

Municipality Declaration, Urban Imagination and Urban Experience

A Case of Putalibazaar and Walling, Syangja, Nepal

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Abstract

Municipalities, which are basically administrative divisions, have been treated as urban entities in Nepal, though most of them lack even the basic urban amenities. Municipality declaration by government can be taken as an effort to foster the process of urbanization in Nepal. On the basis of firsthand qualitative data collected through interviews, observations and focused group discussions conducted in the two municipalities: Putalibazaar and Walling of Syangja District of Western Nepal, this article attempts to highlight the status of urbanization here after 17 years of municipality declaration. This article reveals that local people were out of sorts about how urbanization flourishes in their area due to municipality declaration. It also divulges that local people themselves, municipality offices and other governmental and non-governmental agencies have not been able to make vibrant contribution in the urbanization process. Therefore, this article concludes that the mere act of municipality declaration cannot foster urbanization; thus local people and municipalities offices need to play collective, more responsible, productive and meaningful role to transform the urban imagination into a reality.

Keywords: urbanization, urban imagination, municipality declaration, urban experience

1. Prelude

Human culture and civilization have gone through numerous transitions ever since their origin. Urbanization characterizes one of the recent developments in human culture and civilization. The process of urbanization is directly related to the city-making process. As a result of urbanization, cities are increasing in number and their population. As Glaeser (2011) states

Two hundred forty-three million Americans crowd together in the 3 percent of the country that is urban. Thirty-six million people live in and around Tokyo, the most productive metropolitan area in the world. Twelve million people reside in central Mumbai,

and Shanghai is almost as large. On a planet with vast amounts of space (all of humanity could fit in Texas-each of us with a personal townhouse), we choose cities. Although it has become cheaper to travel long distances, or to telecommute from the Ozarks to Azerbaijan, more and more people are clustering closer and closer together in large metropolitan areas. Five million more people every month live in the cities of the developing world, and in 2011, more than half the world's population is urban (p.1).

Thus, the process of urbanization has been intensifying throughout the world and Nepal is no more an exception. Rural to urban migration is ever increasing and the number of urban, urbanizing and semi urban areas is increasing throughout the country. Some of these areas are exhibiting a spontaneous urbanization while others are officially designated as urban areas by the Nepalese Government in the name of municipalities.

In Nepal, there are 58 officially designated urban areas: 53 of them being municipalities, 4 sub-metropolises and 1 metropolis. Both Putalibazaar Municipality and Walling Municipality were formed in 1996 by the government by merging different pre-existing VDCs. Former Chandikalika VDC, Satupasal VDC, Karendada VDC, Putalibazaar VDC and Ganeshpur VDC were merged to form Putalibazaar Municipality. Similarly, Dhanubase VDC, Walling VDC and Pekhu Baghkhori VDC were merged to form Walling municipality. However, most of the settlement areas and localities within these two designated municipal areas had lacked basic infrastructures like safe drinking water supplies, electricity, sanitary waste disposal system, and solid waste management systems, urban road, etc. at the time of their formation.

So far what the world has perceived and most of us think and believe is that the urban areas are more developed with better facilities. They characterize and reflect a different level of development and civilization as compared to the rural areas. Thus, rural areas tend to transform themselves into urban one. However, the context of these two municipalities is different as even today we can find a number remote and less developed rural settings in terms of infrastructural development. To sum up, these areas had very few prerequisites needed to declare a certain area as a municipality. The bitter fact is that people living here are taken as city dwellers despite living in rural settings and they make a part of 17 percent of the national population i.e. urban population of Nepal.

2. The Problem

Even after 16 years of municipality declaration, many basic urban infrastructures are yet to be installed, and the real feeling of being an “Urbane” is yet to be given to local people. Nevertheless this is not to claim that there have not been changes as social, cultural, economic, and others changes have been undergoing there. However, the important question is that if these changes would not have taken place had present areas within Putalibazaar and Walling Municipality still been the parts of Village Development Committees (VDCs).

Nepalese government seems to have adopted the policy of initiating development of rural and semi urban settings by declaring them as municipalities. Probably, it had imagined of generating greater amount of funds thereby increase investment in urban infrastructural development through municipality. In this context, examining the success or failure of such policies of Nepalese Government is also equally important. Obviously, the municipality declaration had led the local people to make a distinct urban imagination. Thus, the equally important issue is to explore the way that urban imagination has been getting translated into an urban experience today. Thus this research article tries to explain the kind of urban imagination that was there among local people at the time of municipality declaration and the way people of Putalibazaar and Walling have been experiencing urbanization afterwards.

