

## Policy Alignment to Sustainable Development Goals in Nepal

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### **Abstract**

*These studies suggest that Nepal has made progress in aligning national and local policies with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in areas like poverty reduction, gender equality, and community forestry, but faces challenges such as limited resources, institutional capacity, policy coherence, and implementation gaps that hinder full and effective SDG integration. This research attempts to summarize the achievements and difficulties related to sustainable development by undertaking an extensive literature review on perspectives on sustainable development. Based on arguments and discussions of academics, researchers. The study employs a review-based technique. Sustainable development requires striking a balance between the three main pillars of social, economic, and environmental development in order to promote development narratives. The body of research concludes that Nepal must continue to align the prompt implementation of the SDGs even though it is making progress. Resource mobilization, strengthening international alliances, encouraging good governance and institutionalization, guaranteeing environmental resilience, and improving an integrated approach and equity are important initiatives that must be tackled up to Agenda 2030 of the Sustainable Development Goals.*

**Keywords:** *Sustainable development, Economic growth, Social justice, Poverty, Agriculture, empowerment.*

### **1. Introduction**

Is sustainable really such a simple idea? Is this simple idea easy to implement by the government? The Brundtland Commission's (WCED, 1987) declaration released "Our Common Future," demarcated that "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" marked the beginning of the modern concept of sustainable development. This development paradigm, sustainable development (SD) is now the tagline of international assistance organizations, the technical term used by development planners, the topic of conferences and scholarly works, and

the catchphrase of environmental and development activists (Pant 2024). By the United Nations General Assembly 2015 to address the challenges of environmental degradation, biodiversity decline, and global poverty and inequality (Adhikari, 2022). It has been linked to various definitions, meanings, and interpretations, making it the catchphrase of the development discourse. "Development that can be continued either indefinitely or for the given time period" is the literal definition of sustainable development (Stoddart, 2011). All United Nations (UN) Member States endorsed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, which highlights the 17 SDGs as a universal call to action and lays out a shared vision for world peace and prosperity. Addressing poverty, inequality, health, education, economic growth, climate change, and environmental preservation, the SDGs take a comprehensive approach. Historical turning points like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the conclusions of international summits like Rio+20 in 2012 are built upon by this framework. The 2030 Agenda was adopted in September 2015 as a result of the negotiation process. By offering frameworks for catastrophe risk reduction, development financing, and climate action, notable agreements including the Paris Agreement, Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and Sendai Framework substantially enhanced the international commitment to sustainable development. Adopted by every United Nations (UN) member state in 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development presents a shared vision for world peace and prosperity. In order to support the SDGs, provide significant assistance, build capacity, and assess the UN system-wide implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) within the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) is essential. Realizing the 2030 Agenda requires broad ownership and a strong commitment from all stakeholders, and DSDG actively promotes this involvement (United Nations, n.d.).

Its foundation is built on three elements: social, economic, and environmental issues. As a result, achieving economic effectiveness, social equity, and environmental sustainability are all necessary to fulfill the notion of sustainable development. Sustainability in the social sphere must be a target, sustainability in the economy must be a tool, and sustainability in the environment must be a prerequisite. These three components' underlying sustainability will eventually lead to a comprehensive sustainability (Adamowicz et al., 2003). Overall, the concept of development has been shifted from narrow economic metrics to more multifaceted advancement that places a higher priority on sustainability. Hence, it is extremely difficult to balance ecology, social, and economic issues without intentionally preferring one over the other when trying to improve sustainability. In

reality, striking a balance can be challenging because these components' interests can conflict or even be at odds with one another.

The number of severe and interconnected economic, environmental, social, and geopolitical crises has rapidly increased over the past ten years; these crises have a significant impact on nations' ability to develop sustainably and in accordance with their commitments to globally recognized goals, like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These difficulties have arisen in a world that is defined by VUCA, or volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. These include the COVID-19 pandemic's human, economic, social, and financial repercussions; Russia's aggression against Ukraine's ripple effects on the world economy, global food prices, energy supplies, and migration that endangered the chances of attaining goals like energy (SDG 7), food security (SDG 2), and economic growth (SDG 8); and the increasingly negative effects of climate change (SDG 13) (OECD). The continuation of these issues has the potential to erode public confidence in the government and prolong economic and social vulnerabilities, resulting in a "perma-crisis." Additionally, Earth is experiencing irreversible tipping points related to its ecological change.

When ongoing global challenges are interconnected, fragmented government action and incoherent policies increase the risk that such policies offset each other, generate costs to society, and undermine long-term government commitments to sustainable development. Furthermore, the most of these crises, if not all of them, have a significant global and transboundary component. To overcome these obstacles, requires a balance between short term and long-term sustainability commitments. It requires strengthening the capacity of national governments to address global challenges in an integrated manner, to direct action through building trust, and to ensure that national institutions can act globally and harness tools and innovation to do so.

