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E-GOVERNANCE AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN NEPAL: EVIDENCE FROM NAGARJUN MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT

E-governance represents a major transformation in public administration, aiming to enhance transparency, accountability, and service efficiency through information and communication technologies (ICTs). In developing countries like Nepal, where bureaucratic systems often struggle with inefficiency and limited capacity, digital transformation is expected to improve citizen trust and accessibility. This study investigates how e-governance has been implemented at the municipal level, focusing on Nagarjun Municipality in Kathmandu District. A mixed-methods approach was employed to assess both institutional practices and citizen experiences. Quantitative data were collected from 60 respondents 45 citizens and 15 municipal staff while qualitative interviews were conducted with five key informants, including senior municipal officials. The SERVQUAL model was applied to measure service quality across five dimensions reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles while thematic analysis explored administrative culture, inter-departmental coordination, and resource availability. Results show that 65 % of citizens expressed satisfaction with e-governance services, with reliability and responsiveness receiving the highest ratings, while empathy and tangibles lagged. Key challenges included weak coordination between departments, resistance within administrative culture, and limited human and technical resources. Despite these constraints, promising opportunities exist through the integration of the National Digital Identity program and improved ICT infrastructure at the local level. The study concludes that successful e-governance requires context-specific adaptation, robust digital infrastructure, staff training, and enhanced citizen digital literacy. Policy recommendations emphasize strengthening inter-agency data sharing, expanding municipal e-platforms, and aligning local initiatives with Sustainable Development Goal 16 on transparent and accountable institutions. The findings contribute empirical evidence to local-level e-governance research in South Asia and offer practical insights for municipalities seeking inclusive digital transformation.

KEYWORDS

e-governance, ICT, service delivery, citizen satisfaction, Nepal, municipalities, SERVQUAL

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Public administration has continually evolved alongside technological and institutional change. E-governance defined as the use of ICTs to improve government efficiency, transparency, and citizen participation marks a paradigm shift from bureaucratic to citizen-centric administration [1], [2]. Globally, countries have adopted e-governance to streamline processes, reduce costs, and strengthen accountability [3], [4]. The European Union and advanced Asian economies pioneered

integrated digital platforms that enhanced trust in government by reducing bureaucratic delays [17], [18]. However, scholars caution that models developed in high-income contexts cannot be transplanted wholesale to developing nations without considering political and cultural realities [16].

1.2. Motivation and Context of Nepal

Nepal's engagement with ICT-based governance began with the Telecommunications Act 1997 [5] and the Information Technology Policy 2000 [6], followed by the e-Governance Master Plan 2015 [8]. These initiatives aimed to institutionalize digital processes within government agencies, yet implementation has been slow because of political instability, inadequate resources, and weak coordination [9], [10]. Under the federal structure established in 2015, local municipalities became the front-line implementers of public services particularly vital registration, licensing, and local taxation. Their performance directly shapes citizens' perceptions of governance effectiveness [11].

Nagarjun Municipality, located in the Kathmandu District, provides a useful case study because it has partially digitized vital registration and social-security services but continues to rely heavily on manual processes. This duality captures the challenges of Nepal's broader digital transformation, where technological readiness coexists with institutional inertia [25], [26].

1.3. Importance of Local Municipalities in Implementing ICT-Enabled Services

Within Nepal's federal governance framework, local municipalities are central to the success of e-governance, as they are the primary institutions responsible for delivering vital services such as birth, death, and marriage registration, licenses, and permits. Municipalities are the closest level of government to citizens, and the effectiveness of ICT-enabled services directly influences perceptions of state performance [11]. For example, Nagarjun Municipality in Kathmandu has introduced digital platforms for vital registration to reduce delays and improve accessibility. However, successful implementation depends on administrative culture, adequacy of resources, and coordination across departments [12],[13]. A supportive local administrative environment is thus essential for ensuring the effectiveness of ICT reforms [14].

