

# Development Advocate

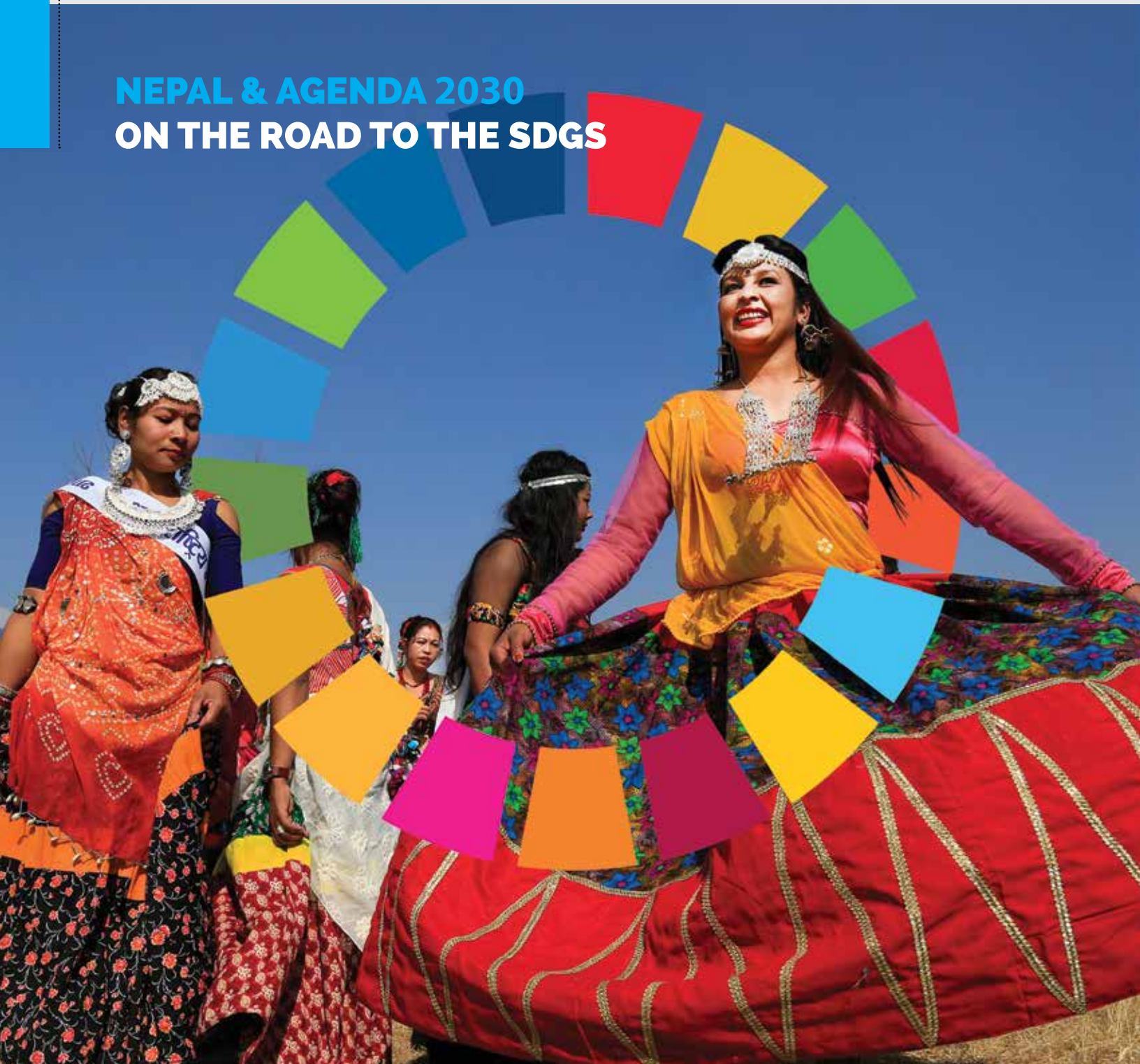
NEPAL

OCTOBER 2018 - MARCH 2019



*Empowered lives.  
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## NEPAL & AGENDA 2030 ON THE ROAD TO THE SDGS



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*As part of its partnership with UNDP, the All Nepal Football Association (ANFA) branded its A-Division Football Tournament under the theme of the SDGs.*

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*Resident Representative a.i., UNDP Nepal*



## GEOGRAPHIC & SOCIAL DISPARITIES NEED TO BE ADDRESSED TO MEET THE SDGs

We are already three years into the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure all people enjoy peace and prosperity. Building upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), these 17 goals and 169 targets encompass additional priority areas better attuned to the complexity of sustainable development—such as climate change, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among others.

At the country level, the SDGs offer a unique framework and opportunity for policy convergence and harmonization towards ending poverty, and promoting equity, inclusion and well-being for all. While Nepal had made considerable progress on the MDGs nationally—particularly where health and education were concerned—that success belied great unevenness in performance between regions and social groups. And although Nepal was among the first countries to internalize the SDG framework and prepare a country report, these deep-rooted disparities form a persistent area of concern going forward.

The percentage of those living below the poverty line in Provinces 2, 5, Karnali, and 7, for instance, far exceeds that in the other three provinces (see infographic on page 8). The least developed provinces also lag behind in access to health care and sanitation. Infrastructure is poor, and very little domestic private investment flows to Provinces Karnali and 7, let alone foreign direct investment. Remoteness is yet another impediment, and all these factors combined threaten to have a knock-on effect on both the current quality of life and the future prosperity of these regions.

Unless these issues are addressed head on, four of the seven provinces will continue to fall short on SDG targets and any hope of making good on the Goals by 2030 will be dashed. To tackle this, geographic and social inequities must be factored into any strategy to accelerate SDG processes. It is fortunate that Nepal just so happens to be completing its transition to a federal system of governance. Though there are challenges, the new decentralized setup is geared towards devolving power and provincial and local levels given decision-making powers. This means that locally-elected representatives are now vested with the responsibility for identifying and determining the development priorities of their own communities.

Of course, there is still a great deal to be done to sensitize both provincial and local representatives to understanding the importance of mainstreaming the Goals. But already, we are seeing a lot of enthusiasm in this regard, with elected representatives eager to localize and incorporate the SDGs and targets in their development plans.

This edition of Development Advocate unpacks how Nepal is getting ready to implement and achieve the Global Goals, including through a vital diversification of partnerships in recognition of the fact that fully realizing the SDGs will require concerted effort from everyone. Key among these partners is the private sector, and we report on how UNDP is already working with several Nepali businesses on innovative initiatives to both spread awareness and internalize this call to action in everything they do. Managing Director of the Chaudhary Group, Nirvana Chaudhary, points out in his interview that



aligning with the SDGs makes perfect sense for private companies, representing an investment in the businesses' own longevity and sustainability as much as contributing to the betterment of humanity overall.

Among the major stumbling blocks on the path to prosperity, climate change, natural disaster and conflict are some of the most critical. Even as Nepal is in the process of leaving behind the legacy of a brutal conflict, climate-related challenges threaten to chip away at hard-earned development gains. ICIMOD's Director General talks about how these effects are felt most disproportionately by mountain communities—people living in areas that are prone to higher-than-average temperature rises due to elevation-based warming, exerting even more pressure on already-fragile mountain ecosystems.

[The SDGs also recognize that good governance and strong, accountable institutions are crucial to building lasting peace and prosperity. In this regard, Kedar Khadka from the Good Governance Foundation emphasizes the need for a paradigm shift in Nepal's approach to human rights and better governance, calling for improved databases to bolster more evidence-based advocacy.](#)

Much like governance, innovation is another cross-cutting area included in the SDGs. We explore how the transformative power of new, emerging technological solutions can be applied to development challenges, and why this isn't something limited to the purview of developed countries as generally assumed: it applies as much, if not more, to the developing world.

And because the country is currently experiencing a youth bulge, where young people make up a sizeable portion of the population, engaging this demographic is key to bring about social and political transformations needed for sustainable development. Binita Karki writes about how—in a context where over 300,000 young Nepalis are migrating overseas every year—more young people need to be acquainted with the SDGs, and initiatives must be designed to boost youth entrepreneurship and self-employment to better retain these agents of change.

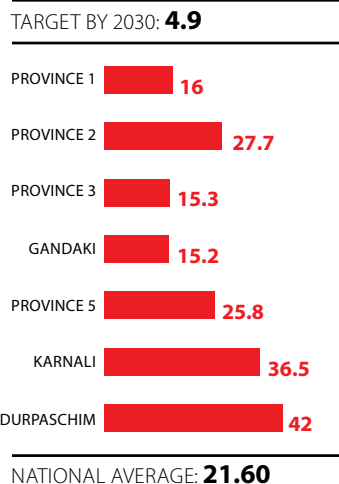
In line with the mantra of the SDGs to *leave no one behind*, this edition of the Development Advocate also brings to the fore different representative voices that need to be heard. From a former bonded labourer, to a transgender activist, to a member of the marginalized Dalit community, among others—these perspectives offer an inside view on the actual, experienced state of equality, inclusion and human rights in Nepal.

This is certainly not an exhaustive account of all aspects of progress made and challenges that remain in achieving the Global Goals, but as we make our way through the fourth year of the SDG era, we hope the insights and reflections captured here will help in improved planning and accelerated implementation of sustainable development in the country.