A more complicated working environment for governments has resulted from the simultaneous emergence of many crises, which has also overstretched their financial, human, and other resources. Furthermore, the most of these crises, if not all of them, have a significant global and transboundary component. However, there is a concern that the required emphasis on immediate, short-term crisis management could compromise governments' capacity to fulfill their long-term objectives and international obligations. However, the world has less than five years left to fulfill the internationally agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda. The successful implementation of SDGs may require localization at the national and sub-national levels.

In the context of Nepal, the localization of SDGs involves aligning the global goals with local development plans with priority by the local bodies. The localization is essential to reflect the unique challenges, priorities, and prospects of local areas and obtain goals starting from the grassroots level (NPC, 2017). Since the 2015 Constitution and the introduction of federalism, Nepal has worked hard to match its national policies and development plans with the SDGs. SDG targets have been included into the SDG Road Map 2016–2030 and recurring national plans, with an emphasis on environmental sustainability, infrastructure, gender equality, and poverty alleviation. With localized development plans that take into account global sustainability targets, municipal and regional governments are essential to this process. Consequently, Nepal has made major achievements in reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, and improving infrastructure by proactively incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into its national policy. Even though, Local governments differ in their level of SDG integration, with some exhibiting more successful alignment than others (Ghimire, 2025). And some SDGs has been hampered or endangered by the nation's numerous obstacles, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic's effects, data shortages, financial limitations and political instability. Even while there is substantial policy alignment with the SDGs, implementation gaps and external factors continue to be significant obstacles.

## **2. Materials and Method**

The secondary source of material used in this qualitative study was released by several governmental and non-governmental organizations. The study has focused more on the data from UNDP, Nepal's National Planning Commission publications and Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics data and information. Throughout the course of this investigation, more relevant books and journals were read, and the textual thematic method was used to analyze the data.

## **3. Review of Literature**

### ***Theoretical Review***

The Brundtland Commission (1987) declared “Our Common Future” define Sustainable development is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Focused on vivacious ideas: Intergenerational equity, balancing economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity and emphasized the need for global cooperation to address environmental challenges, recognizing that they

transcend national borders and significantly influenced international discussions and policy. Sustainability stands on three interconnected pillars: i.e., Environmental sustainability (protecting natural resources), Economic sustainability (supporting economic growth) and social sustainability (ensuring social equity and justice).

Another ecological modernization theory in 1980s define theoretical framework to explain how innovation and economics interact and how nation-state interventions occur, and how NSAs participate in decision-making to attain desired environmental results (P.J. Mol, 2009). A change from the implied to the explicit effect over the attainment of results is another requirement that some theorists support for the EM model: ecological consciousness. (Howes, 2017). The Ecological Modernization (1980) elucidate theoretical framework innovation and economics interact and how nation-state interventions occur, and how NSAs participate in decision-making to attain desired environmental results. Because it offers a suitable framework for examining the responsibilities of societal actors in the process of attaining best practice environmental outcomes, EM is being utilized more and more in environmental policy analysis (Howes, 2017). Likewise, recognized as the "father of environmental justice," Robert Bullard in his Environmental Justice theory defined that environmental benefits and burdens are not equally distributed—often, marginalized communities suffer more and focused on justice and equity, intersectionality of race and environment disparities in environmental benefits, emphasizes the importance of community-led initiatives and participatory approaches to address environmental problems with Fair treatment and involvement of all people regardless of race, income, or nationality. Another Planetary Boundaries Framework (Rockström et al., 2009) delineates the biophysical and biochemical systems and processes known to regulate the state of the planet within ranges that are historically known and scientifically likely to maintain Earth system stability and life-support systems conducive to the human welfare and societal. Idea: There are nine critical earth systems (like climate, biodiversity) we must not exceed to keep the planet stable. This concept helps policymakers to understand "safe operating spaces" for humanity.

### *Constitutional Review of Commitment*

Nepal is dedicated to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations' 2015-adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In alignment with SDG values like decreased inequality (Goal 10) and peace, justice, and strong institutions (Goal 16), Nepal's 2015 Constitution makes clear its commitment to "ending all forms of discrimination and oppression," building a prosperous country, and fostering sustainable peace.

In Directive Principles, Policies, and in the Constitution offers precise guidelines for policy that closely correspond with the SDGs: In Articles 50–55: Stress gender equality, inclusive development, environmental preservation, and socioeconomic change. And Sustainable use of natural resources, biodiversity conservation, and environmental protection are all specifically called for in Article 51(g); these goals are closely related to SDGs 13 (Climate Action), 14 (Life Below Water), and 15 (Life on Land).