1.4. Research Gap: Lack of Empirical Analysis on Local E-Service Delivery in Nepal

Existing research on Nepal's e-governance largely addresses policy frameworks rather than implementation at the municipal level [7], [9]. Few empirical studies examine how administrative culture, coordination, and resource constraints influence the quality of e-services. Comparative experiences from India's Aadhaar program [20], Bangladesh's Digital Bangladesh initiative [7], and Sri Lanka's ICT reforms [22] demonstrate that political support, capacity building, and citizen digital literacy are critical to success. Nepal faces similar barriers: limited ICT infrastructure, low awareness, and inter-agency fragmentation [12], [13].

Moreover, cultural dimensions such as high-power distance and risk aversion often discourage innovation within public institutions [14], [25]. These structural and behavioral constraints underline the need for local empirical evidence to identify actionable strategies for reform.

1.5. Objectives and Contribution

The present study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the implementation of e-governance in Nagarjun Municipality, Kathmandu District. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Examine the organizational and contextual factors influencing e-governance implementation in Nagarjun Municipality specifically administrative culture, inter-departmental coordination, and resource availability and
2. Assess citizen satisfaction with municipal e-services using the SERVQUAL model, thereby quantifying perceptions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles.

By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches [31], the paper provides a nuanced understanding of how institutional and behavioral factors shape e-service delivery at the local level. The study's contribution is twofold: (i) it extends the application of the SERVQUAL framework to a South Asian municipal context; and (ii) it connects local e-governance implementation to global development goals, particularly *SDG 16* on effective, accountable, and transparent institutions [33].

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Global Perspectives on E-Governance

E-governance became a new world paradigm in the late 20th century especially in Europe, where transparency, accountability and efficiency through incorporation of ICT in government systems were fast becoming a reality. The European Union (EU) was the first to develop holistic e-governance plans with focus on digital inclusion, interoperability and citizen-focused services [17]. These projects showed that technology had the potential to greatly decrease any form of bureaucracy and build faith among people. Nevertheless, researchers have warned that such models cannot be unanimously applied to different developing situations where political, cultural and infrastructural realities are varied [16]. In many developing countries, e-governance adoption has improved service delivery but faced challenges related to digital divides, low ICT literacy, and resistance within administrative cultures [18].

2.2. ICT and Service Delivery: Efficiency, Transparency, and Accountability

ICT has been widely recognized as a driver of efficiency and transparency in public administration. By digitizing processes, governments can reduce costs, accelerate service delivery, and minimize corruption [3]. ICT enhances accountability by making information more accessible to citizens, thereby reducing opportunities for discretionary manipulation by public officials [4]. For example, the use of online platforms for licenses, certificates, and permits minimizes the need for physical contact, decreasing opportunities for rent-seeking behaviours [19]. Dawes [1] emphasizes that ICT-enabled service delivery not only streamlines processes but also fosters democratic participation by giving citizens better access to information and decision-making processes.

2.3. E-Governance in South Asia: Comparative Experiences

South Asian countries have pursued varied trajectories in adopting e-governance. India has been a regional leader through its National e-Governance Plan and initiatives such as Aadhaar, which integrates digital identity with service delivery [20]. Bangladesh has emphasized "Digital

Bangladesh" policies, focusing on decentralizing ICT-enabled services to rural areas [7]. Sri Lanka has implemented ICT-based reforms, though limited resources and political instability have constrained progress [22]. Comparative analyses indicate that while these countries share common challenges such as limited infrastructure, digital literacy, and weak inter-agency coordination India's large-scale digital identity programs and Bangladesh's rural ICT outreach highlight possible pathways for Nepal to strengthen its e-governance agenda [15].

2.4. Nepal's Policy Framework on ICT and E-Governance

Nepal's engagement with ICT policy began with the Information Technology Policy [6], which sought to harness ICT for socioeconomic development. Later, the ICT Policy [7] broadened the scope by addressing converged telecommunications, broadcasting, and digital governance environments [8]. Complementing these efforts, the e-Governance Master Plan [8] laid out a framework for digital transformation across ministries and departments [23]. Despite these policy developments, implementation has faced barriers such as political instability, inadequate human resources, and lack of coordination among agencies [9],[10]. While pilot initiatives like smart driving licenses and the National ID Card project indicate progress, the absence of strong institutional frameworks and digital infrastructure continues to hinder nationwide adoption [11].