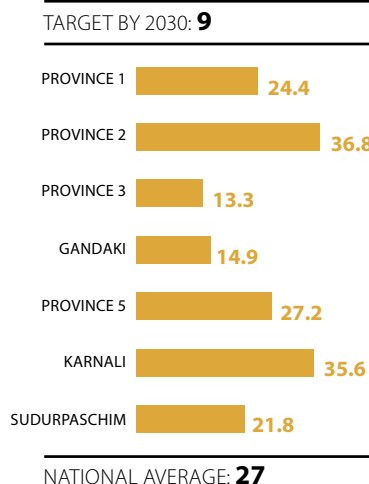
# Nepal's current SDG status and 2030 targets by Province



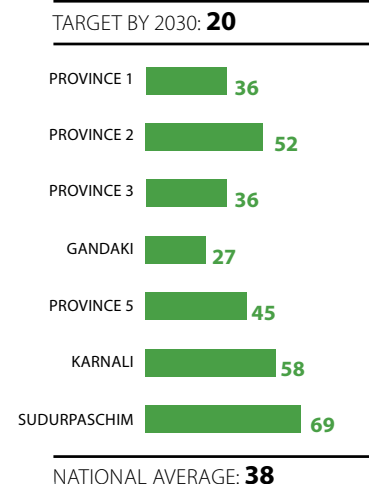
**Population Below Poverty Line**



**Underweight Prevalence (under 5 years)**



**Under Five Mortality Rate (per thousand)**

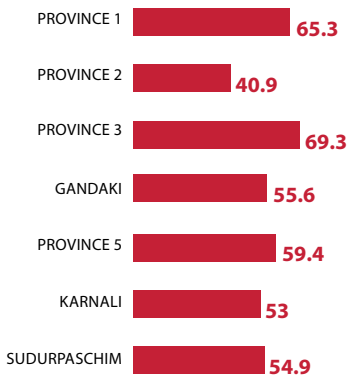






### Adult literacy

TARGET BY 2030: **99**

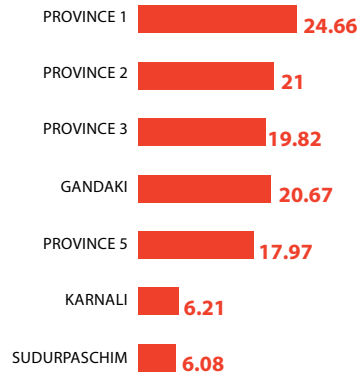


NATIONAL AVERAGE: **59.6**



### Percentage of women who own property

TARGET BY 2030: **40**

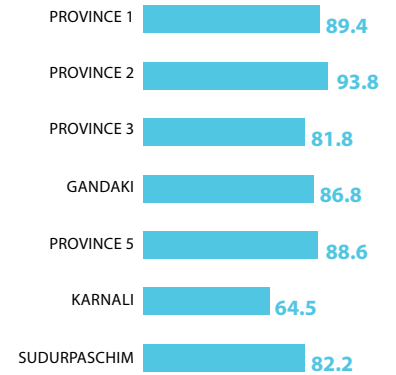


NATIONAL AVERAGE: **26**



### Access to Drinking Water

TARGET BY 2030: **99**

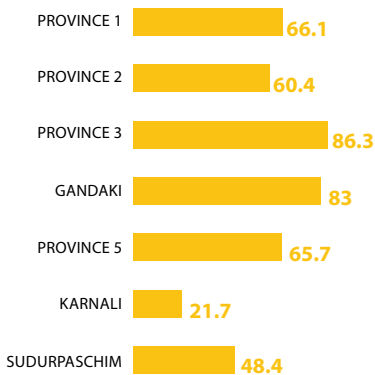


NATIONAL AVERAGE: **87**

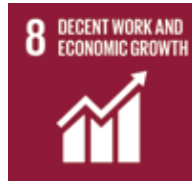


### Access to Electricity

TARGET BY 2030: **99**

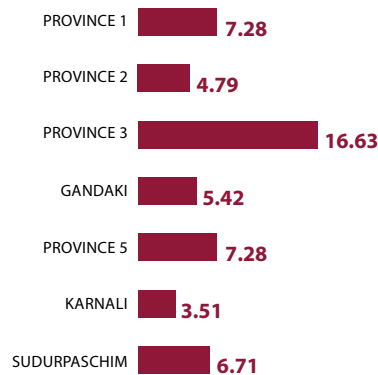


NATIONAL AVERAGE: **74**



### Life insurance coverage

TARGET BY 2030: **25**

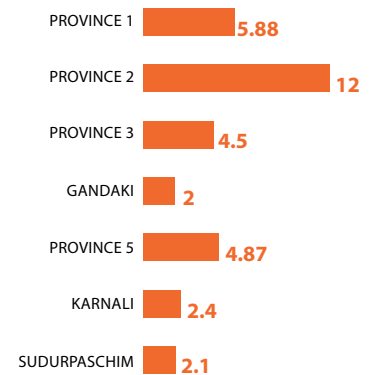


NATIONAL AVERAGE: **8.24**



### Manufacturing sector share in GDP

TARGET BY 2030: **15**

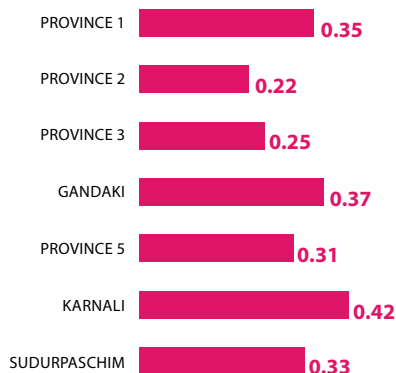


NATIONAL AVERAGE: **6.6**



### Income Inequality (Gini Coefficient)

TARGET BY 2030: **0.23**

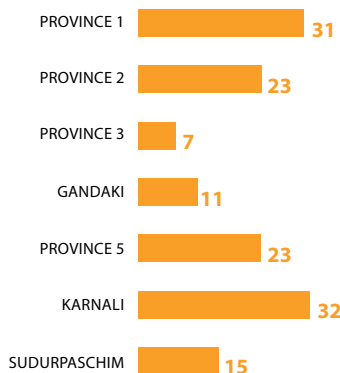


NATIONAL AVERAGE: **0.31**



### Household units roofed with straw

TARGET BY 2030: **5**

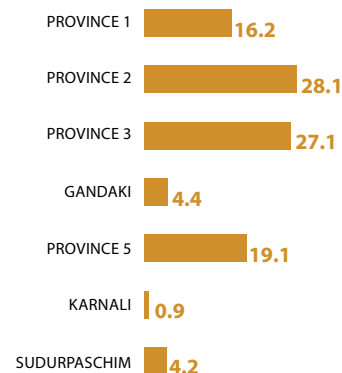


NATIONAL AVERAGE: **19**



### Use of fossil fuel energy consumption (total)

TARGET BY 2030: N/A

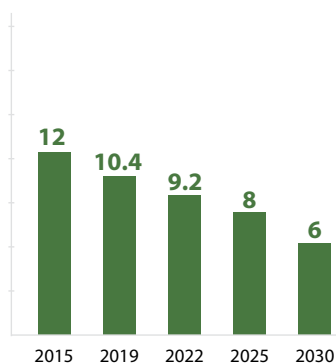


TOTAL: **100**



### Greenhouse Gas Emissions from industrial sector

TARGET BY 2030: **6**

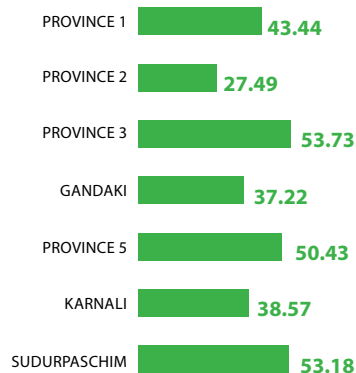


NATIONAL AVERAGE: N/A



### Area covered with forest

TARGET BY 2030: N/A

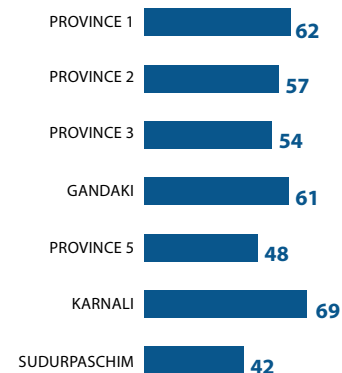


NATIONAL AVERAGE: **40.7**



### Percentage of people who believe corruption can end with Govt will

TARGET BY 2030: N/A

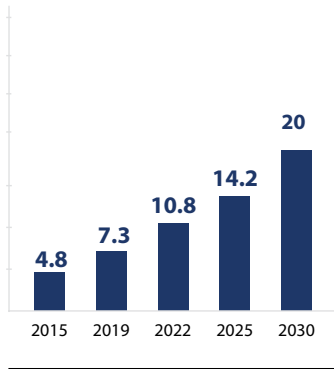


NATIONAL AVERAGE: **55**



Foreign Direct Investment (GDP)

TARGET BY 2030: **20**



NATIONAL AVERAGE: N/A



\*These infographics were developed in 2018 based on data collected from a number of government and UNDP publications.





## COLLABORATION NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

By Dr. Yuba Raj Khatriwada, Minister of Finance

*The SDGs differ fundamentally from the earlier MDGs, in ways that offer both opportunity and complexity for countries including Nepal. Dr. Khatriwada shares insights on this, as well as on the challenges of estimating the costs of achieving the SDGs and identifying financial resources from a range of sources.*

Global development efforts flourished in the 1990s, but while it brought economic growth, it also gave rise to inequality. Social indicators could not keep up with the pace of the economic growth. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emphasized social indicators and included issues like education, health, poverty, drinking water and environment. However, with only achievements on social indicators, no holistic development was possible, and more areas were recognized as important when entering the agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Hence issues like economic growth, overall human development, our inhabited land and its environmental improvement, ending inequality, and building infrastructure were included in the SDGs. The SDGs also take into account the outcomes achieved from the MDGs, to accomplish better results. In general, the MDGs were successful but we also see their development outcomes limited to certain areas. While the MDGs were successful overall, their development outcomes were limited in some areas; for example, a lack of road and bridge infrastructure where schools and health posts have been built or lack of maintenance in an already existing drinking water projects. The SDGs have to take economic growth, infrastructure development and social development together.



The MDGs essentially prioritize social development in reducing poverty. At that time, overall economic growth together with the need to change the framework of employment and equality for economic growth was not discussed. During the MDG lifespan (2000 - 2015), there was an increase in inequality within and amongst nations. At the time, I raised the need for sustainable development pointing out factors contributing to inequality.

Issues related to climate change were not strongly discussed during the MDG years, but obviously required attention. Also, after the international financial crisis of 2007-2008, issues of financial good governance were brought forward. Although many nations were lifted out of extreme poverty, it was felt that there were not significant changes in their living standards and they could not rise above their existing conditions. Only minimum needs of people were fulfilled, while human poverty still existed. Now, the SDGs envision alleviation of all kinds of poverty, which then leads to a more comprehensive prosperity for all.