2. Conceptual/Theoretical Overview

2.1 Urbanization

Urbanization is the process whereby large numbers of people congregate and settle in an area, eventually developing social institutions, such as businesses and government, to support themselves. Urban areas, or those pockets of people and institutions thereby created, are generally characterized as relatively dense settlements of people. Furthermore, it is claimed, they sometimes originate from the effort by authorities to consciously concentrate power, capital, or both at a particular site (Orum, 2004). Similarly, Roberts and Kanaley (2006) maintain that urbanization - the spatial concentration of people and economic activity- is arguably the most important social transformation in the history of civilization since man changed from being a nomadic hunter-gatherer and adopted a settled, subsistence agricultural way of life. While the timing and speed of urbanization have varied and are varying between countries, regions,

and continents, the urbanization process has taken hold everywhere. It has proven to be an unstoppable and a mostly desirable phenomenon. Cities are the foundation of modern civilization; they are the engine room of economic growth and the centers of culture, entertainment, innovation, education, knowledge, and political power.

Some have conceived of urbanization in the physical sense of the increasing area of land being developed for urban use, while others view urbanization as a social process of people adopting the attitudes and behaviour traditionally associated with life in cities and towns, irrespective of where they might be living. Even when it is interpreted from the perspective of population geography so as to relate to the type of settlement in which people live, as it is for present purposes, the term has been applied in several different ways. According to which approach is taken, urbanization can be considered to be a continuing process, one that is long since over or one that is not currently very important but may undergo a resurgence, perhaps in cyclic fashion (Champion, 2001).

Urbanization is the directed concentration of population in urban space. The city itself becomes a narrative device for understanding the process of urbanization. The continually changing tempo of urbanization is not the outcome of a natural order of things, but rather a consciously directed human action. With urbanization, people moved from rural to urban residences, with an accompanying shift from agricultural to industrial occupations. A sense of community in these urban spaces became vastly different from rural models that were based on kinship networks and traditions. The fast pace of city life and the frequently competitive existence of urban dwellers make it far more difficult to connect with the community (Kumar, 2003).

2.2 Municipalitization

Municipality is essentially an urban administrative unit Nepal. It is a local self-government unit. In simple words, 'municipalitization' connotes to a more administrative process. It refers to the way of functioning of a municipality or municipal authority. Whereas urbanization is a general and spontaneous process of change over time, 'municipalitization' tends to be formal, more directed, planned and controlled. Urbanization may take place in any place or any kind of rural setting, but being a formal process, but municipalitization takes place only when there is a planned intervention of authorities of a nation-state. Municipal authority is largely

responsible for the success and failure of ‘municipalitzation’ taking place in a particular designated urban area. Specifically, under municipalitzation of study area, installation of the basic urban amenities and infrastructures given higher priority and constraints associated to it and development of tax culture has been given more importance in the current research. Side by side, the issues of good governance, transparency, democratic local governance, and many more issues find adequate space in the municipalitzation process.

3. Study Area and Research Methods

This study was carried out in Putalibazar Municipality and Waling Municipality of Syangja district of Gandaki Zone, Nepal. The major market centers of these two municipalities are about 27 km. far from each other. Both of them exhibit similarity in the sense that Aandhikhola (one of the main rivers of Syangja District) divides them into two halves. In case of Putalibazaar, out of total 13 wards, 9 wards are located towards the highway side of the municipality while remaining four are on the other side of Aandhikhola. Similarly, in case of Waling Municipality, out of total 11 wards, 8 wards are on the highway side and rest 3 are on the other side of Aandhikhola. The study area characterizes a kind of plurality in terms of the caste/ethnicity and religious identities.

Primarily, this study was conducted by using a descriptive research design to highlight the various facets of the urbanization occurring in Putalibazaar and Waling. It was based on primary data of qualitative nature but some important secondary data were collected as per the need.

The qualitative data needed for getting the end of the objectives of this research were collected by using observation, interview and focused group discussion techniques. Based on these techniques, the tools like interview schedule and checklists were employed to collect the required data. The collected qualitative data using above mentioned tools were first transcribed. After that they were translated. After finishing translation, they were coded manually. After that the codes were used to generate themes and categories. Then the analysis was done descriptively.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Urban imagination among local people at the time of municipality declaration

“..... *suruma ta nagarpalika vanekai kasto hola jasto va'thyo...*”

.....”(at the beginning he was amazed how a municipality was), *yee aba nagarpalika bhasi ta ghargharai bijuli, gharaghari bata, ghargharai khanepani subidha, ghar gharai toilet subidha; Subidhai subidha hunchha hola jasto lagethyo.....*” (with municipality declaration people had felt that each and every household would be blessed with facilities of electricity, access roads, drinking water, toilet and so on).

