



National Governance Symposium 2025

'DOING DEVELOPMENT DIFFERENTLY'

**People- Reimagining Public Service
Delivery: Leadership Requirements for a
Resilient and Adaptive New Normal**

STUDIO BRIEF





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Executive Summary

Nepal's public service delivery challenges persist not because the state lacks capable public servants, but because public institutions operate within fragmented authority, timely un-updated legal frameworks, procedural rigidity, and leadership models that are insufficiently adaptive and citizen-centered. In practice, public services remain slow, complex, and uneven across locations, weakening trust in government and increasing the everyday transaction costs of citizenship.

Although Nepal's governance laws including the Civil Servant Act 2049, the Sushasan (Management and Administration) Act 2064, and the Right to Information Act 2064, establish important foundations for administration, integrity, and transparency, they have not been fully realigned to the demands of federalism, modern service standards, and rising citizen expectations for responsive and empathetic public services.

This policy brief argues that reform must move on two tracks at once: (i) strengthening systemic coherence across federal tiers so that authority, responsibility, and coordination are clear; and (ii) institutionalizing human-centered, adaptive leadership so that rules and resources translate into better services. It proposes (a) modernizing civil service and governance laws to reflect federal realities; (b) re-engineering service delivery systems to be simpler and citizen-friendly; (c) embedding performance-based accountability focused on outcomes and service quality; (d) enabling calculated risk-taking and innovation with safeguards; and (e) transforming capacity building from token training into practice-oriented leadership development.

Together, these reforms aim to ensure that public authority is coherent, human capacity is effectively mobilized, and empathy is embedded in governance practice so that policy intent translates into tangible improvements in service quality, institutional trust, and citizens' everyday experience of the state.

Rationale for Public Action on the Problem

1. Fragmented Authority and Weak Federal Coordination

Nepal's transition to federalism was intended to bring governance closer to citizens. However, unclear mandates, overlapping functions, and weak coordination among federal, provincial, and local governments continue to create duplication, delays, and gaps in service delivery (Devkota, 2020; Subedi, 2025). This fragmentation obscures accountability, when outcomes are unclear, responsibility is often diffuse, making decisive action difficult.

2. Rigid, Opaque, and Timely Un-updated Administrative Systems

Administrative systems remain heavily procedural and compliance-oriented, often prioritizing process adherence over problem-solving and results. Conventional procedures and risk-averse institutional cultures discourage initiative, slow decision-making, and constrain the effective deployment of human resources, especially in citizen-facing services where speed, clarity, and dignity matter (Rijal, 2024).

3. Service Delivery Detached from Citizen Needs

Many services are still designed around administrative convenience rather than citizen journeys. Requirements can be unclear, steps excessive, and timelines unpredictable. This erodes the spirit of servant leadership and reduces the accessibility and legitimacy of public institutions, particularly among younger citizens who expect responsiveness and transparency as a baseline (Devkota, 2025).

4. Fragmented and Tokenistic Capacity Building

Capacity development is frequently treated as a compliance activity, short training that emphasizes theory over practice, rather than a sustained leadership development system. This leaves officials underprepared for complex governance challenges that require adaptive leadership, collaboration across tiers and sectors, strategic foresight, and empathy (Khanal & Pokharel, 2022).

5. Limited Inclusive Governance and Community Co-Creation

Public policies and services often lack structured mechanisms for meaningful citizen engagement and community co-creation. Without feedback loops and co-design practices, services remain misaligned with local realities, limiting responsiveness, ownership, and sustained performance (Upreti, 2024).

Policy Recommendations

1. Transform Capacity Building from Token Training to Adaptive, System-Wide Leadership Development

Policy/Legal Context: Nepal's capacity-building systems remain largely position-based and theoretical, with limited linkage between learning and service outcomes.

Policy Actions:

- Establish modular, differentiated learning pathways by role (frontline service staff, technical officials, managers, senior leaders, and elected representatives).
- Shift to practice-based learning anchored in real service delivery challenges (case clinics, field projects, peer learning, and coaching).
- Institutionalize core competencies needed for modern governance: empathy, adaptive leadership, collaboration, strategic foresight, and mental well-being.
- Promote joint learning for civil servants and elected officials to cultivate a shared governance mindset (eutai soch ra dharana) and improve cross-tier coordination.

2. Enable Innovation through Risk-Responsive and Learning-Oriented Public Institutions

Policy/Legal Context: Current administrative culture often treats innovation as deviation, and anti-corruption safeguards can unintentionally reinforce zero-risk compliance that discourages learning.

Policy Actions:

- Institutionalize “safe-to-try” experimentation: small pilots with clear objectives, defined safeguards, and transparent learning documentation.
- Align incentives to reward improvement—recognition, career progression, and performance systems that value learning and problem-solving.
- Balance integrity controls with learning mechanisms (risk registers, after-action reviews, and service improvement cycles) to prevent procedural safety from overriding service effectiveness.