Nepal's first priority is to end absolute poverty in the next five years. The SDGs echo our agenda. As we are an agriculture-based economy, we are strongly emphasizing agriculture to address problems like poverty, unemployment, and malnutrition among others, which revolve around it. Agriculture has always been our priority, but now it requires modification to be professional, modern and sustainable, to yield comparative benefits. Similarly, we also require a colossal change in education and health. We need skilled manpower with knowledge and expertise to bring about economic growth and development. The SDGs also incorporate education, health, skills development and gender equality, which are equally important to us.

While some understand the SDGs merely as an agenda of the United Nations, we have endorsed it formally and signed it at the UN headquarters in New York and are committed to attain these objectives. Nepal also took part in various meetings and discussions to formulate the SDGs, together with holding various discussions at the national level. Our agenda became an international agenda for everyone, with the coordination carried out by the United Nations. It is not right to have UN agencies constantly remind us to take ownership. Since this is our agenda, it's our duty to implement it and also to take ownership of the achieved outcomes.



Local and provincial governments play a very important role in achieving the SDGs. For example, we cannot just consider the average when it comes to eradicating absolute poverty. On average, although extreme poverty is 21 percent in the country, many areas still have extreme poverty of 70 percent. So it is very important to identify those areas and formulate targeted projects to address them. If we take a top-down policy approach, it will take a long time to achieve this goal. However, the local level can easily identify areas and work can be carried out to alleviate poverty and similarly other areas including health, sanitation, drinking water and literacy among others could benefit from a similar approach. While the central government provides financial support, the implementation has to be done by the local authorities. Hence, the local level has to work more around issues relating to sustainable development, while the support from the provincial and federal government is an absolute necessity.

The other side of the coin is to acquire skills and knowledge to accomplish the SDGs. There is also the financial and technical side to this, for which we have made many attempts to implement from the budget system. There are also misconceptions that the SDG agenda has to be treated as a separate project with its own financial system and program, while the need is to incorporate sustainable development in the national plan and budget system together with integrating both provincial and local levels and their resources. There might be a problem if we move forward focusing on the project rather than on the program itself.



**WHILE SOME UNDERSTAND THE SDGS MERELY AS AN AGENDA OF THE UNITED NATIONS, WE HAVE ENDORSED IT FORMALLY AND ARE COMMITTED TO ATTAINING THESE OBJECTIVES. SINCE THIS IS OUR AGENDA, IT'S OUR DUTY TO IMPLEMENT IT AND ALSO TO TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THE ACHIEVED OUTCOMES.**

While formulating their periodic plans, the local level should consider the SDGs in the background, on the basis of set national milestones for 2022, 2025 and 2030, and deal with the fundamental development required to prepare the strategies. On the basis of this, the budget should be formulated and implemented after the required economic sources and resources are estimated. After assessing our own sources, we should estimate the expectation we seek from the United Nations, which will then move forward with its international support. Therefore, the starting point for the implementation of the SDGs should begin from ward level where the plans and processes should be discussed, debated and programs should be selected. Taking a bottom-up approach these plans should be systematized and be included in the periodic plans of the local level to be implemented in a disciplined manner. The United Nations should support the endeavor and provide the required technical assistance.

We require huge financial resources to implement the SDGs. Even if we commit our entire annual budget to this, it will not be sufficient. Right now the federal government has over a Rs. 1.3 trillion budget. Tax revenue from provincial and local levels add up to Rs. 1.6 trillion; however we need an annual average of Rs. 2 trillion. Also, we cannot channel the entire budget to the SDGs as the state has other important duties to carry out, which might involve state security and also various constitutional duties. These legal duties also require an additional Rs. 100-200 billion annually. Hence, to fully implement the SDGs, an annual budget of Rs. 2.2 trillion is required. And to just gather sources to initiate the SDGs, an additional Rs. 300-400 billion is necessary.

Since the timeframe of 2030 is set, we cannot add the costs involved and move forward. While the entire budget will not be set aside for this agenda, we commit that a big portion of our investment will be dedicated to the SDGs. And for this we require additional resources in the form of foreign assistance, which is an estimated Rs. 500 billion annually.

At the moment, the widened tax net is estimated to generate revenue of Rs. 945 billion. Tax collection has now been authorized at the local level, which raises its revenue. Looking at the budget system, we don't have internal resources over Rs. 1.1-1.2 trillion. Along with the foreign assistance, it is also important to attract foreign investment. If we could bring in Rs. 100 billion in external investments annually, we would not be forced to rely on foreign assistance. It is also important to involve private sector and their resources for sustainable development, as their participation is very necessary to implement SDG 9 and SDG 11.

Both the government and private sector should invest in infrastructure development and for this we have to create a favorable environment. Legal reforms have to be made in order to safeguard investments by ensuring foreign currency exchange. We have to develop a source to earn foreign currency, which will help us take back the investment income. Along with this, SDG 17 encourages technology transfer, and promotes technology for low-income nations and privileges to be obtained by under-developed nations. It is also the responsibility of development partners to facilitate

private sector investment by supporting operations and loan processes. Failing to do these duties will result in bad financial management. A discussion should be carried out on this issue, while we have to encourage investments, loans and increase the capacity to pay in foreign currency.

The most ambitious aspect in the implementation of the SDGs is gathering resources, while also trying to find additional resources. During the MDGs, the commitment for foreign assistance was not fulfilled as planned for development assistance given to low-income countries. Even now we have not moved forward with any outcome concerning the coordination of international financial support, which could be assistance, investment or technology transfer. Multilateral organizations like the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank have not discussed the implementation of the SDGs. We have to develop the capacity to manage the assistance as we have always been blamed for failing to do so. For capacity building, technical assistance programs have to be provided as grants on minimum terms. But in various circumstances taking loans may be more favorable than seeking grants. However, concerning global issues like climate change, we cannot afford to take loans to seek solutions. The international community has to be responsible concerning these issues as we are not the major player in this context. However, we have to solve issues concerning the unnecessary exploitation of nature and exploitation of our resources. We will require assistance to address these issues, because this is also our right. But, if we want agricultural reforms, we will seek loans for it.

Similarly, technological development has been tremendous and in the hands of powerful nations. We do not possess the capacity to buy these modern technologies. So we will request aid assistance for these too. We also have some rights to do so as our workforce employed elsewhere is contributing to the economic development of that country. So we can always seek fragments of that development as a part of aid and assistance. In the first and second World Wars Nepalese soldiers acquired a reputation for bravery. Many of these countries still remember Nepalese people although we were part of their army fighting for their country. We are also seeking similar concern from the countries where Nepalese are migrant workers.

We are also very close to achieving success in a few proposed SDGs with our own budget. Among these

## **THERE ARE MISCONCEPTIONS THAT THE SDG AGENDA HAS TO BE TREATED AS A SEPARATE PROJECT, WHILE THE NEED IS TO INCORPORATE IT IN THE NATIONAL PLAN AND BUDGET SYSTEM TOGETHER WITH INTEGRATING BOTH PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL LEVELS AND THEIR RESOURCES. THERE MIGHT BE A PROBLEM IF WE MOVE FORWARD FOCUSING ON A PROJECT RATHER THAN ON THE PROGRAM ITSELF.**

we plan to end extreme poverty in five years and illiteracy in two years. Similarly, in education, we plan to ensure one hundred percent school admissions by next year. Also, we plan basic drinking water for everyone and modernization of new energy both in the next three years. But so many things are still beyond our control, such as that we cannot eradicate malnutrition immediately and cannot completely eliminate infant mortality and maternal mortality.

It is very important to receive international support for goals that are very challenging. Issues involving environmental degradation, tackling the world economic crisis and inter-economic and social issues require international assistance. While we always say we plan to give social security to our workers, we have not been able to give it to millions of people residing outside the country. We also have our shared responsibilities and we need to initiate ways to fulfill them. Good governance always takes time and zero tolerance of corruption has been our agenda. We are advocating development based on social justice. We need effective partnerships and coordination with stakeholders from various fields to promote peace and justice for development.

*[As told to Development Advocate]*



## LOCALIZING THE SDGs: USHERING IN AN ERA OF CHANGE AND HOPE IN NEPAL

By Dr. Puspaj Raj Kandel, Vice Chairman, National Planning Commission

*Dr. Kandel discusses with Development Advocate some of the key reasons why he is optimistic about Nepal's prospects for making meaningful progress on the SDGs. These include the opportunities presented by the transition to federalism, the framework provided by the Constitution, and the ability to draw on Nepal's – and the National Planning Commission's (NPC) – experience of implementing the MDGs.*

There are a great many differences between the MDGs and SDGs in terms of Nepal's strategy and NPC's role. This is not just in terms of the two frameworks, but in terms of a change in perspective of the country itself. When the MDGs were being implemented, Nepal was experiencing significant political instability and was still under a unitary administrative structure. The Constitution was still in the process of being written and we had barely emerged from a long conflict in which so many lives had been lost. Even under such conditions, the MDGs did make considerable impact in the social sector.





The SDG era, then, is one of comparative ease. For one, we now have a Constitution to guide us, and in my opinion, the mandate laid out by the Constitution has much in common with the mandate of the SDGs, particularly in terms of the basic principles and fundamental rights that both the charter and the Goals espouse at their core. This alignment between the two has certainly facilitated the internalization and implementation of the shared agenda. Back when we were working on the MDGs, we did not have well-functioning local or provincial governments in place. Now that we have elected representatives across the different tiers of governance, their commitment towards and enthusiasm for the sustainable development agenda is more than evident. But, of course, there is a need to help them better understand and internalize the Goals—they have to gain a strong sense of ownership over them for their efforts to be effective and for social transformation to materialize.

There are obviously a number of challenges going forward in this. Where in the past we had a centrally-controlled government, now there are multiple governments, but so far, there hasn't been sufficient clarity about their rights, roles and responsibilities, which has led to some tussles between the federal, provincial and local levels.