The above mentioned statements were of one of the participants of the focused group discussion held in Walling. When these municipalities were declared about sixteen years ago, the local people had a number of hopes and expectations. The government's main aim behind the declaration was an attempt to accelerate the pace of the popular notion of development. So, there was mainly a change in administrative set up from a VDC to a municipality.

However, for local people it was much more than that as it had led them to make numerous expectations related to urbanity and thereby they have had a distinct urban imagination. I had observed the outpouring of such expectations during informal talks made in the course of the fieldwork. Some of the people were saying that they had imagined the flourishing of development infrastructure due to the municipal declaration while others wondered why these areas were declared as municipality. Both the municipality had areas lacking most of the basic prerequisites of a municipality. As one of the interviewees remembered that some people had imagined better road to ease transportation while others had getting the electricity facility in mind. Similarly, some others had imagined for all round improvement in all possible basic infrastructures. Certainly, people were excited to imagine urban infrastructure in their places.

Definitely, there were hopes for better future in urban areas in the form of municipality. So, based on the experiences shared by the local people, it can be said that those early days were quite chaotic and full of expectations and the declaration had helped to develop an urban imagination in the local people's mind. Despite having such expectations, a number of local people, as they revealed, had no any idea about what would be happening in their area after the municipal declaration.

4.2 The urban experience after municipality declaration

When a rural setting comes under the influence of urbanization, its

socio-cultural life sees a number of alternations. The study area included significantly high proportion of typical rural settings but they have started to get influenced by urban features once made parts of a designated urban area as Putalibazaar Municipality and Walling Municipality. Naturally, the existing social and cultural characteristics saw urban influences and gradual changes. Society and culture are complex in themselves so are social and cultural changes. So, detailed and in-depth analysis of such changes occurring in any place is a vague and challenging affair. Keeping the complex nature of socio-cultural changes in mind, this research article analyzes the major impacts of urbanization on socio-cultural life under some selected variables as explained below:

4.2.1 Changes in housing pattern

As observed during the field, most of the houses were found to be of traditional type either with zinc roof or slate roof or straw roof. These households exhibit the rural characteristic of the study area. Importantly, even in rural settlements like Sataun, Lamage, Hirapata, Satupasal, Ramkosh, etc. of Putalibazaar Municipality and Hatiya, Pekhu, Amdali, Miridi, Triyashi, etc. of Walling Municipality, some of the houses were RCC houses which appeared to have built relatively recently. These RCC houses reflect people's recent attraction towards urban features. As one of the informant of this research said these days if people had to reconstruct their houses they would prefer an RCC one.

4.2.2 Status of basic urban facilities in houses

During the field work, observations were made in different localities in both of the municipalities to get an idea about the possession of these urban amenities at a household. Newly built houses in both municipalities had separate rooms according to purpose even in the rural settings. As observation in Pekha, Baghkhori, Triyashi and other settlements of Walling and Sataun, Ramkosh, Hirapata, Karendada, Satupasal, Lamange and other settlements of Putalibazar, people had built separate Kitchen, bedrooms and toilet even in their old houses. Buying TV and connecting a cable network to it, using LPG stove in kitchen, managing tap water inside the household for kitchen, etc. have also been familiar sights in most of the households.

During the fieldwork, the local people revealed that the installation or arrangement of basic urban facilities in the households occurred predominantly after the municipal declaration. Construction of separate

kitchen, bedroom, drawing rooms, etc. fostered hugely after municipal declaration. Purchasing and using computer, television, cable connection, landline and mobile phone, LPG cylinder and stove etc. greatly increased once people became identified and aware as urban dweller. Had there been no declaration of municipality, there would have been increases in such practices but easy access to market and feeling of being urban must have encouraged people to use facilities more and more, one of the interviewees marked. Similarly, one of the informants also agreed that people were trying to adopt so called urban life styles with increase in awareness among them. She also revealed that these basically urban features have already become a part of their life that's why people, now, can be seen borrowing loans from different groups for buying LPG cylinder. Road networks have been playing an instrumental role in facilitating the use of such urban facilities.

But importantly, these developments appear to be the demands and need of the changed time, as rural settings outside these municipalities also characterize such developments. Thus, as one of the interviewees had mentioned that municipal declaration might not totally be responsible for these developments in both of these municipalities.

