




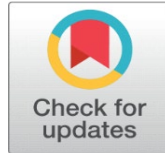
EMPOWERING WARD CITIZEN FORUMS FOR LOCAL SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

The Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCD) has been found to be adopted a transformational approach to social mobilization, aiming to address the absence of elected political representatives at the community level. Central to this approach has been identified as the Community Ward Citizen Forum (WCF) and the Awareness Centre (CAC), which play crucial roles in enhancing local governance through community engagement.

The WCF has been explored to serve as a collective of community representatives' tasks with bridging the gap between the community and local decision-making processes, thereby improving local governance. Complementing this, it has been focused that the CAC operates on a REFLECT process basis, bringing together marginalized and vulnerable community members weekly to discuss pertinent issues affecting their lives. Through facilitated discussions, participants have been found to identify key issues, devise actionable plans to address these concerns, and establish links with local service providers and Village Development Committees (VDCs) to mobilize necessary resources.

Numerous studies and evaluations have been found to have highlighted the effectiveness of WCFs and CACs in initiating community transformation. The research has aimed to underscore the significance of community-based organizations in driving social transformation. It has been known that it provides an analytical overview of the initial successes achieved by WCFs and CACs in fostering social change, explores strategies to expand these successes across broader contexts, and identifies essential prerequisites for the sustained success of the transformational approach to social mobilization. It has been identified that Empowering Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) for local social transformation involves various approaches aimed at enhancing community participation, decision-making, and overall impact. They have been presented pointwise as the findings of the research. the different approaches have been explored like capacity building, inclusive participation, access to information, collaborative partnerships, supportive policy environment, monitoring and evaluation, sustainable community projects, civic education and awareness, conflict resolution mechanisms, and celebrating successes and learning from challenges have been explored as the best approaches for the empowering the ward citizen forums.

It has also been found that Empowering Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) for local social transformation involves a strategic and inclusive approach that engages community members in meaningful ways. The strategies like establishing clear objectives, inclusive participation, capacity building, access to information, supportive environment, partnerships and collaboration, community-driven initiatives, policy advocacy, monitoring and evaluation, communication and outreach and celebrating successes have been found to be employed. By implementing these strategies, WCFs can effectively empower local communities, drive social transformation, and create positive changes that enhance quality of life and well-being for residents. Each step contributes to building a resilient and engaged community that works together towards common goals and shared aspirations.

Keywords: Approach, Community, Governance, Mobilization, Transformation

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past six years, the Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCDP) in Nepal has focused on enhancing community services through a dual approach of bolstering both service provision and community engagement. This initiative is distinguished by several key features: its implementation in post-conflict settings, its nationwide scope, its full government oversight, and its management of service delivery by local bodies in the absence of elected representatives.

The program has made concerted efforts to enhance service delivery by promoting good governance principles such as accountability, participation, and transparency. On the demand side, transformative social mobilization has played a pivotal role in empowering communities to hold local bodies accountable and ensure responsiveness to their rights and needs [UNDP Nepal \(n.d.\)](#).

This approach aims to create a balanced and inclusive framework where communities actively participate in decision-making processes, thereby fostering greater transparency and responsiveness within local governance structures.

The transformative strategy of social mobilization employed within the LGCDP has been pivotal in sparking political consciousness and encouraging active participation among the impoverished and marginalized communities. This initiative has played a crucial role in facilitating their involvement in the transformational journey, ultimately leading to improved delivery of high-quality services by the state. Furthermore, this approach to social mobilization has significantly contributed to advancing fundamental human rights such as employment, healthcare, education, food security, and social welfare, thereby enhancing overall citizen well-being and promoting social justice.

Specifically, within the LGCDP, social mobilization efforts have strengthened the demand side of governance, ensuring meaningful community engagement in local decision-making processes. This engagement is essential for driving societal change and fostering conditions conducive to broader social transformation.

