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Failures of overall governance and inefficiency in public service delivery are endemic characteristics of Nepal. Nevertheless, after ten years of armed insurgency, a window of opportunity for peace and reconciliation in Nepal opened up in November 2006 with the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement. Now the country has been struggling to draft a new constitution, through a Constituent Assembly, by April 2010. In this type of situation it is very difficult to identify what would make a policy succeed. I have noted that in recent years, development science has been reluctant to proclaim any single factor that contributes to making development a success.

However, a deeper consultative process using tools to promote accountability and transparency, such as public hearings, public audits, citizen scorecards, and community scorecards, would help develop more realistic development policies. Also, the policymaking process has to begin with citizens themselves who have to be involved. Nothing will change unless people get involved. Public discourse is also vital in shaping development policy because the public requires time to digest anything new that will affect them. People also require time to conceptualize and decide on suitable approaches. In my almost 15 years of experience as an advocate for good governance in Nepal, I have realized that citizens are never the problem but always the solution. So, I would strongly urge policy makers to be inclusive and listen to different political points of views rather than imposing their own views.

Policymakers should also understand that public discourse is essential for preparing citizens for new policies. Citizens need to understand the vision and objectives of the policy as well as the facts, but they also need to express what they require and what they value most. Stakeholders must be understood and provided enough room to be engaged. Setting criteria against which to measure success also goes hand in hand with results-based monitoring. Finally, monitoring tools should be simple and useful for measuring progress--and they should be intensively applied.

As a proponent of good governance, I believe that experience is the best teacher. As a development practitioner from a third-world country like Nepal, I have seen that policy makers usually do not appreciate the importance of including citizens in the conception stage of a new policy initiative. Policies should neither be filled with jargon nor be copied "as is" from one place to another, or they will fail. People must be given opportunities to read, listen and analyze, and to test their opinions in discussion with others. Having said that, public discourse is not an end in itself, but rather a means of ensuring ownership by a larger representation of citizens.

To my mind the most important features in making a development policy succeed are committed collective action by stakeholders, along with sufficient human and financial resources. These should be corruption free if the policy is to yield results. Without these features a policy will most often fail.



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