But these are, in my opinion, temporary technical issues, and the important thing is that there is collective agreement on the agenda. What's more, the party that is currently in power at the central level has also won in most of the provinces. This raises the possibility of effective implementation, and it is up to us now to tackle the technical problems as quickly and neatly as possible. We are also preparing the 15th Development Plan to further aid the implementation of both the Constitution and the SDGs, as well as working on a 25-year vision plan that not only incorporates the SDGs, but looks beyond 2030 as well. Besides these national-level frameworks, we also have provinces that are preparing their own specific plans, and NPC—with UNDP's support—is helping provincial governments to capture the essence of the SDGs in these. Similar efforts are also underway at the local level, and there is a clear necessity to push for internalization there too. It's a lot of work, no doubt, and there are bound to be obstacles, but it's also a time of immense opportunity in terms of localizing the SDGs through a strategy of cooperation and coordination, as envisioned by the Constitution.

Given the key role it played in the implementation of the MDGs, NPC is a veritable hub of knowledge, and this



technical capacity and institutional knowledge needs to now be transferred to the provincial and local levels. There are going to be planning commissions in each province; NPC must work in close coordination with these in the days to come, helping them gain a better grasp of development planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation—especially for ensuring all these processes are more evidence-based and SDGs-informed- so that they are able to successfully take forward development priorities. To that end, we are also producing a number of relevant knowledge products to serve as resources for provincial and local governments in their work.

Regarding SDG localization, some have raised the potential challenge of the need to strike a balance between respecting the principles of federalization and the autonomy of local governments on the one hand, while also having coherence through an overall framework of national priorities. I don't see any particular conflict related to this at present, because as I said before, the party in power at the center has won seats around the country, so there is a collective, mutually-agreed agenda. And even if that wasn't the case, and other parties had been elected at the provincial and local levels, the very fact that we

have the Constitution means that we are all subject to the same overall vision and objectives, and this I believe goes beyond differences in political ideologies.

The problems that do crop up here and there are, I think, a matter of lack of experience. We are totally new to this federal setup, and there are bound to be hiccups in making this transition, whether it is a sense of competition between the federal and provincial levels or between the provincial and local levels. There are cases where elected representatives have complained that they have not been able to exercise the rights and roles they were granted, that there is a lack of support from the bureaucratic level. One of the most common complaints, for instance, has to do with the dearth of civil servants, which is a valid criticism, because although we have changed to a federal structure, there are still certain elements of our bureaucracy that remain stubbornly centralized—such as government employees who are reluctant to move away from the center.

But I trust that these issues will be resolved soon enough, especially in light of the Inter-Provincial Coordination

Committee meeting that has been scheduled to take place under the Prime Minister. The principle of federalism has to do with distribution of power—where the federal government is responsible for policy, provincial governments for implementation and local governments for service delivery—and enabling a better, vertical system of checks and balances within the government machinery. So long as we are willing to abide by this, I have no doubt that we will be able to make progress.

There is already reason enough to be encouraged. In the few international forums that I've recently participated in on behalf of NPC, Nepal is actually doing a lot better in terms of advancing the SDGs in comparison to many other nations. Our main hurdle, however, is financial: even though our national priorities are well aligned with the Global Goals, we are still looking at an enormous need for investment in order to achieve the targets.

*[As told to Development Advocate]*

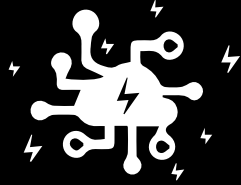




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**“THE PRINCIPLE OF FEDERALISM HAS TO DO WITH DISTRIBUTION OF POWER—WHERE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR POLICY, PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS FOR SERVICE DELIVERY—AND ENABLING A BETTER, VERTICAL SYSTEM OF CHECKS AND BALANCES. SO LONG AS WE ARE WILLING TO ABIDE BY THIS, I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE PROGRESS.”**

*- Dr. Puspa Raj Kandel*



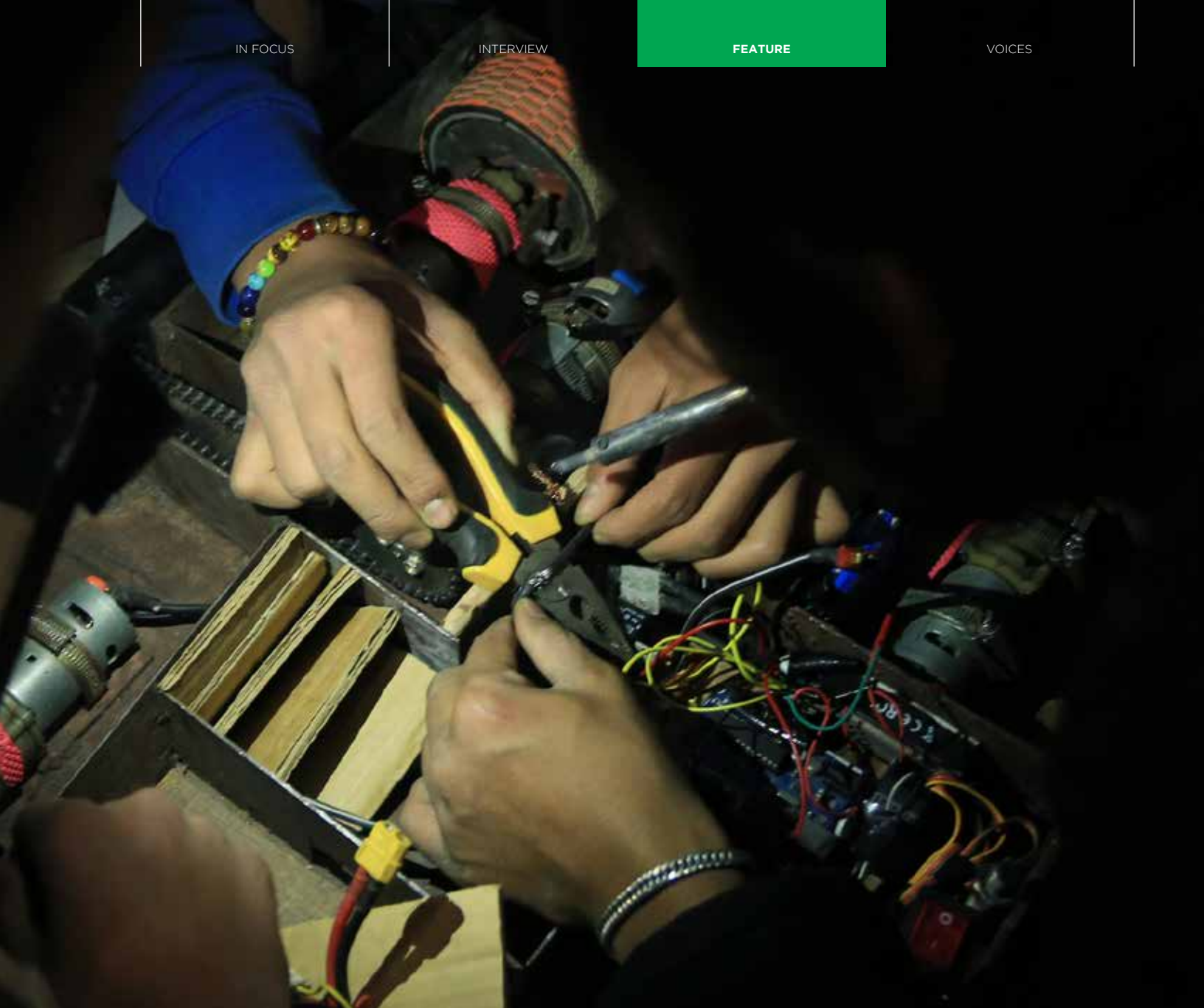
## FINGER ON THE PULSE: UNLOCKING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF INNOVATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

### Special Report

Delivering on the ambitious agenda of the SDGs requires all nations, including Nepal, to commit more research and investment in new, emerging technological solutions to increasingly complex and interconnected development challenges.

**“WE SIMPLY CANNOT AFFORD TO REMAIN SO  
INDIFFERENT...IF WE WANT PROGRESS AND  
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THE WAY WE WORK AND EMBRACING INNOVATION.”**

*- Mahabir Pun, Chairperson National Innovation Center, Nepal*



We live in an age of technological abundance. Acceleration in innovation has brought unprecedented changes in virtually all spheres of life; it has multiplied productivity, reduced costs and improved accessibility across numerous sectors and fields. And it is precisely this cross-cutting potential for positive change that has earned innovation a space amid the Sustainable Development Goals. While Goal 9 specifically refers to “Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure”, it is plain to see that leveraging the power of science, technology and sheer human resourcefulness is essential to achieve progress on all 17 Global Goals. And this isn’t something limited to the purview of developed countries: it applies as much, if not more, to the developing world, including Nepal.

The National Planning Commission is the focal agency for overseeing the implementation of the SDGs, and it has approved the country’s roadmap for 2030, prioritizing the following: cutting absolute poverty down to less than five percent, increasing the per capita income to US\$2,500, providing universal basic healthcare, ensuring every child attends school and raising the contribution of industry to GDP to 25 percent, among other targets.

But it has become clear that delivering on this ambitious agenda will call for a leap beyond the business-as-usual approach. There is indeed no option but to harness the emerging tools and methods offered by technology if we are to tackle the increasingly complex and interconnected

nature of our present-day development challenges. Unfortunately, research and investment in the potential use of new technologies to advance the SDGs is still very much lacking in the country today and afforded relatively low priority overall.

“We simply cannot afford to remain so indifferent,” says Mahabir Pun, the chairperson of the National Innovation Center, Nepal. “If we want progress and to ensure prosperity for everyone in the country, we cannot expect that to happen without changing the way we work and embracing innovation.”

The NPC’s roadmaps holds some promise in this regard. It seeks to, for instance, raise research and development expenditure as a proportion of the country’s GDP from the present 0.3 percent to 1.5 percent. It further aims to increase the number of patents registered to 1,000 from 75 in 2015. In fact, the NIC provides full support in ensuring innovators and inventors are able to acquire patent rights, trademarks and intellectual property rights over their ideas.