In line with SDGs 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and 4 (Quality Education), Article 51(h) supports social security, public health, and high-quality education.

Align with constitutional rights create binding obligations for the state that strongly overlap with multiple SDGs such as: Fundamental Rights (Part 3), Right to Education (Article 31), Right to Health (Article 35), Right to Clean Environment (Article 30), Right to Social Security (Article 43), Right to Food (Article 36). Under the federalism structure: The Constitution's embrace of federalism encourages bottom-up approaches to achieving SDGs through localized governance structures.

#### *Institutional Mechanisms for SDG Implementation*

Nepal's apex advisory body National Planning Commission (NPC) that formulates national development policies and plans into line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the NPC, a central institution works under the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers. Leads SDG integration into national plans, Provincial and Local Governments: Given extensive powers under the Constitution to legislate and act on matters related to social, economic, and environmental development (Schedule 6, 7, and 8).

NPC's strategic documents:

- SDG Baseline Report (2017): Developed standards for SDG goals.
- The SDG Status and Roadmap Report (2020) evaluated advancements and delineated strategies for the future.
- SDG objectives were incorporated into Nepal's national development strategy in the 15th Five-Year Plan (2019/20–2023/24).

Under Nepal's new federal system, the National Planning Commission is coordinating throughout the various governmental levels. By delivering enough and long-term funding for SDG initiatives.

filling up data gaps to assess development at the provincial and local levels by assuring inclusive, equitable, and sustainable growth.

### *Integration of SDGs into National and Local policies*

This paper aims to examine how higher-level policies are shaped to fit the local needs and to take into account the significance of local governments in achieving the SDGs. According to recent studies, a local government's policy response to global issues like those outlined in the SDG is frequently influenced by local political leanings, or at most, is motivated by the state/national and neighboring governments' actions when adopted at the local level (Hughes et al. 2018). These topics range from leadership response to fiscal decentralization, from participatory governance to partnership with various stakeholders. The localization of SDGs in Nepal involves integrating the global objectives with regional development strategies that are prioritized by local authorities. In order to represent the particular difficulties, priorities, and prospects of local communities and achieve objectives beginning at the local level (NPC, 2017). Integration into National Plans: SDG targets are fully aligned with the 15th Five-Year Plan (2019/20–2023/24) and the 14th Periodic Plan (2016–2019). SDG goals have been included into Nepal's national policies, including the National Health Policy, Education Policy, Agricultural Development Strategy, and Climate Change Policy. As well as the motto "Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali" was the overriding vision of the 15th Plan, which places a strong emphasis on growth that is equitable, inclusive, and sustainable. In Sectoral Strategy Alignment the Ministries have been directive to integrate sectoral policies (health, education, agriculture, energy, water, etc.) with SDG targets. Especially sectoral roadmaps have been created for objectives such as Climate Action (Goal 13), Decent Work (Goal 8), and Gender Equality (Goal 5).

### *Localization and Implementation Challenges*

Localization of the SDGs is the process of modifying, putting into practice, and regulating the objectives at the local and regional levels in order to match them with the distinct socioeconomic and environmental circumstances of certain regions. It entails involving regional stakeholders, such as enterprises, communities, and governments in the decision-making process to ensure accountability and ownership. Depending on their capacities and governance systems, nations around the world have chosen different strategies for SDG localization.

The 2015 Constitution of Nepal stipulates that local governments are responsible and acknowledged as important contributors to the development agenda's execution, serving as change agents, policymakers, and vital linkages between local communities and global objectives, and directly related to the SDGs, including agriculture, water supply, education, health, and local infrastructure (Schedule 8 of the Constitution). The discussion highlights particular SDGs, such as reducing poverty (SDG 1), promoting agricultural output (SDG 2), and coordinating health and sanitation initiatives (SDGs 3 and 6), where LGs are crucial. The SDGs and LGs are interrelated, which highlights the necessity of suitable political, legal, and national frameworks for successful implementation (Sarkar, 2021).

The National Planning Commission have created a "Sustainable Development Goals Localization Roadmap" to serve as a roadmap for provincial and municipal administrations. Local and provincial governments are creating their own annual programs and periodic development plans that are in line with the SDG. SDG indicators are incorporated into the Annual Development Programs and Medium-Term Expenditure Frameworks (MTEFs) by both urban and rural municipalities (Ghimire, 2025)

For Capacity Building diverse tools such as SDG Localization Guidelines and Integrated Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring, and Evaluation (IPBME) systems have been introduced. Training programs are conducted to build the capacity of local officials for SDG mainstreaming.