4.2.3 Dependence on market for food items

During the informal talks with the local people and interviews with the respondents, it was understood that the self-sufficiency of people through farming is ever decreasing and there has been a clear dependence on market for different food items. Most of the people interviewed during the fieldwork revealed that their own production has been gradually declining. As a result they now depend upon market for cereals or food grains much more than in the past. The households' reliance on market for vegetables appeared comparatively much lower than other food items. This is due to the fact that the households most often grow different types of vegetable in their farmland and their cultivation is relatively easier than other food crops.

4.2.4 Changes on transactional practices and saving practices

The local people revealed that they use cash directly for paying wages, small scale donation, purchase of daily needed goods and services. But for large scale payments like large scale donation, loan payments, etc. they even use chequebook. A large amount of money enters this area as remittance. Moreover, non-agricultural occupations also generate

significant income among local people. Here we can clearly find the involvement of cash in almost all respondents' daily life. In this sense, people of both municipalities have developed an urbanite feature of dependence of cash economy.

Some of the households were found to be collecting their money in local informal groups and cooperatives. In different localities within the study area, there are a number of groups such as farmers' saving groups, women's saving groups, forest users' saving groups, school saving groups etc. These groups are informal agencies but people invest money here on monthly basis. The money invested per member differs from groups to groups but usually it ranges from Rs. 50 to Rs. 1000. As an informant revealed that each month a large sum of money is collected and invested within the study area through informal groups. Echoing with a local social worker of Amdaanda in Putalibazaar it can be said that the spirit of working together has become over spread in the study area. But question can be raised above the use of money taken by members as loan from these groups i.e. if they have been using it for productive or unproductive activities.

Some of the respondents collected money in other formal agencies like local co-operatives. Collectively the local groups and co-operatives have been instrumental in developing a habit of saving among people and cropped the possible practices for economic security in the future. In sum, in terms of saving money certain urban features have developed among people of the study area.

4.2.5 Changes on consumptions of *khaja* at home

As noted in both FGDs, people's attraction towards packed and baked items is ever rising in the study area. As one of the respondents quoted during a FGD in Walling, people think that consuming packed goods is a modern or urban feature so they even use it in hard laboring agricultural works; though these food items may not provide as much calorie as provided by the traditional items. Such shift in use of *khaja* exemplifies the shift in consumption pattern among people. Their changed consumption behaviour is an indication that people are striving to change their rural status into an urban one, as quoted by the participants of focused group discussion.

4.2.6 Changes on observation of some selected rituals/events

During this research, attempts were made to understand the changes in

two of the most important socio-cultural practices i.e. birthday celebration and marriage. In this section, changes observed in birthday celebration and organization of marriage and other associated activities have been highlighted.

As reported by the local people during interview and informal discussions, the celebration of birthday in so-called urban style is getting gradually popular year after year. Most of them reasoned that the access to cable TV network is the most important factor for it. During fieldwork, simply literate or even illiterate people were also found to be using the term '*birday*' to refer to birthday. One of the interviewees, who had served for five years in Walling as elected people's representative believed that the municipal declaration has been largely responsible for popularizing birthday celebration. For him, since the sense of being municipal dweller had already developed among local people, they now feel easy to imitate the practices being practiced in major cities of Nepal like Pokahra, Kathmadu, Butwal, etc.

During the field work, the researches got to witness the catering service being used in a marriage event in Lamage area of Putalibazaar. As some of the local people admitted that the hiring of catering is a sign that the social and cultural relationship among people is getting a different dimension. More and more individualist features have started to become dominant and local people were found to be equating this change with the urbanization and municipality declaration.

4.2.7 Changes on inter-personal relationships in the neighborhood

“In my personal view, the selfish acts are ever increasing in the last 4-5 years; the whole society is immersed in such selfish activities. The kind of mutual respect, cooperation and friendly relation, helping attitude, etc. which had been a dominant phenomenon in the past is gradually becoming a tale. Such transformation of society is a worrying sign and such selfish tendencies are more in the Walling Bazaar.....”

This was a view of an informant from Walling-8 regarding the prevalence of selfish behaviors. Other respondents were also expressing similar views regarding this. Most of them revealed that individualistic feeling has remarkably risen in the last 10 years or more.

For most of the people interviewed and discussed with there were many

neighbors in the past to share with in the daily life but now their number has decreased. These respondents opinioned that people have started to generate a kind of prestige issue regarding the sharing goods, things and matters. A participant of focused group discussion was of the view that more people now feel asking others for things leads to decline in their social status or lower their image, so they opt more for buying things than seeking for reciprocal exchange with neighbors.