“This is all part of the effort to create an environment where ideas and talent can flourish,” Pun says. He adds that the government should either do more to directly support innovators or at least help connect them to investors, not



**“FROM BRINGING INFORMATION AND LEARNING MATERIALS TO CLASSROOMS AROUND THE COUNTRY, TO THE WONDERS OF TELEMEDICINE WHERE SPECIALISTS IN CITIES COULD TREAT PATIENTS LONG DISTANCES AWAY, THERE’S SO MUCH THAT COULD BE DONE... THE POSSIBILITIES ARE PRACTICALLY ENDLESS.”**

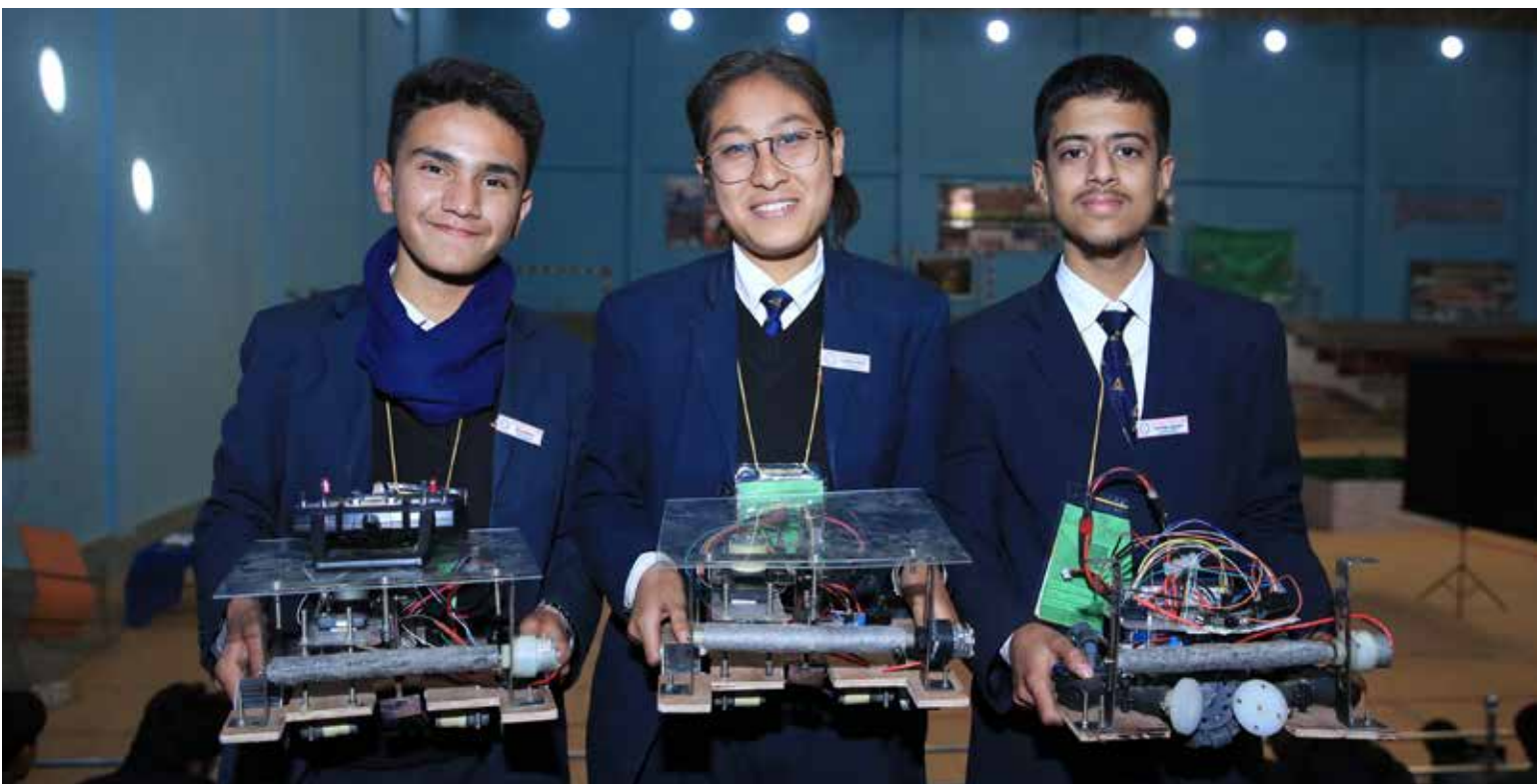
*-Sunaina Ghimire Pandey, Vice-chair Federation of Computer Association Nepal*



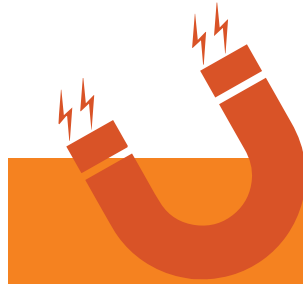
only so their products and services can contribute to the country's socio-economic development, but also to help put a stop to the persistent draining of the working force to foreign countries.

Pun, who was awarded the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2007 for his work in introducing wireless technological equipment to rural areas around Nepal, says it is also important to remember that innovation is not always about inventing something entirely new: "It's as much about adapting existing technologies to meet the requirements of your particular context".

This is reiterated by Sunaina Ghimire Pandey, the vice-chair of the Federation of Computer Association Nepal, who says that there are vast ways in which currently available information and communication technologies can be mobilized for the purpose of the SDGs in Nepal. "From bringing information and learning materials to students in classrooms around the country who would otherwise never have access to these, to the wonders of telemedicine where specialists in cities could help treat patients long distances away, there's so much that could be done without reinventing the wheel," she says. "The possibilities are practically endless."



# THE INVISIBLE FORCE



My name is Mina Kumari and I'm originally from Ramechhap, although it's been a long time since I left my home and settled in Banepa. That's where I live today, with my husband and two kids—a son and a daughter—who I support through my job at a construction site. My work usually involves carrying building materials from one place to another; sometimes I mix concrete too—it really depends on what the builders need you to do on a given day. It's hard labour for not very much money, just Rs. 400 a day, and I'm often tired to the bone when I come home, but when I fall sleep, it's with the satisfaction of knowing that my family is provided for.

Things weren't always this way. When we first arrived in Banepa, I had high hopes of finding a good job, building a good life and educating my kids so that they could make their own paths in the world. But it wasn't so easy; my husband was an alcoholic, to begin with. He would waste all the money I earned on drinking, and didn't take any responsibility for our kids or their futures. There was a time when our children were constantly falling sick, we had perilously little to eat, and couldn't afford to pay the rent.

As desperate as I was feeling back then, I knew deep down that I couldn't give up, at least for the sake of my kids. So I persevered, continued to save money where I could, and little by little, I had enough to send my children to school, which was all I had ever wanted.

Today, my son is all grown up, practically a man. He goes to university and is even earning money that he uses to pay for his own studies as well as those of his sister. And what's more, my husband is a changed

person now—not only has he given up his old ways, he actually works with me at the construction site and contributes to the family's income. Of course, although we do similar tasks, he gets paid more money than I do because he's a man; almost double in fact.

While I feel a man and woman should get paid the same amount for the same work, I've learned that it's also about who you know. Those labourers who are closer to the contractors earn much more than the rest of us, but then again, who could we complain to about this?

It's a stressful job overall, and very unforgiving on your body. I often fall down and get all kinds of bruises, but I have to keep going. Although I've heard about insurance, I'm not insured myself. So if anything happens to us on site, nobody can help us. My friends are already struggling to make a living themselves. And as the contractor sees it, we are entirely replaceable.

The nature of the work is also changing compared to not too long ago. Back in the day, we had to mix and serve the concrete by hand, but today there are machines for that. And while they've eased the task, the more such jobs are done by machines, the more we are at risk of being made redundant and losing out on income.

Very often I am struck by fears like "What will I do if I can't earn anymore?"; "How will my family survive?" and "What if one of us falls sick and can no longer work?". But I don't know if I really want to know the answers to these questions.

The day I can't get any more work, I will most likely have to leave the city because it's just too expensive to go on living here. We have rented two rooms for which we pay Rs. 5,000 a month. We do have electricity but drinking water is a real problem—we have to purchase it in jars which costs us Rs. 35 a day. It's also very close quarters for a four-person family, but we have few other options.

It is not that I am ashamed of what I do. Of course, there are people who call us names, who think the work we do is beneath them. But we're helping people build their dream homes; we're the invisible force without whom this city could not rise and spread out the way it has been doing, and I take pride in that.

*I do think, however, that people like us—who don't have the voice or the means to advocate for their own rights—need the support of governmental or non-governmental entities to help us address the wage disparities and lack of safety mechanisms that have rendered us so vulnerable to exploitation and physical danger. There are a few organizations that do claim to be working on our behalf, but their activities are limited—mostly to International Labour Day celebrations—and we haven't seen any real impact on our daily lives.*

I hope I do not sound ungrateful. Whatever the difficulties of life as a labourer, at least the work has helped me through some hard times, helped me raise my kids, and secure something of a future for them. I derive strength from the knowledge that they are on their way to independence. This was what I'd hoped and prayed for, and to see it happening in reality makes me unbelievably proud.





MINA KUMARI

**“IT’S A STRESSFUL JOB OVERALL, AND VERY UNFORGIVING ON YOUR BODY. I OFTEN FALL DOWN AND GET ALL KINDS OF BRUISES, BUT I HAVE TO KEEP GOING. ALTHOUGH I’VE HEARD ABOUT INSURANCE, I’M NOT INSURED MYSELF. SO IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO US ON SITE, NOBODY CAN HELP US.”**





# NEW FRONTIERS: ALIGNING BUSINESS WITH THE GLOBAL GOALS

## AN INTERVIEW WITH NIRVANA CHAUDHARY

Nirvana Chaudhary is the Managing Director of the Chaudhary Group (CG), Nepal's first multi-national company, and its largest and most diverse business conglomerate. Trained at India's prestigious Doon School and Harrow School in the UK, Nirvana is co-founder of the Himalayan Climate Initiative and also leads the Chaudhary Foundation—CG's corporate social responsibility arm. He chats with Development Advocate about why it makes perfect sense for private sector entities to integrate the principles of the SDGs in their operations, investments and partnerships, the existing challenges in Nepal's particular context, and what the government and development partners could do to encourage more businesses to integrate the SDGs.

