution of such a resource should be based on the common pool principle and it promotes social inclusion. Here the principle of co-governance is to provide resources in an idealistic way where people must feel the presence of the government everywhere in every condition.

In co-based governance, every activity is based on accountable ways rather than the traditional administrative mechanism (Lee & Ospina, 2022). An open, flexible and participatory process is acceptable in every governance system. Every stakeholder is equally responsible in this matter, but the government is more responsible than others. The ultimate goals and aims of this is to provide the sense and presence of government everywhere.

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This co-framework is highly relevant in the Nepalese federal structure where a country transitioned from a centralized unitary system towards a three tiered federal system of governance consisting of federal, provincial and local governments (Bhusal, 2023). The governance challenge in Nepal is not due to the inefficiency or weaknesses of the institutions but due to its inability to recognize the equal participation of various segments of the society in collective governance. In this connection, the Constitution of Nepal (2015) has made a provision for participatory governance which includes local level citizen assemblies, participatory planning at local level, representation of different community groups in public institutions and strong coordination between the three tiers of governance (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015 & Bhusal, 2023). The Constitution of Nepal (2015) have made a significant contribution to institutionalize the six co-governance dimensions together where diverse communities are considered as the genuine participants of governance creating co-existence. Similarly, it tries to create the collaborative arrangements across different levels of governments and set up intergovernmental council to coordinate activities. The constitution guaranteed the shared responsibility for resources between the local government and the community which involves co-management, also allows co-production between citizens and the local governments, and ensures audits and reporting system which constitute co-accountability.

In the co-governance framework, Nepal is regarded as one of the best country in managing millions of hectares of forests together since 1990s. It is successful in transferring management authority from the centrally located state actors to the community user groups (Bhusal, 2023; Carlsson & Berkes, 2005). Co-management in Nepal exists not only in policy document but is practically implemented where Community Forests User Groups consistently interact with the Department of Forest to discuss about the objectives of forest management, the rules of harvesting, the slopes to be controlled from erosion, conservation of forests and other related matter based on the forests act and the national policies about the conservation and management of forests. Moreover, it shows the interdependence between various other dimensions of co-governance. The success of co-management is rooted in the formal recognition of genuine community actors with their rights and responsibilities towards the forest resources which is co-existence. Similarly, other activities like the joint development of forest management plans by the local community and the forestry actors constitute the collaborative arrangement in co-governance framework. Moreover, the general assembly meetings, financial reporting and regular audit from outsiders represent co-accountability in the framework of community forests user groups and these practices are practically important for maintaining the acceptability of co-management arrangement over time (Bhusal, 2023). Here, the interdependence of “Co” dimensions revealed that the health of a single dimension is based on the quality of other dimensions.

Bhusal (2023), in his comparative study of Nepal’s participatory governance in diverse political systems framed the political developments of Nepal into three political systems as the panchayat era from 1961-1990, the multi-party political system from 1990 – 2007 and the federal democratic system from 2007 onwards. These three political systems have brought new hopes and prospects of citizen’s participation with significant inheritance of participatory ideals from one political system to another. However, the quality of citizen’s participation has varied widely across the political system from symbolic participation in the Panchayat era to a more inclusive form, still inconsistent participation in federal structure of Nepal.

The constitution of Nepal (2015) has provided autonomy in the fiscal management to local governments but their reliance on federal and provincial grants has limited the capacity of local governments which represents the weaknesses or failure in co-management. This suggests that the rule on paper is not sufficient for effective co-governance; it should be enriched with better financial and institutional arrangements to activate all the six dimensions of co-governance.

Conclusion

There are different “Cos” are described in diverse ways. The definitions and nature and its utilities are described in the fields of governance and public policy. The smooth and healthy governance system is only possible through the use of Co, in fact. The action part of any policy depends on views on public policy implementation. If there is coordination and recognition of actors and agencies, where redistribution of activities between stakeholders has functional ways. Participation in policy governance helps bridge the gap between policy action and its operation.

The implementation of the principles is only possible while the policy meets the spirits of governance in every activity of the government. The rule of law, decentralization, accountability, transparency and people’s participation are only possible through Co.

Public policy action is not only about the implementation of policy. But it is like two-way communication between bottom-up and top-down approaches. In this process, actors exist, and they have co-existence to stabilize the functional process of governance. Co-existence is only possible through the ‘working together’ for the sake of the together principle. There are different policy actions guided by the contexts. For now, in the federal setting, policy is also determined and guided by intergovernmental relations. The role of governments is for the sake of the implementation of policy and governance. The discussion and the demands for current policy millstones are changing the policy environment. Now our society and social institutions are becoming more and more complex. To deal with such complexities, every country, even every society, needs participatory action. Without participation the policy will be just pieces of a written document. Only documentation is not the real spirit of public policy; it has to work for results and expected outcomes.

Participatory action in governance through policy has emerged as a critical way to increase social equality. This model can challenge the traditional top-down approach of public policy governance systems. The demand and advocacy for the ‘Co’ model is currently a suitable model in public policy discourse. For the sake of social equity and productive governance are the outputs of such participatory practices. Without collective participation, the action of public policy is like ‘waiting in vain,’ just like action without result.

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