3. Re-engineer Service Delivery Systems for Citizen-Centric Governance

Policy/Legal Context: Many public services are governed by layered procedures (karyavidhi) that have accumulated over time, producing complexity without improving outcomes.

Policy Actions:

- Adopt a stepwise service re-engineering framework (karyavidhi) starting at the local level, focusing first on high-volume, high-friction services.
- Replace obsolete procedural provisions rather than layering new systems on top of old ones.
- Redesign services around citizen journeys: clarity of requirements, reduced steps, predictable timelines, accessible channels, and dignity in interactions.

4. Strengthen Federal Coherence through Unified Authority, Performance Accountability, and Shared Mindset

Policy/Legal Context: Federal service delivery suffers when roles are unclear, and performance systems focus narrowly on compliance rather than outcomes.

Policy Actions:

- Clarify roles, authority, and chains of command across tiers for key service functions to create coherent public authority.
- Scale indicator-based performance evaluation that tracks service quality, efficiency, and outcomes (alongside integrity), enabling management decisions based on evidence.
- Institutionalize routine cross-tier coordination mechanisms—joint planning, shared targets, and regular performance reviews—to reduce duplication and close service gaps.

Policy and Legal Alignment: Priority Reform Areas

1. Civil Servant Act 2049

- **Major gap:** The absence of an updated federal civil service framework perpetuates fragmented authority, inconsistent HR practices, and uneven leadership development across tiers.
- **Reform direction:** Update and harmonize recruitment, placement, transfer, promotion, mobility, and performance evaluation across federal, provincial, and local govern

2. Sushasan (Management and Administration) Act 2064

- **Major gap:** Emphasis on procedural administration and compliance limits citizen-centric, adaptive service delivery.
- **Reform direction:** Amend the Act to mandate simplified, citizen-focused, outcome-oriented service standards and enable continuous service improvement practices.

3. Right to Information Act 2064

- **Major gap:** Weak implementation and inconsistent proactive disclosure reduce transparency in service performance and institutional accountability.
- **Reform direction:** Require proactive disclosure of service delivery performance metrics, establish citizen feedback loops, and strengthen periodic reporting on institutional performance and HR systems.

4. Capacity Building and Leadership Development Policies

- **Major gap:** Training remains theoretical and fragmented, insufficiently building practical leadership and collaborative capabilities.
- **Reform direction:** Adopt modular, practice-oriented leadership development linked to service improvement outcomes.

5. Federal Authority and Coordination Frameworks

- **Major gap:** Limited codification of cross-tier authority and coordination mechanisms undermines coherent service delivery.

Reform direction: Clarify and codify role-sharing and coordination mechanisms to enable decisive, aligned governance.

Conclusion

Nepal's public service reform challenge is fundamentally a challenge of alignment—between federal authority and accountability, between procedures and citizen realities, and between capacity building and implementation. Strengthening systemic coherence while embedding adaptive, empathetic leadership can shift public administration from procedural rigidity and fragmented authority toward resilient, learning-oriented, and results-driven governance. When authority is clear, performance is measured, innovation is enabled safely, and leadership is developed through practice, public services can become simpler, faster, and more trustworthy, improving citizens' everyday experience of the state.

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About National Governance Symposium

The National Governance Symposium (NGS) 2025 was convened on 12th December 2025 at the Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC), Lalitpur, as a multi-stakeholder policy dialogue platform bringing together senior government officials, private sector leaders, civil society actors, researchers, and practitioners. Organized jointly by Governance Lab and NASC in collaboration with the Office of Prime Minister and Council of Minister, Ministry of Finance and National Planning Commission, the Symposium focused on the overarching question: **“How can we Do Development Differently?”**

The Symposium was structured around four interconnected Policy Studios: People, Money, Data, and Technology - reflecting the core resources required to strengthen public institutions and improve development outcomes in Nepal. Each studio, with their respective Knowledge Partner, combined practitioner presentations with moderated policy dialogue, emphasizing practical insights and implementable reforms rather than theoretical debate.

About People Session

Reimagining Public Service Delivery: Leadership Requirements for a Resilient and Adaptive New Normal

Chair: Ms. Chandrakala Poudel, Secretary, Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration

Moderator: Mr. Anil Kumar Gupta, Deputy Director of Studies, NASC

Presenter: Dr. Guna Nidhi Sharma, Section Chief, Policy and Planning Division, Ministry of Health and Population

Speakers:

- Mr. Kewal Prasad Bhandari, Former Secretary, Government of Nepal
- Mr. Dila Ram Panthi, Joint Secretary, MoFAGA
- Mr. Tulasi Sharan Sigdel, Senior Director of Studies, NASC
- Dr. Sucheta Pyakuryal, Adjunct Professor, Tribhuvan University and Advisor, Governance Lab
- Mr. Sanjay Pokharel, Senior Program Manager, Daayitwa

Knowledge Partner

Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC)





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