Similarly, as most of the interviewees agreed that inter personal ties among people in the study area are gradually weakening. One of the respondents reasoned that such weakening is due to increasing urban features among the people in the study area. With increased dependence on market products for livelihood, people now very rarely practice some of the popular activities of the past such as *paincho* (*reciprocal sharing of goods and foodstuffs*).

In the past, one of the common activities which used to be the evidence of close interpersonal relationship was leaving one's household's keys to other households in the case all the members have to be out of the home and nobody remains there to look after the home. So regarding the practice of leaving keys to others households, people have started to turn more suspicious than in the past. This indicates the weakening bonding among these people.

Almost all the social and cultural changes outlined and explained above have taken place in Putalibazaar and Walling area after the municipality declaration. Municipality declaration was largely aimed at accelerating development and thereby urbanization. So, municipalization and urbanization account to a certain extent for those changes. However, the role played by other factors in bringing those changes too deserves certain credit. Among these factors, globalization can be taken the most important one. As Giddens (2001) maintains *inevitably, our personal lives have been altered as globalizing forces enter into our local contexts, our homes and our communities through impersonal sources – such as the media, the internet, and popular culture – as well as through personal contact with individuals from other countries and cultures* (p. 61).

Similar to Giddens' remarks, it is quite obvious that the globalizing forces have already penetrated into the family and socio-cultural life of the inhabitants of Putalibazaar and Walling Municipality. Television with

cable connection, mobile phone, mobile internet, massive number of emigrants to various countries and their frequent visits to their parental home, etc. have ever been in an increasing trend. These globalizing forces like media, internet, personal contacts, etc. are encouraging people to develop urbanism as a way of life.

Putting in another way, it seems that by incorporating numerous products and features of globalization consciously or unconsciously, local people can be considered to be propelling society in Pualibazaar and Walling towards, what Beck (1992) suggests, a 'risk society'. Giddens (2001) sums up Beck's idea of risk society as

'the risk society, he argues, is not limited to environmental and health risk alone - it includes a whole series of interrelated changes within contemporary social life: shifting employment patterns, heightened job insecurity, the decline influence of tradition and custom on self-identities, the erosion of traditional family patterns and democratization of personal relationships' (p. 68).

The explanations of changes made above clearly suggest that the societies in these two municipalities are more or less heading towards a risk society. They are gradually modifying their way of life in the directions as driven by the globalizing forces consciously or unconsciously. However, people here are hardly aware about these potential 'risks' of globalization, they are just engaged in what can be called imitation.

4.3 Efforts of municipality offices in urbanization

These municipalities have already passed about 16 years of declaration, but urbanization process is not taking place at an encouraging fashion. After these years there should have been the acceleration of development related activities incorporating the participation of all possible sectors. The major efforts of both municipalities have been found to be concentrated in the roadways extension and launching of *Tole Bikas Sansthas*, so they have been explained here.

4.3.1 Construction of access roads

After series of discussions, informal talks, observations and interviews, I was convinced that among the infrastructures of development the most sought upon by local people was the construction of access roads. In all of their annual programs, this infrastructure has been the most prioritized program of both the municipalities. It appears quite natural as the large

settlements of both municipalities were devoid of the facility of access roads.

Significantly high development budget is allocated in the construction of urban access roads in both of the municipalities. The achievement of such investment is that in almost all settlements in both of the municipalities have seasonal accesses to road network. But the achievements made in past 16 years and more have not been able to transform these seasonal roads into all-weather roads. During the fieldwork, the local people were found quite dissatisfied with the achievements made in terms of roadways extension.

Both of the municipalities possess similarity in terms of their physical features as both of them are divided into two halves by Andhikhola River. Siddhartha Highway runs through one of the halves of both of the municipalities. At the time of municipal declaration it was the only blacktopped road in these areas. The other half lying to the right of the Andhikhola River had no any blacktopped road. Both municipalities have failed so far to blacktop even a single meter of road in this region. In the words of local public, there has been bias in infrastructural development as most of the visible development activities in terms of roadway extension have been carried out in the other half only. Significantly, during field work it was discovered that both of the municipalities have blacktopped few kilometers of road in the other half which lies to the left of the Andhikhola river. Due to this, the feeling of bias experienced by the inhabitants of previous Pekhu Baghkhori VDC of Walling and Chandikalika and Satupasal VDCs of Putalibazaar appears quite realistic and a genuine one.