Several writers have written about the empowering ward citizen forums for local social transformation and among them [Kretzmann & McKnight \(1993\)](#) have emphasized asset-based community development and empowering local residents to identify and leverage their community's strengths. Likewise, [Block \(2008\)](#) has explored how communities can be strengthened through inclusive conversations and actions that foster belonging and accountability. Similarly, [Fung \(2003\)](#) has focused on various forms of participatory governance, including citizen forums and deliberative processes, and their role in deepening democracy. In the same way, [Mathews \(1996\)](#) has explored democratic practices and citizen engagement in public affairs. These authors and their works provide valuable insights into community empowerment, participatory governance, and the role of citizens in local social transformation.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The writers like Peter, Archon, David and John and John have left answering the issues and they have not discussed regarding the empowering ward citizen forums for local social transformation yet. So, the research has attempted to fill the gap about it by answering the following research questions.

- 1) What are the approaches of empowering the ward citizen forums for local social transformation?
- 2) How can it be possible in empowering the ward citizen forums for local social transformation?

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The objectives of the research have become to explore the obstacles and issues of empowering the ward citizen forums and identifying the possibilities of it for the advancement and transformation of the local system properly. The specific objectives are:

- 1) To explore the approaches of empowering the ward citizen forums for local social transformation.
- 2) To identify how it can be possible ways in empowering the ward citizen forums for local social transformation.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research has adopted the critical and descriptive analysis through the use of the secondary data. It has employed various official data of various reports found across the country, Nepal. It has used the articles, reports, official documents, and other secondary resources found in the journals and they have been minutely observed and analyzed in exploring the existing condition of ward citizen forums for the analysis in identifying the possible ways of empowering them.

5. ANALYSIS

The analysis has been carried out on the basis of the existing condition of the ward citizen forums on the ground of the thematic order with different subtopics.

6. COMMUNITY-BASED INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The establishment of Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) and the regular conduct of 'REFLECT' sessions in Community Awareness Centers (CACs) represent significant social mobilization initiatives aimed at enhancing the demand side within local communities. Both WCFs and CACs have been identified as crucial elements in mobilizing communities and laying the groundwork for broader social transformation. These interventions have proven instrumental in setting communities on a path towards meaningful societal change.

Moving forward, the primary challenge lies in sustaining and scaling these initiatives nationwide, ensuring their continued impact and reach across the country.

7. NEIGHBORHOOD PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

The community-based forums, represented by diverse segments of citizens, particularly those historically excluded, are integral to the ongoing social mobilization efforts. The Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) play a crucial role in fostering community participation in local-level planning processes, acting as a vital link between local communities and bodies such as the Village Development Committee (VDC). This role is designed to address the absence of elected representatives at the local level.

Functionally, WCFs facilitate communities in identifying and articulating their issues and needs through project proposals submitted to the village council for approval and funding. Additionally, WCFs assist communities in collaborating with other service providers to secure support for implementing projects that local bodies may not fully address.

Currently, the primary focus of Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) is enhancing community engagement in local-level planning processes. However, WCFs have also demonstrated innovation by expanding their role to lead various other community activities beyond planning. They have effectively created a platform for ordinary citizens, especially the poor and marginalized, to participate in local governance. Studies have indicated that citizen participation primarily remains at lower levels, and there is potential for further advancement to more influential levels of engagement in local governance.

Data analysis reveals a noticeable decline in the number of WCFs categorized under B and C over the past year, suggesting a decrease in WCF activity. This fluctuation in organizational growth is considered normal but underscores the need for ongoing capacity development efforts to rejuvenate and sustain WCF effectiveness.

Despite their significant contributions, Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) across Nepal do not hold equal status, varying significantly from one location to another. Analysis based on the 2012 focused evaluation reveals that the percentage of 'A' category WCFs (considered the best) remained stable at 5%. However, the percentage of 'B' category (very good) WCFs has notably decreased from 30% to 10%, accompanied by a proportional decrease in 'C' category (good) from 55% to 15%. Conversely, there has been a substantial increase in 'D' category (needs improvement) WCFs from 10% to 75% in 2013 compared to the previous year, indicating a concerning decline in WCF effectiveness.

Several factors contribute to the observed decline in WCF performance. These include an imbalance in project support from local bodies, inadequate orientation for WCF members regarding their broader roles and responsibilities beyond VDC-level planning, insufficient efforts to strengthen WCFs as core groups capable of addressing various programs at the ward level, unfavorable attitudes from political parties and local leaders, and a perceived lack of cohesion within WCFs as cohesive forums.

