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Home Assignment

Module: Governance

Title of the home assignment: **Assessment of the Social Accountability
Tools in the Nepalese Context**

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1. Introductory Assessment of Social Accountability Practices in Nepal

Social Accountability (SA) in Nepal is a virtually active concept in the development management. The practices of the SA tools are in the developing phase in the Nepalese governance. The government machineries are to some extent aware about the need and necessity of the SA though it has been searching the better way to institutionalized. Very few offices do fulfill the public accountability and most of the offices are reluctant to do it. The reasons behind the reluctancy are very complex and not easily visible. Though the prevailing *Act* and *Regulations* has described enough in accountability evaluating and testing the performance. For example, in the past, public audit and public hearing tools are actively implemented tools by the local bodies. Dissemination of the reports of the said tools was limitedly made public. Both were procedurally conducted well but still people are seeking the public trust in response and institutional credibility from the actor itself. It proves that it is the question of validity and legitimacy of the applied SA tools itself.

Explaining the SA practices is theoretically not empirical in Nepal due to limited or no information. Though the conceptual clarity among the governance stakeholders is gaining pace. If we wish to evaluate the accountability process and product empirically, it requires scientific efforts to explore the impact and result of the delivery of the development inputs. Service benchmark is not standardized (with few exceptions and it has also fuelling the classical top-bottom accountability. The government offices publish the information disclosure report as per the Right to Information Act but not the periodic impact-based assessment regularly. Thus, the accountability mechanism is still need to be institutionalized in the government (federal, provincial and local) itself.

Furthermore, Public sector accountability is widely debated phenomenon in the development politics and focusing the people's realistic engagement in the development-cycle. The engagement of the people and organization are very fundamental principle as well of the Constitution (2072 B.S.). Consequently, there is significant change is required in the overall realm of state restructuring; particularly focusing in the local government paradigm. Citizen ownership and oversight should not be forgotten during the integrity checking.

In my view, SA initiatives are started to apply in the government machinery but still needs to be strengthened qualitatively and quantitatively. Which could ultimately ensure the bottom-up answerability to the people and even harmonize the terms of politician as well as the bureaucrat. Sometime the dichotomy between the role of politician and administrator has affected the result-chain accountability. To effectively address the responsiveness and answerability to the citizen, there are lots of scopes to execute the SA tools which are discussed in the local government context with the SWOT in following sections.

2. Analysis of the Appropriate Tools:

In the Nepalese Governance, *Public Audit* and *Social Audit* tools are better in order to address the responsiveness and the impact of the development governance.

Public Audit is inevitable and implementable SA tools, because it could:

- measure the performance against the target
- provide the opportunity to the people directly to participate in the process
- give chance the Administrator to response sincerely
- increase the access of services directly to the people through feedback
- inform the people different services in a platform
- confirm the quality, quantity, cost and time of services
- ultimately ensures the effectiveness of the governance responsibly, etc.

Social Audit is also another vibrant means to reform the local administrative accountability mechanism because it could:

- analyze the result of the development efforts
- measure the impact of the governance with the bottom-up approach
- publish the analytical report to understand what, how, when and who is getting the fruit of development in the local context
- ensure the periodic evaluation of the sectoral as well integrated development
- foster the transparency of plan, budget and implementation
- guide further the required intervention with the people's choice

- create the environment of transparent government with valid analytical report, etc.

3. SWOT Profile Analysis of the Local Government to apply SA Tool:

There are number of opportunities in the local government at the federal setup of Nepal's restructuring phase. Besides of it, we are also facing number of challenges since long time, which are descriptively examined as below:

3.1 Strength:- Following strengths are available in the local government:

- Newly formed local government structure has high opened up the door of establishing new norms and values of SA
- Elected officials has committed vision and mission of the accountable governance
- Transparent capacity is increased due to information and communication technology
- Democratic polity has created constructive opposition to check and balance the system
- People supports are highly valuable in institutionalizing the good-governance.

3.2 Weaknesses:- In view of the legacy of fifteen years of vacuum of elected political leadership, there are inherent following weaknesses are seen in the local government context:

- Knowledge of the SA tools are low
- Skills to use and sustain the SA tools are weaker in political and administrative front
- Institutional preparedness is not properly assessed
- Not adequately prioritized to assess the accountability of the local government
- Institutional memory is challenging to sustain the good practices,
- Mind-set of the stakeholders are not fully compatible with the federal accountable governance etc.

3.3 Opportunity :- Number of ample opportunities are available for the local government in order to implement the constitutional norms of accountable government, they could be as follows:

- During the state restructuring, integrating the SA concept in policies and programs can be done promptly

- Creating the new *accountability culture* in the local governance (through elected leaders)
- Design the service and its' benchmarking in order to deliver and measure
- Can design the appropriate SA mechanism and it's evaluation tools in the program and budget by the local Council
- People can spontaneously own the tools measuring process smoothly
- Bureaucrat can be trained in the SA tools new structure and institutionalize in the local governance process

3.4 Threat :- With view of lot of opportunities and strengths of the creating new social accountability values in the local bodies, following major risks are also can be assume in order to reduce it properly:

- Local leader might be reluctant to introduce the SA concept inside their governance structure
- Knowledge may be less to penetrate the SA policies/practices appropriately
- Bureaucratic mentality can be disturbing to sustain it
- Balance between policy introduction and implementation modality (budget etc.) may hamper the objectivity
- People level trust-building (transparency, participation, response etc.) might not be prioritized during the institutionalization phase.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, SA is the robust theory and its tools are inevitably required in the Nepalese context to enhance the public trust. Many SA tools are available globally as well as locally in order to be made government accountable and hold government answerable. Quality and quantity of public service is very vast and always regime of reform in which standardization is quite demanding always. Therefore, the measurement of the benchmarking of the services through public audit and/or social audit tools are found very pragmatic in the Nepalese local government regime which could be institutionalize in the restructuring and newly injected federal governance setup by thoroughly assessing and accepting the SWOT. Last but not least, constructive engagements of all stakeholders are the backbone of the social accountability ensurance mechanism.