### WHAT ROLE DOES THE PRIVATE SECTOR HAVE IN DELIVERING SOLUTIONS FOR THE SDGS?

All 17 of the SDGs are enmeshed in our daily lives and the environment around us, and the “five P’s” they propagate—planet, people, prosperity, peace and partnerships—are concepts that are applicable to all nations, and to all sectors. So any responsible business, whether a micro-enterprise or a multi-national like CG, should internalize these principles in their day-to-day working, and ideally restructure itself to support achievement of the SDGs. If more businesses take human values into consideration and seek to improve the human condition overall, people around the world would better appreciate the role of business in advancing sustainable development, and help to create a culture of conscious business leadership. This is the model we follow at CG.

### IN WHAT SPECIFIC WAYS IS CG INTEGRATING THE SDGS INTO ITS WORKING STRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENT?

We at CG always try to keep our eyes and ears open to practices and models around the world that testify to the

power of the private sector in affecting positive change. We are especially grateful to UNDP for introducing and educating us on the Global Goals in 2017; it was a partnership we were keen to take forward, not just because of the potential benefits for Nepali people, but also because we wanted to set an example for other Nepali businesses.

Under UNDP's guidance, we have identified more than 10 Goals that are directly related to CG's work. The size and diversity of our 10,000-strong workforce shows how CG has created jobs in Nepal; this has a ripple effect, as it helps employees and their families access better nutrition, health, education and generally improve their standard of living.

Our HR department is also tasked with ensuring that gender parity is observed and enforced in the company. We also favor the use of eco-friendly alternative sources of energy, sustainable consumption and production patterns and inclusive industrialization in our work as far as possible. We





*Industrial waste water treatment plant installed at CG industrial park.*

are also creating local and international partnerships to better utilize collective resources to support various development projects.

We have also held orientations for hundreds of senior staff on the SDGs and their application in CG's operations. We are running monthly trainings in our factories and offices around the country, in fact. Such sessions help staff really absorb the values of the Global Goals and inform how they work. UNDP, along with our corporate social responsibility wing, the Chaudhary Foundation, is supporting CG in this regard.

### **WHERE DO YOU THINK NEPALI BUSINESSES STAND TODAY IN TERMS OF INTEGRATING DEVELOPMENT INTO THEIR DNA?**

It is always important for any individual, community or organization to take into account the long-term sustainability and impact of their actions, but it has never been more crucial than it is today, at a time when we must think twice as hard about how we make use of our limited resources. Ethical business policies that incorporate human prosperity should be the path for all businesses—it's everyone's responsibility at this point.

But so far, I'd say business leaders have been slow to step up. CG is one of the first, and I have lately become aware

of a few other businesses that have started to really align themselves with the SDGs. But time is of the essence. I call upon all business houses, small and large, to join hands in supporting the 2030 Agenda. This is for the good of humanity, and our collaborative efforts can help ensure our children see a better future.

### **WHAT DO YOU THINK BUSINESSES HAVE TO GAIN BY DIRECTING THEIR ATTENTION TO THE SDGS?**

The SDGs can create awareness about some of the world's most pressing issues, and are a catalyst for sustainable innovation, in that they encourage businesses to use their resources and networks to become a force for good. Adopting the SDG principles could also help shape national policies and laws to become more standardized, equal, inclusive and ecologically-conscious, which would be good news for the business environment in the country, and further guide companies to improve their own ways of working. In this way, aligning with the SDGs is really an investment in the businesses' own longevity and sustainability.

### **ACHIEVING THE SDGS WILL REQUIRE SUBSTANTIAL FINANCES. HOW CAN THE UN, DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS AND THE GOVERNMENT OF NEPAL HARNESS THE NECESSARY RESOURCES? IS THERE A WAY TO LEVERAGE PRIVATE CAPITAL FOR THIS PURPOSE?**

The UN, development partners and government could mobilize additional resources needed to meet the SDGs by becoming co-investors in innovative projects focused on addressing a range of development challenges.

It is a bit more complicated in the case of Nepal, however, because the government here imposes high taxes on businesses and it isn't entirely clear how these taxes are used in development work, since the results are hardly satisfactory. Without basic infrastructure, such as roadways to support supply chains, market expansion is difficult—this is the result of a lack of long-term vision, obsolete practices and inefficient governance. There is thus a need to strengthen trust between the public and private sectors, and I think the UN and development partners have a role to play here. Their engagement and facilitation would go a long way in creating an enabling environment to encourage companies like CG to join hands with and offer assistance to the government and other actors in achieving the SDGs.



The UN and UNDP should also continue their campaign to educate other members of the private sector about the SDGs. There are a lot of misconceptions surrounding the Global Goals; many people are intimidated by them and believe they are too ambitious for individuals to have an impact. They need to be shown the thousands of ways in which the SDGs apply to the smallest of actions in their own lives—whether it's just spending an hour reading to your children, or planting a tree, these are all contributing to one or multiple SDGs.

#### **CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE CHAUDHARY FOUNDATION'S EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THE SDGS?**

One of the objectives of the Chaudhary Foundation is to help raise Nepal's status from a least developed country to a developing country by 2022. We have programs running in 24 districts aimed at vulnerable and marginalized communities and focused on diverse areas of need. As far as education is concerned, we've built 40 schools in 10 districts impacted by the 2015 earthquakes and are attempting to introduce modern, digital technology to classrooms, as well as providing scholarships for needy students and grants to outstanding teachers. For disaster risk reduction, we are constructing a model village for 65 quake-affected households in Sindhupalchowk, using a comprehensive design that integrates a number of key facilities related to education; enterprise development; and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) besides shelter for the families.

We have also built a cultural hub in Shaswatdham, Nawalparasi, which has received 1.7 million visitors in the last 18 months, and we have also renovated the World Heritage Site at Pashupatinath. In addition to donating water filtration systems to schools and communities as part of hygiene education programs, we have initiated several social business projects, including the Unnati program, which is directed specifically at helping rural women strengthen and use their craftsmanship in earning a livelihood, and which has already opened four outlets selling the women's wares in the local market.

#### **WHAT KIND OF ACTIONS WOULD YOU RECOMMEND TO ENCOURAGE BUSINESSES TO ALIGN WITH THE SDGS?**

Businesses need to be presented the SDGs in a way that resonates with them, that renders clear how and why it makes perfect sense for them to incorporate the Global Goals into their normal operations, investments and partnerships. When a business does contribute in a meaningful way, they should be publicly acknowledged, or even offered tax breaks or subsidies so as to create incentives for others to follow suit. And no matter the size of the business, the government needs to implement a proper monitoring mechanism to ensure that the SDG indicators are being achieved and aligned with national targets.



## IMPLICATIONS OF THE SDGS FOR PLANNING IN FEDERAL NEPAL

By Pitamber Sharma, Former Vice Chairman, National Planning Commission

*The endorsement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the transition to a federal system of government are overlapping in Nepal. Coordinating the roles and mandates of Nepal's non-hierarchical three levels of government with respect to implementation of the SDGs will require a thought-through approach, writes Pitamber Sharma.*

The Sustainable Development Goals represent the most ambitious and comprehensive global initiative ever undertaken. The ambition of the SDGs is to *leave no one behind*, globally and in each country, region and community. The 17 Goals, with 169 targets and 230 indicators, are designed to ensure the welfare of humanity, and the health and integrity of the planet. Further, they are not just a call to action to attain the targets. They go much further in that they seek to address the often complex and entrenched roots and causes of national, regional and global economic, social, environmental and even political problems. The SDGs therefore pose an overarching and complex challenge: that of translating and adapting global and national goals to achievable and context-specific sub-national targets and indicators.



Nepal is among the countries that made an early start in taking the SDG commitments seriously. This is evidenced by the National Planning Commission's 2015 report 'Sustainable Development Goals for Nepal 2016-30'. The report made the first preliminary needs assessment as well as costing and financing strategy. NPC's 2017 study 'Sustainable Development Goals: Status and Roadmap 2016-30' takes stock of Nepal's development strategy and makes a preliminary projection of the roadmap for SDG attainment, with intermediate milestones for 2019, 2022, and 2025. But the task of institutionalizing these in the plans and programs of federal agencies, and then at the sub-national levels, remains daunting and has not yet begun.



The Constitution of Nepal, 2015 transformed Nepal from a unitary state to a federal republic. It also ushered in a fundamental paradigm shift in the systems, structures and functioning of sub-national governance. The Constitution stipulates three levels of government. It envisages a significant restructuring of the federal government, and new governance structures at the province and local levels. Devolution of power is guaranteed through the exclusive and concurrent powers as provided in Schedules 5 to 9 of the Constitution. As envisaged in the Constitution a non-hierarchic three levels of government based on the principles of coordination, cooperation and coexistence have now come into being following local, federal and provincial elections. It will still take some time for the all-inclusive and comprehensive devolution to be fully operational but the shift is already being felt. For the first time in two-and-a-half centuries in Nepal provinces and local governments have the power and indeed the responsibility of defining their own development agenda in coordination and cooperation with the federal government.

Seven provincial governments and 753 local governments are already implementing their first annual budget. Over 40,000 representatives have been elected to different bodies. For the first time in Nepal's history, women, Dalits, disadvantaged and groups, and janajatis comprise nearly 40 percent of the elected representatives at the local levels. Almost all local and provincial governments are in the process of conceptualizing a coherent development vision and designing periodic plans. Within governments at each level, albeit at a pace much slower than desired, institutional systems are being created to support the translation of the development pledges to achievable





**FOR THE FIRST TIME IN TWO AND A HALF CENTURIES IN NEPAL PROVINCES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS HAVE THE POWER AND INDEED THE RESPONSIBILITY OF DEFINING THEIR OWN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA IN COORDINATION AND COOPERATION WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.**

reality. This provides an opportune moment to integrate SDG goals and targets in the process of sub-national development thinking and sectoral planning. More importantly, since this is the first government at the sub-national levels, institutions and systems that are created and development thinking that is embedded in the government bureaucracy will find a precedence and resonance in succeeding periodic and annual plans and programs.