2.5. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

2.5.1. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede [14] conceptualizes culture as the "collective programming of the mind," identifying dimensions such as power distance and uncertainty avoidance as central to administrative behaviour. High power distance in governance may support and promote hierarchical systems that restrict the ability to adopt new technologies in governance, whereas high uncertainty avoidance will create resistance to reforms that create ambiguity on the part of the administrator [24]. Such dimensions are especially applicable in Nepal, where traditional administrative culture and risk-aversion tend to slow down the ICT adoption [25].

2.5.2. Van Meter & Van Horn's Policy Implementation Theory

According to Van Meter and Van Horn [26], the key variables to successful implementation of policies include clarity of the objectives, availability of resources, communicating with other organizations and disposition of the implementers. The latter research emphasizes issues of coordination as one of the key impediments of complex governance systems [12]. On the same note, Kapucu [13] also stresses the role of inter-organizational networks and coordination, which lead to effective implementation in dynamic situations. The reforms of e-governance in Nepal have been constrained by poor coordination between central ministries and the local governments [9]. These are further complicated by resource limitations (human and financial) [27].

2.5.3. SERVQUAL Model

The SERVQUAL model that was created by Parasuraman et al. [28] has been broadly used in measuring service quality and it has five dimensions that include, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, empathy and tangibles. Citizen satisfaction in e-governance is looked at in terms of responsiveness (speed of services), reliability (accuracy of information) and accessibility (ease of platforms) [29]. Research indicates that the enhancement of these dimensions can contribute to a high level of trust of citizens to the government [30]. The SERVQUAL framework is applicable

in Nepal where the population is likely to encounter protracted waits and bureaucracies to receive any services.

2.5.4. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM): User Behavior Dimension

The Technology Acceptance Model developed by Davis (1989) [35] explains technology adoption based on two perceptions:

- **Perceived Usefulness (PU):** the extent to which ICT use improves job or service performance; and
- **Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU):** the degree to which ICT systems are simple to learn and operate.

In municipal governance, staff and citizens are both users of digital platforms. High PU and PEOU encourage adoption, whereas complex procedures or unreliable systems reduce participation. TAM complements SERVQUAL by explaining why users adopt or resist ICT systems linking citizen satisfaction with behavioral intention.

2.5.5. Integrated Framework for Municipal E-Governance

Bringing together these perspectives, the framework assumes that:

1. **Institutional Factors** (administrative culture, coordination, resources) determine the readiness for ICT implementation.
2. **Technology Acceptance Factors** (usefulness, ease of use) influence adoption by both staff and citizens; and
3. **Service Quality Dimensions** (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibles) reflect the ultimate citizen-level outcome of e-governance.

When these dimensions interact effectively, citizen satisfaction increases, enhancing trust and aligning with SDG 16 on accountable institutions [33].

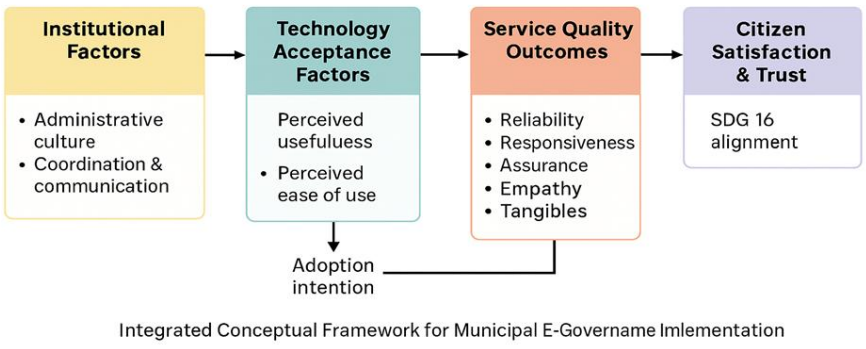

Figure 1. Integrated Conceptual Framework for Municipal E-Governance Implementation.

This conceptual framework illustrates how institutional factors including administrative culture, coordination, and resource availability shape the effectiveness of e-governance implementation through mediating influences of policy implementation and institutional behaviour. The framework also integrates technology acceptance factors (perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and behavioural intention) and service quality dimensions (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles). Together, these elements lead to citizen satisfaction and

public trust, aligning local digital governance outcomes with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on effective, accountable, and transparent institutions.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively analyze the implementation of e-governance at the municipal level. Creswell [31] emphasizes that mixed-methods designs are particularly suitable when researchers aim to capture both numerical patterns and in-depth contextual insights. The combination of surveys and interviews allowed for triangulation, thereby increasing the reliability and validity of findings [32]. Quantitative data provided measurable evidence of citizen satisfaction and service quality, while qualitative narratives enriched the interpretation of institutional and cultural factors influencing e-governance.

