Chapter V
Local government in Nepal is composed of 75 districts, 58 municipalities, and 3,913 villages. Municipalities and villages are further subdivided into wards. Each village is divided into 9 wards, while each municipality is divided into 9 or more wards based on area and population. The largest municipality, Kathmandu, has 35 wards. This arrangement pre-dates the current democratic system. However, the names of the representative bodies at each level changed after 1990. The discredited panchayat system instituted by King Mahendra in 1960 was replaced in 1991 with a system of District Development Committees (DDCs), Village Development Committees (VDCs), and Municipal Committees overseen by a district, village, or municipal council. In practice, the DDCs, VDCs, and Municipal Committees are the dominant institutions at those levels. The associated councils meet annually or bi-annually to approve DDC, VDC, and Municipal Committee actions. Each village or municipal ward has a ward committee. Nepal also has 5 development regions above the district level. Each district is divided into 9 to 17 sub-districts, Ilaka. Development regions and Ilaka are primarily planning and administrative units and are not considered to be part of Nepal’s system of local government.

Central – Local Relations

Nepal’s local governmental institutions have enjoyed little autonomy since Prithvi Narayan Shah’s Gorkha forces unified the three kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley in the eighteenth century. Successive rulers controlled national life from Kathmandu. Considerable political changes occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, accelerating after 1990. Though power devolved away from the monarchy, Kathmandu’s central role in the country’s political life did not diminish. The government remains unitary despite talk of the need for decentralization.