In a complementary turn of events, the endorsement of the SDGs and the beginnings of the federal system of governance have tended to overlap in Nepal. While the more relevant SDGs and targets provide an initial framework for setting development priorities at the province and municipality level, the commitment of elected provincial and local governments with respect to meeting their SDG targets can ensure the alignment of the province and municipality targets with that of the nation. Setting of SDG targets at the national level becomes meaningful only when they are achieved at the sub-national levels. A critical task then is to ensure that the priority SDG targets are identified in each context to inform the overall development and sectoral planning as well as program formulation and implementation processes.



The institutional focal point for SDG implementation, support and auditing at the federal level has to be the apex planning body. This agency should also develop and adapt methods and tools to guide SDG localization at the provincial and local levels. Further, SDG targets are to be attained over a 15 year time horizon. Not all SDG goals may need priority attention in the first phase. Some SDG targets may be more urgent than others. There may be a hierarchy of SDG targets, and some could be a precondition for achieving others. Also, achieving some targets may contribute to achieving multiple targets and indicators. These conceptual issues can meaningfully be addressed at the national level.

Provincial governments have now been formed and are operational. But provincial institutions of governance and planning are in their infancy. At this level, the institutional base for SDG localization has to be the provincial planning agency, which should assess and review province and local level data and set SDG targets and indicators for the province. It can revise the periodic SDG targets and indicators for the province suggested by the federal planning agency. Also, the provincial planning agency would be best placed to support the internalization of SDG targets and devise appropriate indicators in the formulation, auditing and evaluation of sectoral development plans and programs of the provinces.

The municipalities can review and assess the SDG targets and indicators suggested by the provincial planning agency and make changes appropriate to their context. In

most cases it will be at the local level that targets for Goal 1 (end poverty in all forms), Goal 2 (end hunger and achieve food security), Goal 3 (ensure healthy lives), Goal 4 (ensure inclusive and equitable education), Goal 5 (gender equality and women's empowerment), Goal 6 (availability of water and sanitation), Goal 7 (access to modern energy), Goal 11 (inclusive, sustainable cities), and Goal 13 (action on climate change) have to be set and addressed. Indicators selected at the local level will have to be more context specific, disaggregated and guided by the motto: leave no one behind.

The localization of the SDGs at the municipality level will require intensive support (both in terms of sensitization for SDG integration and requisite capacity building) mainly from the provincial planning agency. This can ensure the alignment of municipal targets with provincial targets and also strengthen cooperation and coordination between the province and the municipalities.

The above discussion basically highlights the fact that the process of integration of the SDGs in the planning at federal, province and municipal levels should be an iterative process where the ultimate national goals might remain the same but will have to be realistically assessed and reviewed at province and municipal levels annually and periodically. The federal set-up in Nepal, and consequent devolution of political, administrative and financial powers, can ensure that sub-national governments own the SDG targets and strive for their attainment in line with national targets.







## PROVINCE 2 ASPIRES FOR VIBRANT ECONOMY

### AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. HARI BANSH JHA

Hari Bansh Jha, Vice Chairman of Policy Commission of Province No. 2 has been instrumental in facilitating the process of formulating budget, policies and programs, stakeholders mapping, periodic plan and state profile based on SDGs. He tenured as Professor of Economics at Tribhuvan University and Executive Director of Centre for Economic and Technical Studies. Over the years, he has also been a scholar with various prestigious fellowships in India, China and Germany among others. Jha's interests revolve around South Asian affairs, border issues, conflict and peace, international migration, child labour, human trafficking, agriculture, international trade, Dalit, Janajati and Madhesi communities. He has authored and edited 28 books on national and international affairs and also contributed to leading newspapers and journals.

#### **YOU ARE THE FIRST VC OF THE POLICY COMMISSION OF PROVINCE NUMBER 2. HOW HAVE YOU ACCESSED THE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF THE PROVINCE?**

We have been facing serious challenges in developing Province No. 2 ever since the formation of state government on Falgun 3, 2075. One of the common challenges is that the state has not been equipped with adequate number of employees from the federal government to implement development programmes. Besides, most of the employees who have been working in the state are not very concerned about supporting the government. This is one of the main reasons for the budget meant for development projects is being spent inappropriately. Additionally, we are also facing a resource crunch in executing development projects. But, on the brighter side, despite all these challenges, the state government is committed to give a new direction to the state while people are equally enthusiastic to witness positive changes. Our advantage is the huge demographic dividend and other natural resources we possess, readily available for development activities. With such human and natural resources, we plan to establish Province No. 2 as a vibrant economy in the future.

#### **DIFFERENT INDICATORS SHOW THAT PROVINCE NUMBER 2 NEEDS SERIOUS PLANNING AND FUND TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES RELATED TO POVERTY, EDUCATION, HEALTH AND OTHER SOCIAL SECTORS. DO YOU HAVE ANY**

#### **SPECIFIC VISION TO ADDRESS THOSE ISSUES?**

The Human Development Index shows a deplorable picture of Province No. 2, taking into account poverty, education, health and other social sectors. By far this is also the truth. Therefore, we need to encourage massive technical and financial sectors from both internal and external sources to invest in development projects as required by the social sector. We are now engaged in an exercise to identify such projects that could have a multiplier effect in our economy. Our vision for change is clear and will soon be reflected through actions.

#### **YOU ARE PREPARING THE FIRST PERIODIC PLAN OF THE PROVINCE. WHAT ARE THE MAJOR PRIORITIES OF THE PLAN?**

Recently, we have come out with stakeholders mapping for Province No. 2. According to our plan, we are going to engage ourselves in making provincial profile along with the periodic plan. Our priorities for developing our economy are set where agricultural development is the top priority, followed by the development of education, health and other sectors.

#### **THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS ADOPTED SDGS IN ITS PERIODIC PLAN. HOW ARE YOU PLANNING TO INCORPORATE SDGS IN THE PROVINCIAL PLAN?**

It is appealing and admirable to see that the federal government has adopted SDGs in its periodic plan. It is also very likely that we will also incorporate SDGs when we create the provincial profile. We will complete this task on time within this fiscal year.

#### **WHAT IS THE SITUATION OF DEVELOPMENT FINANCE IN YOUR PROVINCE? HOW ARE YOU PLANNING TO MANAGE/ MOBILIZE FINANCIAL RESOURCES NEEDED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROVINCE 2?**

As per the constitutional provision, currently we are largely dependent on the federal government concerning the finances. But we have noticed that the budgetary allocation made by the federal government for our development activities is not adequate. Therefore, we have also imposed certain taxes in the process of mobilizing additional resources for the development.





## STRENGTH IN NUMBERS: HOW THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT COULD HELP MAKE GOOD ON THE SDGS

### Special Report

*The Government of Nepal has embraced cooperatives as one of the three pillars of the economy, cognizant of their power and evolving prospects to contribute to poverty reduction, service delivery, gender equality and good governance.*

## THE 34,500 COOPERATIVES NOW ACTIVE ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE MANAGED BY 6.3 MILLION PEOPLE—OVER HALF OF WHOM ARE WOMEN—AND THE SECTOR IS SHOWING NO SIGN OF SLOWING DOWN.

Across the world today, cooperatives are increasingly seen as key players at the grassroots level, effectively organizing farmers and small businesses, providing much-needed financial support, and empowering the poor by creating jobs and income-generating activities. It is therefore not surprising that the Government of Nepal has embraced cooperatives as one of the three main pillars of the economy, alongside the public and private sectors.

With over 34,500 cooperatives active across the country, managed by 6.3 million members, the sector has built an impressive network already. And it shows no sign of slowing down; every year, cooperatives are making inroads into newer areas such as education and health, agriculture, industry and banking. The fact that cooperatives serve around one-third of the Nepali population, and show seemingly boundless potential for expansion, means they will play a crucial role in helping the country to make progress on the SDGs.

“I don’t believe there is a single one out of the 17 SDGs that doesn’t apply to cooperatives, in some form or the other,” says Keshab Badal, chairperson of the National Cooperative Federation of Nepal (NCFN), an umbrella body

of cooperatives in the country. Badal explains that the Federation has been campaigning to promote the SDGs since they first came into effect in 2015, by conducting training and orientation programs at the district and local levels on the links between the Global Goals and the cooperative movement.

The most obvious of these links has to do with the impact of cooperatives on poverty reduction, or SDG 1, through the creation of livelihood opportunities, particularly for poor segments of society. Data from the Federation shows that cooperatives have generated over 64,000 full-time jobs, while indirectly benefitting around 1 million others. In fact, the sector contributes around 4 percent of the country’s total GDP, equal to that of the tourism industry.

The scope of their functions has also evolved over time. While cooperatives used to largely limit themselves to collecting deposits from members and providing loans, they are now opening up to a more diverse range of income-generating activities—thereby raising the earnings of the cooperatives themselves on the one hand and creating jobs on the other.

Similarly, given that an overwhelming number of co-ops in Nepal are involved in boosting productivity and production in agriculture and animal husbandry, there is also a clear link to SDG 2, ending hunger and improving food security.

In other cases, cooperatives can be found running health centers and hospitals in more remote areas of the country, thereby enabling communities otherwise cut off from health services to access necessary medical treatment at affordable rates. In a context where the government still hasn't been able to provide quality healthcare at the local level, thousands are benefitting from the intervention of the cooperatives, which incidentally contributes to SDG 3 on the promotion of health and well-being.

It's a similar situation when it comes to education, or SDG 4: in some places where government-run institutions are unable to ensure quality education, cooperatives have stepped in to fill the gap, running schools and colleges targeted at people from lower-income groups who cannot afford private school education.

And, in what is one of the sector's biggest accomplishments, women comprise over 52 percent of the total members of cooperatives. This positively illustrates the importance of the cooperative model in terms of expanding women's opportunities to participate in different social and economic activities, thereby contributing to their empowerment and financial independence, and gender equality overall—a clear nod to SDG 5.

Badal also reflects on how cooperatives can support effective governance, another important aspect of the SDGs, particularly in the new federal context of Nepal. "Co-ops, together with local governments, can help to better spread out state benefits to the local



**“I DON'T BELIEVE THERE IS A SINGLE ONE OUT OF THE 17 SDGS THAT DOESN'T APPLY TO COOPERATIVES IN SOME FORM OR THE OTHER,”**

- Keshab, Chairperson National Innovation Center, Nepal



level," he says. He adds that they also assist in maintaining peace in society through their mediation and advocacy functions. According to Badal, examples of this abounded in the period not too long ago when different communities were divided over the form and features of federalism in the country, where the involvement of cooperatives was vital in preventing tensions from spiraling out of control.