Presently three memorable bridges have been built over Andhikhola joining two halves of Putalibazaar and two such bridges have been built over Andhikhola joining two halves of Walling municipality by the government of Nepal. But people's disappointment is miles away from being over.

In terms of roadways extension, significant changes have occurred in the last 5 years or more as explained by interviews during the fieldwork. One of the interviewees who had served as an elected people's representative for five years in Walling said that previously people used to protest strongly against any roadway excavation through their private lands. So many such programs were halted or even cancelled. But now the same people have

been visiting the municipality office for getting a road excavated through their private land. Even some of them have constructed roads through their private investment. He labeled this as the development of urbanism due to municipal declaration. He further elaborated this saying that had these areas still been VDC, the investment on roadways extension would not have been more, thus the awareness about roadways extraction and its importance would not have generated in such shorter period of time.

4.3.2 Institutionalization of *Tole Bikas Sanstha*

In what can be labeled as a much positive approach these municipalities have brought forward is the concept of developing a particular locality with the active engagement of local inhabitants in the form of '*Tole Bikas Sanstha*'. As Power (2001) stresses *cities are made up of neighbourhoods and their fortunes are locked together. The success of cities depends on successful neighbourhoods, and therefore the urban agenda – an attempt to reverse the urban exodus and overcome social exclusion - forces on neighbourhoods as well as cities and regions. They are intrinsically interconnected* (p. 346).

However, the success of such strategy depends upon the type of role the municipalities play afterwards. Only devising a design is never going to be enough, there requires active engagement with it. During the fieldwork, *Tole Bikas Sansthas* of Walling were found to be much more effective and functional as compared those of Putalibazaar. In Putalibazaar, *Tole Bikas Sansthas* are active only in a few wards; in most of the wards, they exist only in papers

Regarding other infrastructural developments, electrification has almost completed in both of the municipalities. In regards to communication, PSTN service is also limited to these core or market areas of both the municipalities. Though mobile service has greatly penetrated into the social and cultural life in both municipalities like in other parts of the country, local people have been deprived of benefits of PSTN service like cheaper outgoing calls, ADSL internet facilities, etc. Most of the areas in both municipalities are still away from the facilities of modern health care systems. In Putalibazaar, there is a District Hospital, but there is the lack of enough specialist doctors. In case of any major illness or injury, people are compelled to travel to Pokhara, which always proves to be costly affair from financial point of view as well as risky affair in terms of life of people. The condition of Walling is even worse in terms of the

availability of modern health care system. There is a Primary Health Center, which is also facing the similar problems to that of the District Hospital. Here too ill or injured people have to be rush to Pokhara or Palpa. The investment of private sector in health can be found in other cities of Nepal in an encouraging way; however, the private sector is yet to contribute significantly in the health sector in whole Syangja district.

Both municipalities do not possess proper waste disposal system, so they dump solid wastes at the bank of Aandhikhola River. The act has been increasing the pollution of Aandhikhola. In fact, the office bearers of both municipalities accept that the issue of solid wastes has already proved to be one of the most challenging affairs for them. Likewise, there are still a number of localities which do not have proper supply of safe drinking water.

For the last few years, Walling has been making important news in whole Nepal due to its effective management, better administrative functions and planned development, contrarily Putalibazaar has been facing slashing of the grants from the Ministry of Local Development. As per the Minimum Conditions (MCs) and Performance Measurements (PMs) assessment result of all LBs for the FY 2065-66, Putalibazaar Municipality had faced the loss of 10 percent of its capital grant from LBFC of Ministry of Local Development in FY 2067-68 whereas Walling had received 25 percent more capital grant in the same year.

4.4 Status of participatory infrastructural development

Two interviewees, one each from Walling Municipality office and Putalibazaar Municipality office asserted that all development planning by them incorporate that issue. According to them, all the wards organize 'ward meetings' to assess the needs of people and annual programs and planning are set accordingly. However, the local people had the other ideas. They were reiterating that they did not exactly know about the way urban or municipal planning is made and guessed that such planning were made as per the pressure by some influential leaders and groups. One of the interviewees, who was from a Dalit community, maintained that;

..... *hamra kura pani suninchhan vannuparyo. Hamro tolema 36 ghar dalit chhan, tara hamro tole bikas sansthaka adhakshya chahi Chhetri chhan. Ma Kosadhakshya hun tyo sansthako. Tara hisab arkaile rakhchhan, tyasaile maile aafulai thapana*

garera rakhe jasto matrai lagchha. Mulyankan nai vayena kosadhakshyako..... (.....it should be said that our talks are also heard. There are a total of 36 Dalit households in our locality, but the President of our To. Bi. Sa. is a Chhetri. I am the Treasurer of that committee. However, others take care of its accounts, thus I feel I've just been made a showpiece. There has not been evaluation of the Treasurer.....).

