

# Issues and Challenges in Implementing the SDGs in Nepal

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## ABSTRACT

The Government of Nepal has adopted various policies and programs to accelerate the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Nepal and had put in place the institutional and financial arrangements. The National Planning Commission (NPC) is the principal agency for SDG monitoring and has taken a number of initiatives towards attaining the SDGs by engaging relevant stakeholders in this process. Nepal is one of the first country to take stock of its status on the proposed Sustainable Development Goals in 2016, followed by preparing SDGs status and roadmap 2016-2030 and SDGs Needs Assessment, Costing and Financing Strategy

**Keywords:** *gender, cultivation, global economy, natural resources, development*

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

Nepal, a least developed country (LDC) in South Asia, is characterized by slow economic growth, socioeconomic underdevelopment and a low level of human development. This underdevelopment stems from a politically and socially fragile post conflict situation, structurally generated poverty and inequality, deeply entrenched forms of social exclusion, and weak governance structures in all spheres of the state. Beginning in 1996, the country faced a decade-long armed conflict triggered by political ambitions but rooted in social discrimination, economic inequality and poor service delivery by the state and weak governance. The 2006 peace accord between the government and the rebels (the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist) ended the conflict and addressed the political problems. The social and economic tensions associated with the conflict are being resolved through development efforts and inclusive state restructuring.

## Objectives

The aim of this paper is to analyze the proposed SDGs from Nepal's perspective and set the stage for embarking on the implementation of the sustainable development agenda for the next 15 years. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Overview the proposed SDGs and their relevance from Nepal's perspective;
- ii. Identify key indicators for the targets and set their tentative quantitative benchmarks;

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is primarily based on the review of thematic reports on SDGs prepared by the National Planning Commission (NPC) in association with the officials of sectoral ministries and experts. The thematic groups were headed by NPC members and supported by ministry officials. The relevant ministries and the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2021) were consulted for baseline data compilation and verification. Major national reports published by CBS and NPC were collected. Recent national reports published by ministries were also referred to for working out the latest baseline information and setting the 2030 targets and the indicators to achieve the targets. As the global SDGs and their targets are yet to be finalized and officially agreed, it is too early to set the national indicators for achieving the targets. Nevertheless, an attempt has been made here to work out key indicators for which data is available or could be available to monitor the achievements of the proposed SDG targets. The thematic data were collected, reviewed and updated, information gaps filled in consultation with relevant ministry and NPC officials, and analysis of some of the SDGs not covered by the thematic groups carried out by the paper itself. Basically the secondary data were analyzed, and this paper tried to keep an anthropological input and flavor for readers.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Issues and Challenges

The SDGs are comprehensive, ambitious and challenging goals and require huge resources as well as enhanced capacity to achieve them in the given 15 years' time. The goals of universal access to basic economic and social services, reduced inequality within and among nations, and structural changes in production and consumption patterns are ideal. But their achievement will require unprecedented national efforts and international cooperation in action rather than rhetoric. The following sections

delve into the key issues and challenges that Nepal has to address to achieve the SDGs (Lumanti, 2021).

### **Localization of SDGs at Sub-national Levels**

Although the SDGs are global goals and targets to be adapted to the national context; they also need to be addressed at the sub-national and local levels. Thus, the localization of the SDGs implies that actors and institutions at the sub national level have a fundamental role to play if the SDGs are taken seriously as an opportunity to improve all people's lives. Adaptation of the SDGs to fit local realities will ensure that the national development goals will be achieved at both national and sub-national levels. There is a realization from the implementation and outcome of the MDGs that the national development goals have to be localized for higher, more equitable, and inclusive outcomes. This experience should be exercised for the implementation of the SDGs and a strategy needs developing to localize the SDGs at provincial and local levels once the federal system is set up.

The experience of MDG implementation shows that the localization of national development goals is critical for properly addressing targeted populations, targeted groups and remote geographical areas. The overall levels of achievements of the MDGs in several subject areas mask substantial disparities by gender, social group and location. Addressing hard-to-reach populations, specific geographical areas and marginalized and endangered ethnic people requires localized planning and programming, and thus a framework for implementing the SDGs at the sub-national and local levels is essential.

Overall, as the localization of the SDGs at the sub-national and local levels is critical for the universal, equitable and inclusive outcome of sustainable development efforts, it is equally important to have a political setup at those levels that is willing and capable of handling the development agenda effectively. Thus, along with preparing SDG-based local development strategies at the sub-national and local levels, it is essential to work out financing strategies and encompass capacity development interventions within the same strategies. The notion of 'capacity first, devolution later' should be avoided through the simultaneous devolution of the authority and capacity building of local bodies. Capacity constraints should not prevent the implementation of the SDGs at sub-national and local levels.

### **Mobilizing Financial Resources**

The SDGs are diversified and so can be financed by the government through public investment programmers; by households throughout-of pocket expenses; by the non-

government, cooperatives and community sectors; and by the private sector including through foreign direct investment (FDI). International non-government organizations (INGOs), philanthropic organizations, charity foundations, and personal trusts can also be instrumental in supporting SDG financing.

