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NEPAL: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND EVALUATION: INITIATIVES IN NEPAL¹⁰¹



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INTRODUCTION

Nepal ventured into the new era of governance by becoming a Federal Democratic Republic through the Constitution of Nepal in 2015. Around the same time, Nepal became a part of the international commitment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Having achieved remarkable feats in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by reducing extreme poverty and hunger, reducing child and maternal mortality rates and combating diseases, Nepal stood confidently ready to embrace a new step in the direction of development. Thus, in an endeavour to achieve the unfinished agenda of the MDGs and to achieve greater, more inclusive and sustainable development, Nepal adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Nepal has been a dedicated Member State in the introduction, familiarization, awareness and implementation of the all-encompassing SDGs. With the inception of federalism, Nepal comprises a federal Government, seven provinces and 753 local units. Localizing the SDGs at the subregional level is a major step that needs to be taken.

The SDG Road Map 2016-2030 of Nepal envisages shared aspirations of generating, sharing and sustaining prosperity. Capitalizing on areas of agriculture, tourism and clean energy, owing to the resources endowed to the country by nature, can be a means of generating prosperity for the country. Similarly, an emphasis on inclusivity and equity among all castes, races, ethnicities, sexes, genders, geographic locations and ages is also sought for a balanced development of the country. Shared prosperity is eventually the overarching goal of “leaving no one behind”. Also envisioned is a key focus on environmental sustainability through advancement of clean air, water and energy as well as better management of resources. Nepal is prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and landslides and the major cities are gripped by problems of pollution. Planned and safer infrastructure, buildings and settlements are vital to

¹⁰¹ Based on “Nepal’s perspectives on the adaptation of evaluation systems”, presentation made at the National Evaluation Capacities Conference 2019, Hurghada, Egypt.

mitigate the losses incurred through these disasters.¹⁰² The federal structure of Nepal also demands fiscal discipline in order to ensure sustainability in changing times.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has been a significant component of the planning process in Nepal. M&E is required to gauge the most valuable and efficient use of resources and to assess ongoing or completed projects. In Nepal, various institutional mechanisms have been formed in order to monitor and evaluate programmes and projects. Institutions such as the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, National Planning Commission, Ministry of Finance, Office of the Auditor General, National Vigilance Center, Financial Comptroller General's Office, other line ministries and provincial and local bodies are also involved in the M&E process.

In the context of the SDGs, various committees have been formed at the national level for better planning, execution, monitoring and evaluation, such as:

1. A High-Level Steering Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister
2. An Implementation and Coordination Committee, chaired by the Vice-Chair, National Planning Commission
3. Seven thematic committees, chaired by members of the National Planning Commission

CHALLENGES

The lack of data disaggregated by sex, age, social group, disability, geography and income at the provincial and local levels and of a strong database system is one of the major hindrances to quality monitoring and evaluation. The SDG Needs Assessment, Costing and Financing Strategy¹⁰³ estimates that an annual average investment of 2.025 billion Nepali rupees will be required, which is 48 percent of gross domestic product on average. Access to technology, capacity-building and challenges due to lack of effective governance and public institutions are also present in addition to threats due to the country's landlocked status, climate change and natural disasters. Lack of coordination among the different tiers of government has also been a challenge, as has horizontal coordination.

INITIATIVES

Various initiatives have been undertaken in terms of integrating the SDGs in national planning processes through the formation of an institutional framework, production of documents and integrating the SDGs at the subnational level.

102 National Planning Commission. Sustainable Development Goals Status and Roadmap: 2016-2030. Government of Nepal, Kathmandu. 2017.

103 National Planning Commission. Needs Assessment, Costing and Financing Strategy for Nepal's Sustainable Development Goals. Government of Nepal, Kathmandu. 2018.

For evaluation specifically, a National Monitoring and Evaluation Act is in the Cabinet for discussion before being introduced in the Parliament. Further, Nepal has piloted the Online Self-Assessment Tool for National Evaluation Diagnostics and Strategizing, a tool that assesses evaluation capacity, determines needs and establishes action points for developing a country's framework for evaluation of national development strategies, including the SDGs. An SDG localization guideline for local governments, entitled "Local Governments and the Sustainable Development Goals in Nepal: A Guidance Note for Achieving Sustainable Development at the Local Level in the context of the Federal Constitution", has been launched. It complements the SDG-based local and provincial-level planning guidelines and sets a clearer path for the local levels to better understand and internalize the SDGs in their programmes and projects.

Some key policy documents have been brought to support mainstreaming and aligning the SDGs with national plans and priorities.

1. Preliminary SDG Baseline Report, 2015
2. Sustainable Development Goals: Status and Roadmap 2016-2030, 2017
3. National Voluntary Review, SDGs, 2017
4. United Nations Development Assistance Framework for 2018-2022
5. SDG-based Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines
6. SDG-based Local and Provincial-Level Planning Guidelines
7. SDG Needs Assessment, Costing and Financing Strategy, 2019
8. Integrated National Evaluation Action Plan of Nepal (2016-2020), 2017
9. Guideline on SDG localization prepared for local governments, 2019

Further, capacity-building has been carried out on an SDG-based planning, budgeting and medium-term expenditure framework and on M&E and statistics to help provincial and local levels to integrate the SDGs into their priorities. SDG indicators have been produced at the provincial level. A national data profile has been created along with an online portal on the National Planning Commission website to help access information related to the SDGs.

CONCLUSIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Nepal's transition to a federal system of governance poses new challenges and tremendous opportunities at the same time. In order to make hay while the sun shines, Nepal needs to work on localizing the SDGs to better coalesce the developmental goals at the grass-root levels in a more equitable manner.

Long-standing challenges of horizontal and vertical coordination in the Government need to be addressed along with the formation of a responsive public system that meets the concerns of the private and cooperative sectors. Strengthening the national database through development of robust data disaggregated according to sex, age, social group, disability, geography, income, provincial and local structures is one of the most important steps.

Nepal is set to graduate from least developed country status in 2022, become a middle-income country by 2030 and a developed country by 2043, as envisioned by the Long-Term Vision of Nepal. The SDGs will play a complementary role in helping the country to achieve these ambitious goals.

Nepal has made remarkable strides in promoting an equity- and gender-responsive evaluation system as well as an enabling environment, capacity-building and institutional arrangements. Endeavours are under way to further refine the evidence-based planning, monitoring and evaluation system. In order to realize the overarching goals of leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first, a robust evaluation system should be in place which not only keeps a check on achieving developmental goals but also provides pointers to what could be done better and more efficiently.

Deliberations that help to achieve national goals in line with international commitments have been important for Nepal. Through an amalgamation of national goals and priorities along with the all-inclusive goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Nepal is committed to utilizing available resources and knowledge to bring about prosperity in the country. The 15th Plan of Nepal focuses equally on economic as well as social indicators. For the country to attain its goals on time, and to help steer it towards a higher trajectory of growth and well-being, it is essential that a standard, evidence-based M&E system is in place, and Nepal's initiatives for achieving the same speak for themselves.