From the talks made with local people, it was revealed that people in both of the municipalities were waiting for municipality office to start development of their area. In this context, one of the interviewees, who served as a representative of a political party in Walling Municipality Mechanism a few years ago, said that

“Regarding participatory development, the level of participation is a relatively high in the rural setting of the municipality. But in urban settings within the municipality, people have very high tendency of expecting others to undertake and execute participatory development in their area and now this type of thinking is gradually entering into the psychology of people of rural settings as well.

The municipality had introduced the concept of 70/30 (i.e. municipal office contributing 70% of the development budget in any development activity in any setting within municipality and the local people contributing rest 30 %). However, telling you frankly, in actual practice 100 % of the development expenditure came from municipality in all of such development works, but in paper it has been shown that local people contributed 30% of the estimated expenditure.....”

Later on other interviewees of Walling as well as those of Putalibazaar also made more or less similar type of comments in regards to the status of participatory development. There has been overwhelming presence of participation as rhetoric only not a reality. It seems that local people are still not being the effective parts of planned development of their own area. It also seems that for local people, the development of their setting is only the municipality office's agendum not theirs. Their weaker role in planned development was clearly evident as they could not clearly outline and explain the major changes happened in their setting in terms

of infrastructural development. As one of the interviewees revealed that the local used to respond to municipality's call only, and they could not translate themselves into the planner of development of their own area. In this way, it appears that one of the reasons for local people being devoid of basic urban infrastructures even 16 years of municipality declaration is the weaker role played by local people themselves in participatory and planned development.

When any planning or development designed for an area was not arisen out of people's side, when it comes out of the minds of some selected and influential people, ensuring people's participation effectively becomes impossible as people cannot develop a sense of ownership in that plan or development program. In such scenario, the issues of stakeholder's participation, inclusive development, development as per people's aspirations, etc. become much weaker subject matters. Analyzing the trend of assessing the development needs of people and implementing them, it was clearly revealed that effective participation of people has been lacking in the study area.

4.5 Dissatisfactions galore

According to a teacher in a local school in Mirdi, Walling, municipal council and other authorities lack long term vision; to show that they have been working, they have undertaken haphazard opening of the roadway tracks. Another local woman even lamented that municipal authorities haven't been doing anything significant for the study area, they have just been attending office for the sake of their *Jagir*; they don't feel any responsibility towards local people and the area. The level of development that people have experienced in Putalibazaar and Walling after the municipal declaration is not different from the neighboring VDCs of this municipality, she further claimed. On the other hand, Chief Executive Officer of the municipality at that time and former Deputy Mayor denied any kind of lack of responsibility among municipal authorities which seems natural from their respective sides.

In informal discussion also, the local elderly people showed extreme disappointment over the lack of fulfillment of their expectation developed at the time of municipal declaration. For them, as one of the old man of Lamage commented, municipality office and its functioning mechanism have not been up to the expectation of people. He criticized municipal authorities for the lack of long-term vision. In the other hand, one of

the teachers teaching at the +2 level in Sataun equated that failure of municipality office as the failure of local people. He added that since local people have not been able to pressurize the municipal authority, their expectations have largely remained unfulfilled. He was also critical of the youths of this area who could form the most effective pressure groups for their failure to contribute for the development of their own place.

The most remarkable dissatisfaction was made by an inhabitant of Walling 10 during his interview. He said “*ma ta nagarpalikasita yeti dherai wakka vaisakeki maile Wallingka neataharulai baru hamro thau lai nagarpalika bata nikalera pheri GABISA banaideu vane*” which means that “I am so much frustrated with municipality, and I have demanded with the leaders in Walling to take out this area from municipality and reinstate as a VDC.” Likewise other interviewees from Puitalibazaar-7 said;

..... *ke shahari hune ho? Yo nagarpalika ta yeso pujipatilai, cheating garnelai, ali jagga badhai hunelai, yeso adal badal parna sakne lai uhi paisa mulya bhadhaune kam ho..... nagarpalika hamijastalai chai thik lagena* (.....why urbanized? This municipality is basically for increasing the price and valuation for the benefit of capitalists, cheaters, landlords and those who are capable of manipulating papers..... Municipality is not right for us.....)