The legal standing and role of Ward Citizen Forums (WCF) are frequently questioned, particularly regarding their tenure, restructuring, and future following local body elections, issues that remain unresolved and require careful consideration. There is concern that without periodic restructuring, if WCFs become permanent bodies, they could inadvertently create another group of local elites.

There is widespread ambiguity among stakeholders regarding the legitimacy and continuity of WCFs. However, it is widely acknowledged that this mechanism should be sustained due to its potential to significantly engage communities in local-level planning and address various local issues. The increasing recognition of WCFs' importance and influence in prioritizing local projects has led local political leaders and elites to take a keen interest in their activities. Efforts should be made to harness this positive momentum and provide appropriate guidance.

Nevertheless, associations representing all three tiers of local bodies express reservations about the current ad-hoc nature of WCFs, which aims to fill the gap left by elected representatives in local bodies. They argue that this approach has inadvertently delayed local elections to some extent. A faction of influential

politicians strongly opposes WCFs, viewing them as a potential replacement for elected local bodies and lobbying to diminish their influence.

Citizen Awareness Centers serve as gathering places for the most economically disadvantaged, marginalized, and excluded individuals in both Village Development Committees (VDCs) and municipal wards. These individuals convene weekly for REFLECT sessions, which aim to identify the challenges impacting their lives, explore possible solutions, and formulate actionable plans to implement these solutions. The ultimate goal is to mobilize resources from various service providers to effectively address these issues.

In general, Citizen Awareness Centers (CACs) have proven highly effective in empowering the most economically vulnerable individuals. The proactive actions undertaken collectively by CAC participants, based on issues identified during REFLECT sessions, illustrate the efficacy of this process. These actions include challenging unjust social conditions, advocating for the preservation of natural resources for community benefit, actively participating in campaigns like 'Open Defecation Free', promoting leadership roles for Dalit women within community organizations, and utilizing the initial Rs. 15,000 allocated for tea/snacks to initiate small savings schemes. Additionally, they have contributed to constructing toilets to support national sanitation campaigns and participated in community infrastructure projects.

CACs have also succeeded in leveraging resources beyond their immediate VDC and municipal boundaries by establishing connections with other service providers and projects. However, it's noted that only approximately 15% of CACs achieve the highest category of effectiveness.

The Citizen Awareness Centers (CACs) have played a crucial role in facilitating the issuance of citizenship certificates, particularly in Terai regions, and have contributed significantly to vital registration and the oversight of social security benefits. They have also been effective in addressing issues such as domestic violence against women and mediating community conflicts related to natural resources like water and forests.

Approximately 30% of CACs are recognized as very effective, excelling in these areas of citizen empowerment and community service. Another 20% of CACs are categorized as fairly effective; they adhere to REFLECT principles and regularly attend weekly sessions to identify local issues, although they face challenges in adequately addressing these concerns. The remaining CACs, about half, exhibit lower levels of activity with irregular attendance and difficulty in accurately identifying and addressing local issues. They struggle to mobilize resources even from Village Development Committees (VDCs).

Several unresolved issues surround Citizen Awareness Centers (CACs), including the insufficient number of CACs within a single VDC despite identified needs, irregular session operations, and the continuation of activities beyond the planned 52 REFLECT sessions. The overarching goal of this process is to establish a self-sustaining mechanism wherein local communities identify and resolve emerging issues through well-defined action plans. These groups are intended to explore available resources to implement their plans effectively. However, there is a notable absence of clear guidance and a cohesive vision in the strategy for empowering CACs.

The status of Citizen Awareness Centers (CACs) varies significantly across different VDCs and municipalities in terms of operational regularity, physical presence of CAC sites, completion of scheduled REFLECT sessions, levels of community awareness and empowerment, and the range of activities conducted.