The SDGs financing strategy will have serious implications for the outreach of people to the goods and services and the sustainability of such outreach. In particular, the taxation system has serious implications for the access of the poor to basic goods and services. There is strong evidence that direct and indirect user fees for primary education and essential healthcare are a barrier to access for the poor, but ending user fees often requires increased aid to make up government revenue shortfalls. Thus incentive effects of well-designed user fees must be compatible with policy objectives (i.e. no basic health care and primary education fees). As such, household contributions must be estimated on the basis of ability to pay across all sectors. Thus for household financing, user fees should not be expected to contribute to the costs of primary school education, adult literacy program, improving gender equality, basic healthcare, nutritional interventions, and transport infrastructure. But provision should be made in the financing strategy for richer households to bear some of the cost of agricultural interventions, secondary school education, energy provision, water supply and sanitation.

### **Capacity Development at the National and Sub-national Levels**

SDG 17 calls for enhancing international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity building in developing countries to support national plans to implement the SDGs, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation. But international support must be led and reinforced by the national government so that capacity constraints do not impede the success of SDG achievement despite commitments, resource availability and willingness to carry forward the agenda. Capacity development should thus be an integral part of the SDG national development strategy. The SDG needs assessment should assess the capacity to implement and the interventions identified to implement the SDGs must include capacity developments that are assigned adequate budgetary resources. Capacity development interventions will not be prioritized and resourced unless they are mainstreamed into the national planning and budgeting process. The capacity assessment exercise undertaken on MDG implementation<sup>23</sup> means that similar tools, knowledge and experience already exists within the United Nations system that could be adapted for the SDG related capacity assessment. The global community can support the national government to undertake the assessment and then help address

the capacity gaps. In particular, the institutional, physical, information technology-related, and human resource-related capacity gaps should be prioritized interventions and solved in time to enable the achievement of the SDGs (DNPWC, 2012).

### **Post-Disaster Recovery and Reconstruction Challenges**

Nepal is prone to disasters due to its topography, location, and habitat. Nepal is prone to earthquakes, floods, landslides, avalanches, fires and disease outbreaks. These often undermine the achievements made in poverty reduction and human development and pose serious challenges to human security. The achievement of the SDGs with better human development implies that adequate disaster risk reduction interventions are identified during the SDGs needs assessment and financing strategy (UGC, 2019). The SDGs are designed to reduce several risks and vulnerabilities, and interventions to achieve them will address disaster risks and vulnerabilities. But some disasters are difficult to predict and plan for — one of them being large earthquakes as Nepal experienced in April/May 2015. These earthquakes took the lives of almost 9,000 people, destroyed more than half a million houses and damaged more than 200,000 houses and public offices. The damage and losses, as measured by the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) (NPC, 2022) is more than NPR 700 billion and the reconstruction costs will be as much as NPR 670 billion. This indicates that the country must carry out contingency planning for such unpredictable disasters, which demand additional financial and human resources. SDG implementation will have to be formulated in such a way that prevents such kinds of disasters from derailing or obstructing SDG-related interventions. So, the SDG financing strategy, the capacity assessment for implementing it and the implementation strategy should be mindful of likely future disasters and actions that need taking to prevent them from derailing the achievement of the SDGs.

### **Strengthening Governance and Service Delivery**

Good governance, which is synonymous with democratic governance, is possible when democratic values and norms are engraved into the functioning of the state, society and its institutions. The key dimensions of good governance are the free, fair, and inclusive election of people's representatives; the peaceful turnover of power; accountable government; responsible opposition; rule of law; respect for human rights; accountable and transparent public administration; the separation of powers; an impartial judiciary; decentralized local governance; strong civil society; free media; effective service delivery and inclusive social, economic and political processes. These features, including the ones enshrined in the SDGs, cannot be

ensured without the accompanying values of human rights, equality and equity, inclusion, solidarity, plurality, and respect for the people and environment they live in (World Bank, 2021). The importance of good governance and the strengthening of trust in government are fundamental for achieving the SDGs. The achievement of the SDGs will require substantial scaling up of public investment, which in turn requires good governance for the proper use of additional resources. The government needs to focus on the following dimensions of good governance (GoN, Nepal, 2015)

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, SDGs were not sufficient initiatives for human development in developing countries, there are many reasons why economic development continues to bypass many of the poorest people and places with one common cause being poor governance. It is poor and vulnerable people who suffer the most when governance is characterized by a lack of transparency, accountability or competence. When income inequality is high, economic growth does not sufficiently help reduce poverty. When state policies and programmers are frequently captured by the ruling elites, who control most of the resources, the poor do not have access to resources and opportunities or 'voice' and thus remain excluded from the development process. Without sound governance, the country cannot expect to make sustained progress on human development and poverty reduction. In a post-conflict situation, commissions for disappeared persons, transitional justice, and truth and reconciliation will have to be in place to resolve conflict period cases and establish lasting peace. These institutions are yet to come into operation a decade after the peace agreement. Many of the structures destroyed during the conflict are yet to be rebuilt while the recent earthquakes added to the government's reconstruction tasks. The National Reconstruction Authority is yet to be fully functional. The reconstruction task also requires strong local and community level mechanisms, which, however, have not been instituted in the wake of the almost non-existent local government and the lack of an alternative ad-hoc implementation coordination mechanism.

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