3.2. Study Area

The study was conducted in Nagarjun Municipality, located in Kathmandu District, Nepal. As one of the urban municipalities under the federal governance framework, Nagarjun plays a vital role in delivering essential public services, including vital registration, licensing, and local administrative functions. The municipality was selected due to its ongoing adoption of ICT-based practices in service delivery and its representative status as a mid-sized urban local government in Nepal. Local municipalities are the first points of contact for citizens, making them a critical arena for assessing the effectiveness of e-governance reforms [11].

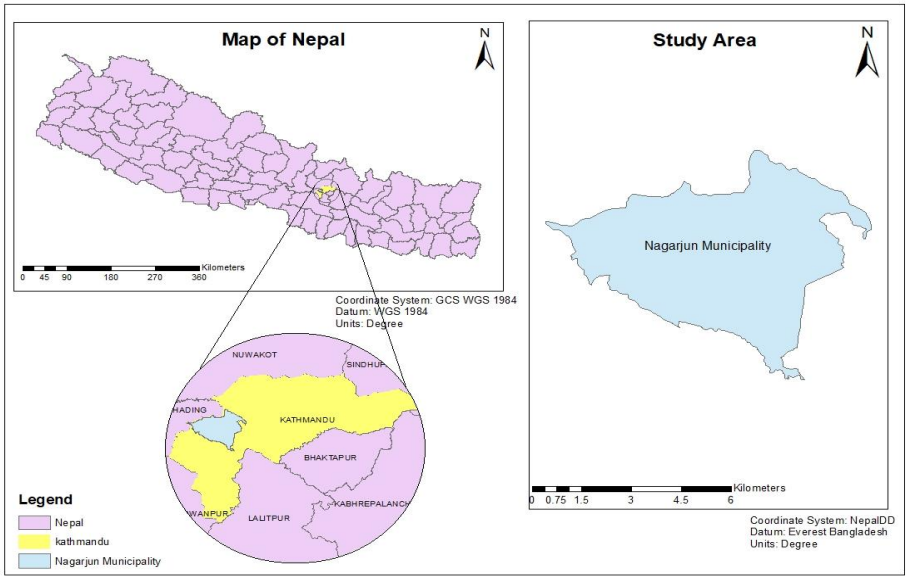

Figure 2. Location of the Study Area Nagarjun Municipality, Kathmandu District, Nepal

3.3. Sample Size

The research sample comprised 60 respondents, selected through purposive and random sampling techniques. These included 45 service users (citizens) who had directly engaged with municipal

e-services and 15 municipal officers responsible for service delivery. In addition, five key informants were interviewed, including the Chief Administrative Officer and four senior municipal staff. The sample size was designed to ensure both representativeness of citizen experiences and adequate institutional perspectives for qualitative analysis [31].

3.4. Data Collection Methods

Two main tools were used for primary data collection held March to April,2025. First, structured questionnaires were administered to 45 citizens and 15 municipal staff, focusing on accessibility, reliability, timeliness, and overall satisfaction with e-services. Second, unstructured interviews were conducted with five key municipal officials to explore administrative culture, resource allocation, and coordination challenges in greater depth. Secondary data were also reviewed from government reports, policy documents, and scholarly literature to contextualize the findings [9],[10].

3.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics, percentages, and graphical representations such as bar charts and pie charts were generated to measure citizen satisfaction and identify patterns in service delivery quality. Qualitative data from interviews were subjected to thematic coding, identifying recurrent patterns in administrative practices, coordination mechanisms, and resource constraints. The integration of both strands of data allowed for a comprehensive interpretation of the findings [31].

3.6. Variables

The study utilized an analytical framework based on both theoretical and empirical considerations. The independent variables included:

- Administrative Culture measured by organizational attitudes, hierarchical practices, and openness to reform [14].
- Coordination measured by inter-departmental communication and information-sharing mechanisms [12],[13].
- Resources measured by availability of trained personnel and financial/technical support [26].