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES

The capacity of communities to assert their needs has increased, with greater involvement in decision-making processes at the VDC level. Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs), established over a year ago, have begun advocating for their priority projects during Integrated Planning Committee (IPC) sessions and village council meetings. According to information gathered from 20 WCFs, 28% of the projects they proposed were approved in village council meetings. Results from structured interviews with 144 WCF members and 155 CAC participants in 2012 indicate a significant rise in both the demand for projects and their approval rates compared to 2011. Detailed project demand and supply data are presented in Table 4. The data also reveal an increase in the participation of WCF and CAC members in decision-making at the VDC level. However, their involvement primarily occurs during ward-level mass meetings for identifying and prioritizing projects. Out of 155 respondents, 112 reported participations in VDC-level decision-making processes, with 106 attending ward-level mass meetings. Only three individuals each participated in IPC and VDC council meetings. Similarly, out of 144 CAC participants interviewed, 129 were involved in ward-level mass meetings, and only one attended a VDC council meeting.

The table demonstrates a significant rise in community engagement in VDC decision-making and project demands over the course of one year, attributed to the efforts of Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) and Citizen Awareness Centers (CACs).

9. ENHANCEMENT OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND TRUST

Conversations with members of Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) and Citizen Awareness Centers (CACs), as well as observations of the decision-making processes within WCFs, indicate a marked increase in community confidence. Individuals are now more adept at asserting their rights when engaging with local government officials. For instance, one WCF effectively compelled a VDC to reschedule a council meeting where WCF members had been absent.

10. KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTION OF WARD CITIZEN FORUM (WCF) MEMBERS AND COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC) PARTICIPANTS

When focusing on the "Knowledge and Perception of Ward Citizen Forum (WCF) Members and Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Participants," the study typically delves into several key areas to understand the perspectives and insights of these individuals.

Awareness and Understanding: Assessing the level of awareness among WCF and CAC participants regarding their roles, responsibilities, and the purpose of their involvement in community decision-making processes. This includes understanding their knowledge of local governance structures, policies, and community issues.

Perceptions of Effectiveness: Exploring participants' perceptions of how effective WCFs and CACs are in influencing decision-making, addressing community concerns, and achieving meaningful outcomes. This involves understanding their

views on the impact of their contributions and the effectiveness of collaborative efforts.

Challenges and Barriers: Identifying challenges and barriers perceived by WCF and CAC participants that hinder effective participation and decision-making. This could include issues related to communication, resource constraints, bureaucratic processes, or interpersonal dynamics.

Motivations and Expectations: Understanding the motivations and expectations of WCF and CAC participants for engaging in community governance. This includes exploring what drives their participation, their desired outcomes, and their expectations of the process and outcomes.

Feedback and Improvement Suggestions: Gathering feedback from participants on how to improve the functioning and effectiveness of WCFs and CACs. This involves soliciting suggestions for enhancing communication, increasing transparency, improving decision-making processes, and addressing community needs more effectively.

Impact on Community Engagement: in institutions, and overall community well-being. Assessing the perceived impact of WCFs and CACs on community engagement and empowerment. This includes understanding how participation in these forums influences community cohesion, trust and faith.

Comparative Analysis: Conducting comparative analysis between different WCFs and CACs to identify variations in knowledge, perceptions, and experiences based on factors such as geographic location, socio-economic demographics, or organizational structure.

Future Directions: Exploring participants' views on the future role and potential evolution of WCFs and CACs in addressing emerging community challenges, fostering inclusive governance, and sustaining long-term community development efforts.

Out of 155 surveyed participants of Citizen Awareness Centers (CACs), approximately 102 (65.8%) reported that CAC sessions were transformative, while 57 (36.5%) found them valuable, and only 3 (1.9%) did not find them transformative. Participation in CAC sessions has significantly increased awareness among members about the VDC budget and their rights to access resources from VDCs. Specifically, participants were well-informed about the significance of citizenship certificates and vital registration, and many successfully obtained these services from the government. Additionally, CAC participants have accessed other essential services such as sanitation.

Below are examples showcasing social transformation that highlight the achievements of Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) and Citizen Awareness Centers (CACs):

Empowerment through Advocacy: WCFs have successfully advocated for community priorities in local governance, influencing decisions even when absent from scheduled council meetings.

Capacity Building and Awareness: Discussions with WCF and CAC members and observations of their decision-making processes indicate a significant increase in community confidence. People are now more assertive about their rights when engaging with local officials. These achievements underscore the effectiveness of WCFs and CACs in fostering community empowerment and promoting active participation in local governance processes.