### *Sectoral Perspectives and Gaps*

Nepal has made progress aligning major development sectors with the SDGs. They are as follow:

- Poverty Reduction align with SDG 1: Nepal has made significant progress in poverty reduction over the past few decades. According to the World Bank and Nepal's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS): In 1996, the poverty rate was 42%. By 2011, it had dropped to 25%. In the latest 2019/20 Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS): Poverty rate drop to 17.4%.
- Agriculture and Food Security align with SDG 2: Zero Hunger- Agriculture Development Strategy (2015-2035) promotes sustainable agriculture and rural development programs for food security and nutrition improvement are being scaled up to increase agricultural productivity and climate-resilient practices.



- Health Sector align with SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being- In which Policies like the National Health Policy 2019 and Health Sector Strategy 2015–2020 supported universal health coverage. Focused on maternal health, communicable disease control, and expanding basic health services. As well post-COVID-19 recovery plan embraced resilience building and strengthening the health system.
- Education Sector align with SDG 4: Quality Education- The School Sector Development Plan (SSDP 2016-2023) aimed to ensure inclusive, equitable quality education. Progress have been in primary school enrollment and gender parity. Emphasis on technical and vocational education for youth employment.
- Gender Equality align with SDG 5: Gender Equality Strengthened by the Constitution guaranteeing 33% women's representation in Parliament and local bodies. Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) introduced across ministries programs targeting gender-based violence and women's economic empowerment.
- Energy Sector align with SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy- Nepal's Energy White Paper 2018 aims for 100% clean energy transition by 2030. Significant investments in hydropower, solar, and biogas initiatives.
- Climate and Environment align with SDG 13, 14, 15: Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) committed under the Paris Agreement and National policies like the Climate Change Policy 2019 and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2014-2020) focus on resilience, adaptation, and ecosystem protection.

### *Challenges in Policy Alignment and Implementation*

Increased policy rationality and integrated implementation are necessary to address pressing development problems that cut across different sectors. Regarding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the issue of interconnected development goals has received a lot of attention (Breuer) et.al.,2023). In Nepal's case there are multiple challenges in policy alignment and implementation of SDGs in Nepal including limited financial resources, weak institutional capacity, lack of policy coherence and integration across sectors and governance levels, insufficient awareness and stakeholder engagement, and gaps in data, research, and knowledge management

Despite these advances, several challenges hinder effective SDG alignment and implementation, Financial and Institutional Constraints: Limited financial resources, weak institutional capacity, and inadequate research and data systems impede SDG progress, especially at the local level. Developing countries like Nepal face different problems and challenges regarding sustainable development goals. Some problems like lack of good data, leader should pick their targets, local government often face complex challenges, population growth, etc. These were the major challenges faced during implementing of sustainable development in Nepal. Every fiscal year government announces newly and important works related to sustainable development but its works like building a castle in the air. The major problem is that every leader corruption (Acharya, 2021).

There are issues with coordination among different levels of government and across sectors, leading to fragmented implementation. In sectors like energy, a lack of policy coherence and synchronization undermines gender and social inclusion. Limited awareness and understanding of SDGs among local officials and stakeholders, including in higher education institutions, restricts effective integration into planning, budgeting, and curriculum. Nepal's vulnerability to natural disasters and environmental challenges necessitates robust, context-specific indicators and strategies for localizing environmental goals.

Nepal must continue to prioritize the prompt implementation of the SDGs even though it is making progress. Resource mobilization, strengthening international alliances, encouraging good governance and institutionalization, guaranteeing environmental resilience, and improving an integrated approach and equity are important initiatives that must be tackled.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Global efforts and attempts towards sustainable development are praiseworthy and have produced noticeable benefits, despite a number of obstacles and challenges. According to a report, Nepal's progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is mixed generally. According to the National Review of Sustainable Development Goals 2020, Nepal has aligned and achieved great strides toward reducing poverty and achieving a number of human development objectives, including biodiversity, gender equality, education, and empowerment. Additionally, the nation has demonstrated progress in the fields of energy, infrastructure, and water and sanitation.

Nonetheless, making modest headway toward objectives pertaining to industrialization, hunger alleviation, and climate change mitigation.

Hence, this simple idea of sustainable is not easy to implement by the government alone. The Nepalese federal government mobilizes its wings and align to give priority to pragmatic methods such increasing ownership, coordinating with institutional structures, utilizing policy tools, setting program priorities, and resources, making sure they are implemented effectively, and keeping track of performance. An integrated strategy integrating governmental and non-governmental organizations, such as the media, the commercial sector, and civil society, may be advantageous given that the federal government alone might not be able to accomplish all objectives.

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