3.7. The Dependent Variables Comprised

- Citizen Satisfaction perceptions of service quality and trust in municipal services [30].
- Service Quality accuracy, reliability, and completeness of e-services [28].
- Responsiveness timeliness of service delivery, feedback systems, and accessibility of digital platforms [29].

This framework provided a structured lens to assess how organizational factors shape e-governance outcomes in the context of a Nepalese municipality.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Implementation Status

The study focused on the vital registration system in Nagarjun Municipality as a representative case of municipal e-services. While the municipality has introduced digital processes for birth, death, and marriage registrations, the extent of transformation remains partial. Basic registration and record-keeping have shifted to computer systems, but full online service delivery is limited. Citizens still rely heavily on physical visits to offices, reflecting incomplete digital integration.

4.2. Citizen Satisfaction

Citizen responses show moderate satisfaction with municipal e-services. Levels of awareness about online registration options were uneven, with younger, educated respondents more aware than elderly or marginalized groups. Accessibility remains a challenge in remote wards due to weak internet connectivity. Trust in the system was mixed citizens acknowledged faster services compared to manual systems but expressed concern over errors and delays in online updates.
Overall satisfaction levels indicated that 65% of respondents were satisfied with e-services, while 35% remained dissatisfied.

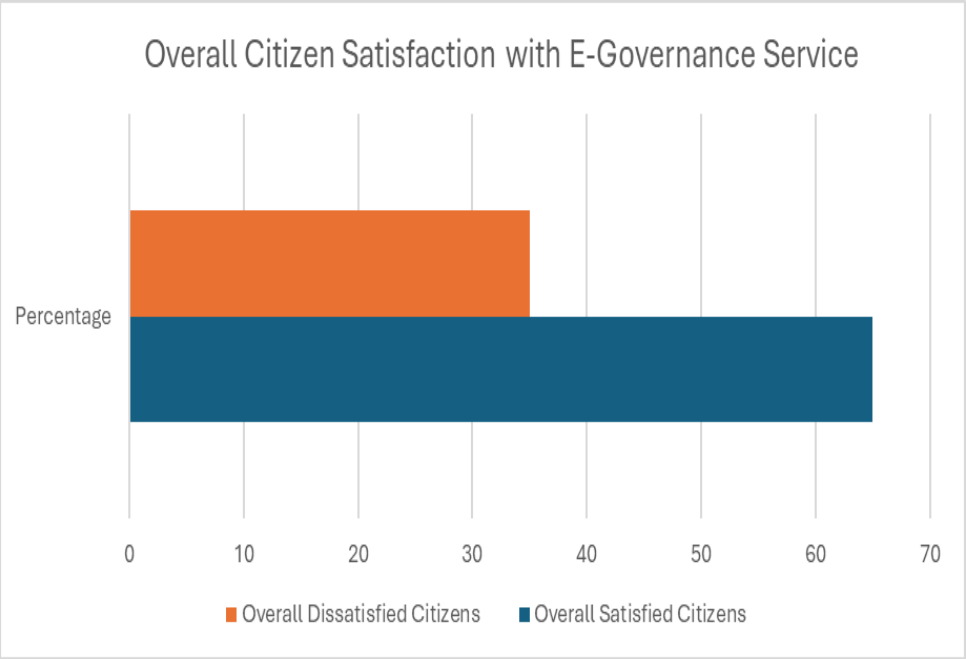

Figure 3. Overall, Citizen Satisfaction with E-Governance Services in Nagarjun Municipality

Citizen satisfaction with e-governance services in Nagarjun Municipality, when assessed through the SERVQUAL framework, presents a mixed picture. Reliability emerged as the strongest dimension, with 70% of respondents satisfied; records were generally accurate, yet frequent spelling errors and delays in updating information reduced public confidence. Responsiveness followed with 65% satisfaction, as staff performed better in digital interactions, though recurring system downtime often hindered timely service delivery. In terms of assurance, 60% of citizens acknowledged staff competence but noted inconsistencies in the quality of support provided, which weakened overall trust in the system. Empathy, at 55%, highlighted a lack of personalized attention, with many citizens feeling those online processes limited meaningful interaction with service providers. Finally, tangibles scored the lowest at 50%, reflecting underdeveloped infrastructure, including poorly equipped service counters, limited kiosks, and inadequately designed online portals. Collectively, these findings suggest that while digital reforms have

improved some aspects of service delivery, significant gaps remain in infrastructure, staff consistency, and citizen-centered approaches.