Moreover, it can be narrated in the following forms:

- 1) Participants of the Citizen Awareness Center (CAC) in Lekhparsa VDC, Surkhet district, took proactive steps to identify and address local issues affecting their community. They developed a practical action plan that effectively resolved all identified issues by mobilizing financial and other resources from the VDC, various service providers, and donors. The CAC members strategically determined what resources could be sourced locally and what needed to be sought from external sources.

Their efforts resulted in significant community achievements, including securing land for constructing the CAC building, utilizing voluntary labor, and pooling cash contributions originally designated for tea and snacks during CAC sessions to fund the construction. The community's unity enabled them to successfully advocate for and secure VDC funding not only for the CAC building but also for electricity, clean drinking water, roads, and a stretcher.

Following the completion of 44 CAC sessions, the community gained confidence in sustaining their local initiatives and independently resolving future issues.

- 2) Geeta Ram, a Dalit woman residing in Ward No. 8 of Lahan Municipality, faced difficulties accessing money remitted by her husband from the Gulf because she lacked a proper identification card such as a citizenship certificate. Through the effective facilitation of a Community Awareness Centre, Geeta was able to obtain her citizenship certificate. This enabled her to receive remittances directly, using her identity as proof.

Community Awareness Centers across various parts of Nepal, particularly in the Terai regions, have actively engaged in assisting marginalized and economically disadvantaged individuals in obtaining their citizenship certificates. This initiative was made possible through the advocacy and mobilization efforts of social mobilizer Tek Bahadur, who received training in participatory program planning and the REFLECT process.

- 3) The local Sub Health Post in Khidima VDC, Khotang district, was observed to be collecting fees for medicines that were supposed to be distributed free of charge according to government policy. Local villagers raised this issue during their regular weekly sessions at the Citizen Awareness Center (CAC). Participants actively discussed the reasons behind this practice, its implications, and potential solutions to eliminate this unnecessary charge.

They devised an action plan to engage with the health facility in-charge and the locally formed health facility management committee. Their goal was to exert substantial pressure to ensure that medicines were provided free of cost in accordance with government regulations. Following multiple discussions with the health facility in-charge and the chairperson of the health facility management committee, who also served as the VDC Secretary, an agreement was reached to provide essential medicines to the community without any charge.

- 4) Representatives from all nine Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) in Naya Belhani VDC, Nawalparasi district, collaborated to establish connections between the VDC and the WCFs with Heifer International, an international non-governmental organization operating in the district. This collaboration led to the development of a comprehensive three-year integrated program focusing on income generation, capacity building, and enhancing local democracy, particularly for women and children.

The integrated program required a total budget of approximately 25 million rupees. The VDC committed 2.5 million rupees over three years from its targeted

annual budget allocated for women, children, Dalit communities, and agriculture. Heifer International and their local partner Hemavanti pledged to fund the remaining amount. Currently, the program is actively underway in the VDC.

Initial outcomes of the program include increased income from both agricultural and non-agricultural activities, as well as enhanced capacities among women and children through relevant training, on-site coaching, and mentoring. This initiative exemplifies the strategic utilization of VDC funds designated for targeted developmental programs.

The WCF and CAC process faces several challenges, which include essential conditions necessary for effective social mobilization. These prerequisites include the complete internalization and ownership of the transformative approach by all stakeholders, the dedication of the District Development Committee (DDC) in coordinating and overseeing the process, harmonious relationships between Social Mobilizers (SMs) and VDC secretaries, a high level of commitment and proactive engagement among SMs, the dedication and expertise of Local Support Providers (LSPs) in implementing the transformative approach, and a supportive political environment with local leaders endorsing the transformative agenda. Replicating these necessary conditions elsewhere is crucial to expand the successful implementation of social mobilization initiatives.

In a few Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs), the relationship with local political leaders was notably positive. However, across 17 out of the 23 VDCs studied, the connection between political parties and WCF members was generally neutral without significant warmth or tension. Where positive relationships existed, several factors contributed: thorough groundwork before WCF formation, effective rapport between social mobilizers and local political leaders, initiatives by Local Support Providers (LSPs) to address shared concerns among politicians, and crucially, endorsement and support from local bodies for the social mobilization process.