Today a large portion of local people are found to be saying like ‘municipalities have done nothing’. In both of the municipalities, the residents of rural settlements (defined by municipality offices) feel that the municipalities have been biased. As one of the residents of PBM-10 said *Nagarpalikale uhi jaha bazaar chha tyahi matrai heryo, yo gauy tira herdai herena, mukhya karan yehi ho vikas nahunuk, saharikaran nahunuko.....* (.....the municipality mainly focused on market centers only, it has neglected the rural areas, and this is the chief factor for the lack of development and lack of urbanization here.....). More or less similar view was also delivered by one of the interviewees from Walling-10.

However, municipality office bearers do not agree with such public perception. Two interviewees of this research accepted that municipalities have not been able to meet all the demands of people but claimed that municipality has done a lot when its limited resources and political instability are taken into consideration. Clearly, municipalities seem to

be relatively positive in terms of budget allocation for the study areas amid their limited financial resources. Allocating budget is only one step, more important task is its proper utilization. Monitoring mechanism of the municipal offices did not appear much effective.

4.6 Local people and payment of tax in municipal office

During the interviews and informal discussions, the most repeated answer of the question of what municipality has done after its formation was that it imposed taxes. In both of the municipalities, almost all the respondents and discussants maintained that the most noticeable activity of the municipalization has been the imposition and collection of taxes from the locals. They were found to be very much unhappy to pay taxes despite lacking minimum of urban infrastructure. When inquiry was made if they paid taxes regularly, almost all the discussants and interviewees replied that they have been paying it. In the question of why they had been paying taxes despite their dissatisfaction, they had a variety of answers. Some of them labeled it as their duty while others did it because it was a rule which they could not violate or did not like to violate. Some of them were even saying that since other had been paying, they also did.

During the visits to municipality offices, I had observed people lining up to pay taxes. Their disappointment was evident in their reaction towards questions related to taxes. It appears that the local people think they have been fulfilling their duty of paying all the taxes, but the municipalities have been failing to address people's expectations. Here it also appears that their relationship is a one-way traffic with only one party fulfilling assigned duty while other falling far from making people's urban imagination a truth.

Based on the collected data a number of inferences can be drawn. In one way, based on the claims made by people of certain areas within both municipalities, municipality offices are seen to be biased by favoring the development of only selected area. In both municipalities, the major market areas have been found to be drawing a huge share of municipality budgets. As mentioned before regarding communication, PSTN service is also limited to these core or market areas of both the municipalities. Modern health facilities are also confined to these core areas only. Thus it can be argued that some settlement areas within both municipalities have been facing a kind social exclusion. Power (2001) claims 'social exclusion' to be almost entirely an urban agendum and both municipalities have been

exemplifying, may be unintentionally, Power's claim. Unless such cases of exclusion are sorted out, the municipalization and urbanization may not be a successful affair. Regarding participation, there is the prevalence of 'rhetoric' participation and passive participation of local people in the matter of development activities. As illustrated above, in some of the participatory initiatives of municipalities, local people have failed to contribute meaningfully. Their preoccupied idea of development as someone other's agenda than their own is still hurting the participatory development in both of these municipalities.

5. Conclusions

At the time of municipality declaration, both of the municipalities lacked enough pre-requisites to become municipalities. Municipality declaration had led to the development of a kind of urban imagination among local people. However, even after passing more than sixteen years of that declaration, such imagination has not been materialized. The urban experience so far has been a bitter one for local people. The efforts of local people towards an effective urbanization and municipalitization have largely remained weaker. They tend to become mere spectators or supporters of a political party in the ward bhela. They get easily manipulated by local leaders and cannot strongly register their demands. Their role in participatory development has, so far, remained very weak. Educated, productive manpower has always escaped from the development scene as it has so far failed to mark meaningful contribution in the overall development and urbanization of the study area. Mostly, an urban area is associated with a stable production function but both municipalities are discouragingly lagging behind in this field. In the language of World System Theory, Syangja bazaar and Walling bazaar have merely been peripheral to Pokhara and Kathmandu, so their production function has greatly affected. Syangja bazaar and Walling bazaar have to establish themselves as nodes of global economy if the nearby areas are to get benefited in terms of effective urbanization and municipalitization.

Installation of basic urban infrastructures has been very slow so far owing to manpower crisis, weaker financial status of the municipality, very weak presence of participatory development, lack of effective long term sustainable planning, apathy from representatives of concerned political parties and many more. As a result, there are galore of dissatisfactions among local people. Therefore, it has been concluded local people and

municipalities offices need to play collective, more effective, responsible, productive and meaningful role in transforming the urban imagination of local people into a reality.

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