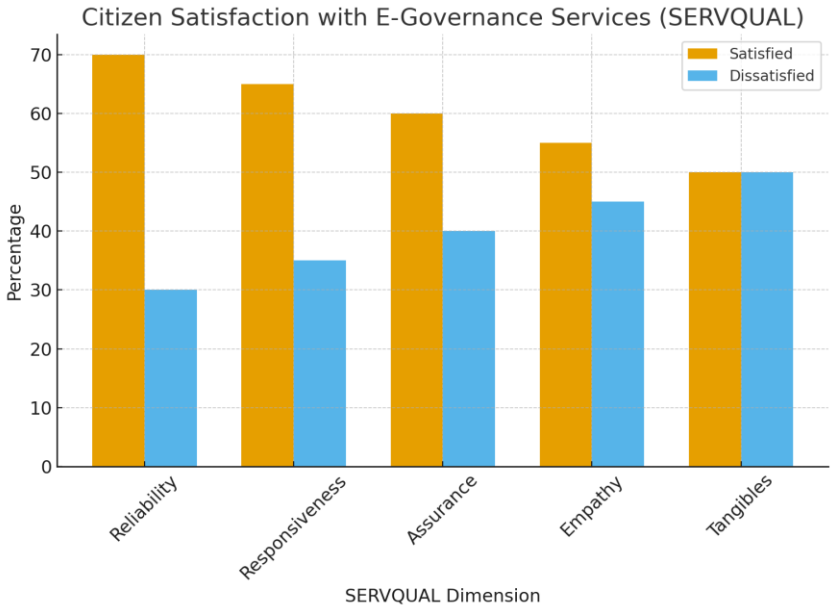

Figure 4. Citizen Satisfaction with E-Governance Services in Nagarjun Municipality (Based on SERVQUAL Dimensions)

The SERVQUAL analysis revealed that reliability and responsiveness scored higher than empathy and tangibles, indicating that automation has improved accuracy and timeliness but not interpersonal interaction. This pattern mirrors findings from India's Aadhaar and Bangladesh's Digital Center programs, where digital reforms enhanced efficiency but required strong institutional coordination to ensure inclusiveness [7], [20]. In Nepal's case, these outcomes align with the Digital Nepal Framework (2020), which emphasizes interoperability, human capacity, and citizen engagement as core principles of e-governance modernization [23]. The results also contribute to SDG 16 by demonstrating that digital governance can promote transparency and trust when adequately supported by organizational culture and resource investment [33].

4.3. Factors Affecting E-Governance

- **Administrative Culture**: A mix of resistance and adaptability was observed. While younger municipal staff were supportive of ICT reforms, senior officials often preferred manual processes, citing familiarity and "safety." This culture limited innovation.
- **Coordination**: Gaps existed between departments, particularly in linking local vital registration data with central databases. Citizens frequently reported having to provide the same documents to multiple offices.
- **Resources**: Both human capacity and technical infrastructure were inadequate. Limited trained personnel and frequent system failures highlighted the dependence on external technical support. Funding constraints restricted the expansion of digital services.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings from Nagarjun Municipality reveal how global concepts of e-governance are reshaped when applied within local contexts. While the principles of transparency,

accountability, and efficiency remain central, their practical implementation in Nepal has been constrained by administrative culture, coordination challenges, and limited resources. This reflects earlier research emphasizing that e-governance models, initially conceptualized in Europe and North America, cannot be transferred wholesale into developing contexts without adaptation [16]. Instead, localized approaches must account for institutional capacity, citizen awareness, and infrastructural readiness.