Nonetheless, there was a prevalent perception among political parties that WCFs posed competition in expanding their influence. Local politicians, in particular, viewed WCF members as potential threats to their political careers due to their growing popularity, involvement in project selection processes, and participation in local campaigns. In VDCs where WCFs were less active and empowered, local political leaders showed a more tolerant attitude, having not yet felt any challenge to their influence from WCF activities.

Current trends suggest that as WCFs become more active and influential, tensions may escalate in their relationships with political leaders. Political parties are aware of these dynamics and are increasingly involved in the formation of WCFs. In some cases, political intervention expedited the formation process, reducing it to just three days in certain wards. The political intervention has become as complex as [Adhikar \(2020\)](#) has discussed about the complexity of conserving the ecology and environment and it has turned out as hard as [Adhikar \(2022\)](#) have pointed out about the global politics that has to be managed through UN and it has to be taken as seriously as [Adhikar \(2020\)](#) has warned the entire humanity in preserving the planet Earth, from various kinds of future viruses as that of the Coronavirus that challenged the world. Hence, it has to be addressed through political commitment and with the wider thoughts and the vision for the entire transformation of the ward citizen forums.

Contemplated-

- **Strengthening Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs):** legitimizing through legislation, tailoring support packages based on WCF categorization, positioning and endorsing them as focal points for ward-level development, and increasing funding to ensure basic operational costs are covered.
- **Strengthening Citizen Awareness Centers (CACs):** establishing clear indicator-based graduation processes that link to activities of choice, enhancing confidence levels through secure funding mechanisms, providing support for skill development, and ensuring sustainability.
- **Balancing Demand and Supply:** educating WCFs on prioritizing projects before submission to councils for approval, and establishing connections with governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to secure funding for projects.

11. OVERALL FINDINGS

Empowering Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) for local social transformation involves various approaches aimed at enhancing community participation, decision-making, and overall impact. They have been presented pointwise as the findings of the research.

Capacity Building: Providing training and resources to WCF members to enhance their skills in leadership, communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. This empowers them to effectively engage in discussions, decision-making processes, and community initiatives.

Inclusive Participation: Ensuring diverse representation and inclusivity within WCFs by actively engaging marginalized groups, minorities, youth, elderly, and other underrepresented community members. This fosters a more comprehensive and equitable decision-making process.

Access to Information: Facilitating transparency and accessibility of information relevant to community issues, projects, and decisions. This empowers WCF members with accurate data and knowledge, enabling informed discussions and decisions.

Collaborative Partnerships: Building partnerships with local government agencies, NGOs, businesses, and other stakeholders to leverage resources, expertise, and support for community projects and initiatives identified by WCFs.

Supportive Policy Environment: Advocating for policies that recognize and support the role of WCFs in local governance and decision-making. This includes policies that promote participatory democracy, community engagement, and citizen empowerment.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Establishing mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness and impact of WCF activities and decisions. Regular evaluations help assess progress, identify strengths and areas for improvement, and ensure accountability to the community.

Sustainable Community Projects: Supporting the implementation of community-driven projects and initiatives identified through WCFs. This includes securing funding, resources, and technical assistance necessary for project success and sustainability.

Civic Education and Awareness: Conducting outreach and educational campaigns to raise awareness among community members about the role and importance of WCFs. This enhances participation and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among residents.

Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: Establishing fair and effective mechanisms for resolving conflicts or disagreements that may arise within WCFs. This ensures that discussions remain constructive and decisions are reached through consensus whenever possible.

Celebrating Successes and Learning from Challenges: Recognizing and celebrating achievements of WCFs in achieving local social transformation goals. Additionally, learning from challenges and failures helps WCFs adapt and improve their approaches over time. By employing these approaches, WCFs can effectively empower local communities, foster social transformation, and contribute to sustainable development that meets the needs and aspirations of residents.

12. STRATEGIES

Empowering Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) for local social transformation involves a strategic and inclusive approach that engages community members in meaningful ways. The key points have been listed out for the practical form of its adoption.

Establish Clear Objectives: Defining clear goals and objectives for the WCFs that align with local social transformation priorities. This ensures that efforts are focused and purposeful.

Inclusive Participation: Ensuring diverse representation within the WCFs by actively engaging residents from different backgrounds, demographics, and perspectives. This inclusivity fosters a comprehensive understanding of community needs and aspirations.

Capacity Building: Providing training and capacity-building opportunities for WCF members on topics such as leadership, communication, problem-solving, and community development. Strengthening their skills empowers them to contribute effectively to decision-making and project implementation.

Access to Information: Promoting transparency and provide access to relevant information about community issues, projects, budgets, and decision-making processes. Empowered WCF members are informed and can make meaningful contributions.

Supportive Environment: Creating a supportive environment where WCF members feel valued, respected, and encouraged to express their opinions and ideas. Foster a culture of collaboration, trust, and mutual respect among participants.

Partnerships and Collaboration: Building partnerships with local government agencies, NGOs, businesses, academia, and other stakeholders. Collaborative efforts bring diverse expertise, resources, and perspectives to address community challenges and opportunities.

Community-driven Initiatives: Encouraging and support community-driven initiatives and projects identified through WCFs. Provide resources, technical assistance, and funding opportunities to translate ideas into actionable plans and sustainable outcomes.

Policy Advocacy: Advocating for policies and practices that support participatory democracy, community engagement, and citizen empowerment.

Engage with policymakers and local authorities to create an enabling environment for WCF activities.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Establishing mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of WCF initiatives and activities. Regular assessments help track progress, identify successes, and learn from challenges to improve future efforts.

Communication and Outreach: Enhancing communication and outreach efforts to raise awareness about the role and impact of WCFs within the community. Use various channels such as meetings, newsletters, social media, and community events to engage residents and solicit feedback.

Celebrating Successes: Recognizing and celebrate achievements and milestones of WCFs in contributing to local social transformation. Highlighting successes inspires community pride and encourages continued participation and support. By implementing these strategies, WCFs can effectively empower local communities, drive social transformation, and create positive changes that enhance quality of life and well-being for residents. Each step contributes to building a resilient and engaged community that works together towards common goals and shared aspirations.

13. CONCLUSION

An effective social mobilization effort that integrates the internalization of transformative processes has been found to be increasingly seen as essential for empowering communities and catalyzing societal change. In VDCs where VDC secretaries and Social Mobilizers (SMs) have been found to have fully committed, service providers have seemed to have monitored social mobilization effectively, and district-level officials have found to have provided adequate on-site support to SMs, significant strides in empowerment have been observed within a relatively short implementation period. To replicate these successes elsewhere, it has been found to be crucial to address current weaknesses in social mobilization management:

It has been explored to be a significant level of politicization in the selection of service providers, which undermines the effectiveness of social mobilization efforts. The choice of inappropriate service providers has been identified as a ripple effect on service quality. Over-reliance on a single service provider has known to create excessive dependency on a single institution. Weak institutional arrangements at the district and municipal levels have been found to hinder their effectiveness as central authorities for coordinating all social mobilization initiatives. Persistent discrepancies between the demands put forth by WCFs and CACs and the projects approved in response undermine the program's credibility. Inadequate monitoring mechanisms have been found to compromise the overall quality of social mobilization efforts.

It has been identified that Empowering Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) for local social transformation involves various approaches aimed at enhancing community participation, decision-making, and overall impact. They have been presented pointwise as the findings of the research. the different approaches have been explored like capacity building, inclusive participation, access to information, collaborative partnerships, supportive policy environment, monitoring and evaluation, sustainable community projects, civic education and awareness, conflict resolution mechanisms, and celebrating successes and learning from challenges

have been explored as the best approaches for the empowering the ward citizen forums.

It has also been found that Empowering Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs) for local social transformation involves a strategic and inclusive approach that engages community members in meaningful ways. The strategies like establishing clear objectives, inclusive participation, capacity building, access to information, supportive environment, partnerships and collaboration, community-driven initiatives, policy advocacy, monitoring and evaluation, communication and outreach and celebrating successes have been found to be employed. By implementing these strategies, WCFs can effectively empower local communities, drive social transformation, and create positive changes that enhance quality of life and well-being for residents. Each step contributes to building a resilient and engaged community that works together towards common goals and shared aspirations.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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