A key linkage emerges between Nepal's e-governance practices and its broader ICT policy framework. The Information Technology Policy [6], ICT Policy [7], and the e-Governance Master Plan [8] explicitly sought to digitalize service delivery, improve efficiency, and foster citizen-centric governance [23]. These policy goals align with global commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, which underscores the importance of building effective, accountable, and transparent institutions. The SDGs 16.6 (develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions) and 16.7 (ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making) are directly supported by effective e-governance because it enhances trust between citizens and decreases obstacles to receiving services provided by the government [33].

Nevertheless, there are some barriers identified in the study. The lack of awareness among the population on the digital platforms has curtailed citizen participation as it has been the case in other South Asian contexts [15]. In addition, the shortage of technical expertise and the absence of training in the municipal personnel also leads to a decrease in the effectiveness of ICT tools [11]. There has also been interoperability due to fragmented coordination among various agencies which have blocked the seamless integration of various service levels in government [12]. These limitations support the thesis according to which the administrative culture and collaboration between organizations are key factors that define the success of the policy implementation [26].

Nonetheless, despite these challenges, there are opportunities of improvement. The implementation of the National Digital Identity (NID) system is one of the most important actions to improve the organization of the records of citizens, decrease duplication, and enhance authentication [10]. Automation at the municipal level, e.g. the digitalization of vital registration, can be more efficient and more reliable, as long as it is supported by proper investment in infrastructure and training of personnel. On the same note, the citizen engagement digital platforms, such as mobile applications and online feedback portals, may help enhance transparency and hold service providers accountable and narrow the gap between citizens and service providers [30].

In general, the paper has shown that, although the world has discussed e-governance in terms of efficiency and transparency, the model of e-governance in Nepal can only be successful when the institutional, cultural, and resource-based realities of the country are taken into consideration. Nepal can potentially improve service delivery by integrating the national ICT policy and SDG commitments with municipal e-governance efforts as well as improving democratic governance and citizen confidence.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has investigated the use of e-governance in Nagarjun Municipality and the factors that influence satisfaction of the citizens and service delivery. The results affirm that e-governance has the capacity to contribute to higher levels of performance in terms of delivery of public services that are favourable to the administrative culture, have administration coordination mechanisms, and sufficient resources. Digital services were moderately enhanced in reliability

and responsiveness, but the assurance, empathy, and physical infrastructure continue to be a challenge. These findings can be explained by the international and South Asian studies which show that reforms in e-governance can be successful only when they are transformed into local institutional and cultural contexts [15],[16].
Policy-wise, the findings highlight the need to integrate municipal e-governance at the national level with ICT policies and with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions speaks about the necessity of transparent, accountable, and inclusive systems of governance [33]. The enhancement of local e-governance is also not just the issue of enhancing service quality but also progressing the international duties of Nepal in the field of democratic governance and digital transformation [23].

6.1. Policy Recommendations

6.1.1. Invest in ICT Infrastructure and Staff Training

Digital transformation demands a strong infrastructure including a good internet connection, secure servers, and automatic registration processes. It is also vital to develop capacity-building among the municipal employees in order to enhance digital literacy, minimize the amount of system failures, and maintain the stable provision of services [11].

6.1.2. Strengthen Inter Agency Data Sharing

Disjointed coordination is a hindrance to working e-governance. Municipal records will be integrated with central databases, including the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) and National Digital Identity (NID) systems and will result in less duplication, more accurate information, and more efficient services [10].

6.1.3. Enhance Citizen Digital Literacy and Awareness

Citizens do not know about the provided e-services or how to operate them well. There is a need to increase inclusiveness and equitable access to services by outreach programs, digital literacy campaigns, and user-friendly platforms, especially to marginalized communities [34].

6.1.4. Adopt Integrated Municipal E-Governance Platforms

The cities must upgrade their digital instruments to elaborate systems that combine centralized registration of vitality, taxation, licensing, and other services into one client portal. These platforms have the potential of creating transparency, lessening the administrative burdens, and enhancing the trust of the citizens [12].

6.2. Directions for Future Research

Future research must involve comparative research studies in various municipalities to determine changes in implementation and satisfaction with the citizens. In addition, additional studies may assess the level of integrating with national CRVS and e-ID systems on the quality of accuracy, efficiency, and inclusiveness in the local service delivery. Longitudinal studies can also be used to shed some light on the change in administrative culture and citizen trust over time with digital changes.

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