In this way, the work of cooperatives can be seen as exerting impact—direct as well as indirect—on a majority of the SDGs. "The part

cooperatives have played in mobilizing local resources and communities while also delivering various essential services at the local level is highly encouraging," says Pushpa Raj Kandel, vice-chair of the National Planning Commission, the government's focal agency for the SDGs. As proof of the growing acceptance of their power and prospects, NPC has created an SDG Steering Committee led by the Prime Minister in which cooperatives are represented; similarly, a number of thematic committees associated with each of the 17 Goals have also included cooperatives among their key stakeholders.

In its report titled 'Sustainable Development Goals—Status and Roadmap: 2016-2030', the NPC estimated that achieving all the targets of the SDGs will cost the country a whopping Rs. 1.77 trillion annually, which is around 68 percent of the total GDP of the country. "It is evident that unless the private sector, NGOs and cooperatives bear some of the burden, the shortfall in funding can never be bridged, and the Global Goals will remain a distant dream," Kandel says.



## YOUNG AGENTS OF CHANGE

By Binita Karki, Association of Youth Organizations Nepal (AYON)

*Productive engagement of youth, particularly in countries like Nepal where they make up a sizeable portion of the population, is key to bringing about the kind of ground-up social and political transformations that are the building blocks of sustainable development.*

There's little question that young people have a stake and a vital role to play—both as beneficiaries and actors—in the development of their countries. But their participation becomes particularly significant in countries like Nepal that are undergoing what is called a demographic 'youth bulge'. Defined as people between the ages of 16 and 40, youth make up 40.35 percent of the total population of the country, and it is clear that unless this large cohort can be meaningfully engaged to contribute to positive change, SDG achievement will prove near impossible.





Following the promulgation of the new Constitution in 2015, Nepal began its transition to a federal democratic republic. And as part of the series of polls conducted in 2017 to elect representatives to the new provincial and local-level government bodies, many young people filed their candidacy and even triumphed on numerous counts.

According to the Election Commission of Nepal, nearly 40 percent of those elected to public office at the local level were youth. However, that figure dropped to 26.63 percent in provincial assemblies, 14.09 percent in the House of Representatives, and even lower to 6.77 percent in the National Assembly. The numbers thus show a clear decline as we move from local to national-level politics—indicating a need for more work to engage young people throughout the different levels of political processes and decision making.

Obviously, such efforts must extend beyond the political sphere. In an encouraging move, Nepal's budget for fiscal year 2018/19 put forth several provisions geared to boost youth employment and self-employment. These include offering concessional loans of Rs. 700,000, at five percent interest, to young people with a higher-education degree to promote entrepreneurship, and establishment of industrial areas at the local level with the participation of the private sector, among other measures. For a country that loses over 300,000 youths to overseas employment every year, such schemes are vital to retaining, empowering and capitalizing on the young workforce—provided they are effectively implemented.

In the context of the new federalized structure of the country, and the overarching bid to decentralize government services and decision-making processes—oftentimes referred to as 'taking Singha Durbar to every village'—it is also essential to apply this approach to the SDGs. Localization of the SDGs, in terms of both awareness and action on Agenda 2030, is key at this point in the country's history, and youth involvement is crucial therein.

Better acquaintance with the Global Goals, and with the core ideas of equality, equity, inclusion, sustainability and good governance that the SDGs encapsulate will help these youths learn more about their own rights and responsibilities, as well as those of local governments. In this way, they will be able to keep better vigilance over the actions of authorities, and also potentially themselves contribute to supporting service delivery and development in their own communities. This could be achieved by ensuring youth representation in local

decision-making processes; educating local governments and other stakeholders about the SDGs and their commitments to the same; supporting local governments in orienting their action plans to better align with the SDGs as well as creating a more conducive environment for youth entrepreneurship; undertaking initiatives to help improve access to education for all; and helping to transfer ideas and innovation from one community to another, just to name a few.

Nepal is thus yet to unlock and utilize the full potential of its sizeable young population, and the longer it takes to engage this precious human resource—the demographic window of opportunity that the country is enjoying at present won't last forever, after all—the lower the chances of actually reaching our development goals.

For this to change, not only must society and the government's perceptions of young people shift dramatically to accept the latter as active contributors to development, but young people in Nepal also need to avoid succumbing to manipulation by political entities, and focus instead on supporting and pressuring the government, development partners and other stakeholders in the implementation of youth-related initiatives and interventions. Only then can any substantive progress be made on the SDGs.

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**BETTER ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE SDGs, AND WITH THE CORE IDEAS OF EQUALITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, SUSTAINABILITY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE THEREIN, HELPS YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN ABOUT THEIR OWN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES, AS WELL AS KEEP BETTER VIGILANCE OVER THE ACTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS.**

# A FRAGMENTED FREEDOM



I grew up knowing only the ways of slavery. I learned early on that our survival was dependent on a small plot of farmland bestowed to us by the landlord after each harvest. The menfolk in our family would work the fields, while the women took care of household duties. Finances were very tight; there was never any spare cash for medical expenses or any other urgent necessities, and we always had to go back to the landlord for loans to pay for any emergencies.

When I got married, it was into another family of Kamaiyas, which meant a continuation of the exploitation and harassment my own family had long suffered. For my part, I worked for three different landlord families during my days as a domestic slave, and each time, it was more or less the same story of cruelty. I was treated like an object, heaped on with endless backbreaking chores—in one place, they'd even wake me up in the middle of the night just to scream at me for not working hard enough.

The news of the abolition of the Kamaiya system in 2000, then, came as an incredible relief to all of us; it was something we had so longed to hear for so many years. And our excitement knew no bounds when the government announced that each Kamaiya household would be eligible to receive five katthas of land. We were looking forward to finally casting off the chains of our past and starting anew, building new lives for ourselves and our children.

That elation, however, proved short-lived. When we went to the local government office to apply for the promised land grant, the officials there informed us that our names were not included on the list of beneficiaries. We couldn't understand why this was the case—our family was, after all, more than eligible to receive the support.

Without land, we grew increasingly despondent and desperate. My husband and I took up daily wage labor in order to feed our family of four, but the pay was exceedingly low because of the oversupply of freed Kamaiyas and Kamlaris like us who also needed to make a living. If we didn't take the job and agree to the offered wage, there would be many other former slaves who would happily take our place. And since we had few other skills—there had been no opportunity to learn anything when we had been bound to the landlords—daily wage work was our only source of income.

*It was only later on that we discovered the truth: one of our previous landlords had mentioned to officials that we owned one kattha of land, and we had thus been disqualified from the grant list. And we weren't the only victims of such contemptible, petty behavior. Many other landlords, taking advantage of the illiteracy of the Kamaiyas and Kamlaris under them, had filled out the government forms on their behalf and ruined their chances of financial freedom, a cunning way to force these families to return and continue working for them.*

And the trick worked in the case of many freed slaves. Without an alternative means to earn a livelihood, many went back to their old masters to work as farm hands. My family was, however, fortunate enough to not have to make that choice. In any case, I would much rather try my luck at working for daily wages than relive that nightmare.

There are still a host of problems affecting our community. Some are not even aware that the Kamaiya system has been abolished and are still in the grip of their landlords. Many others, like us, despite being technically unchained,

have been deprived of land grants and are struggling to make a basic living. Either way, life is hard, and our freedom incomplete.

The government must adhere to national laws and international treaties to which the country is a signatory. We are being denied the opportunity to lead a dignified life, and our circumstances have not much improved—and in some cases have stayed the same—when we were slaves.

If something is not done right away, we risk relegating a new generation of Kamaiya and Kamlari children to the same fate we struggled so hard to escape. The United Nations, along with other civil society and government stakeholders, must look into the issue seriously, and help to develop concrete plans and policies related to the rehabilitation of former slaves. Everyone should have a right to education, health, employment and dignity.

Alongside this, the former slaves themselves should also rally together and find strength in numbers. Social activism has been an important tool in bringing our concerns to the fore so far. We have, for instance, managed to set up a community network to help fellow Kamaiyas and Kamlaris to better access justice, which has proved invaluable in assisting them in acquiring birth certificates, citizenship cards and other government documents.

It was this forum that also gave me the support I needed to enter politics and be elected as a ward member for Rajapur in the 2017 local elections. I am committed to making the most of my position, using all the power and resources at my disposal to continue pushing for the rights of my people, to ensure that the new lives we were promised actually materialize.



LAXMI THARU

**“THE NEWS OF THE ABOLITION OF THE KAMAIYA SYSTEM IN 2000 CAME AS AN INCREDIBLE RELIEF TO ALL OF US; BUT THE ELATION PROVED SHORT-LIVED. WHEN WE WENT TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICE TO APPLY FOR THE LAND GRANT PROMISED US, WE WERE TURNED AWAY.”**





# RESILIENCE AFTER THE EARTHQUAKES: AN ONGOING PROCESS FOR NEPAL

## AN INTERVIEW WITH SUSHIL GYEWALI

Sushil Gyewali is the Chief Executive Officer of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) of Nepal, which has responsibility for reconstruction and rehabilitation following the 2015 earthquakes. The former Executive Director of the Town Development Fund, he is a specialist in local governance, planning and urban development, and has a wealth of experience in policy formation, and design and implementation of development projects. Development Advocate speaks with him about what Nepal has learned about building resilience following the earthquakes, and how this relates to achievement of the SDGs.

### IN WHAT WAYS IS NEPAL BETTER PREPARED TO WITHSTAND NATURAL DISASTERS NOW THAN PRIOR TO 2015?

To a certain extent, Nepal is better prepared, although we cannot yet assert we are fully prepared because it is a process. Talking about preparedness we have to look at the perspectives of the people themselves and the extent they are more prepared. Are they better aware of potential future disasters? How have they incorporated disaster preparedness into their lifestyles? But various government stakeholders are also responsible for preparedness, and Nepal recently opted into a federal system. This makes it a different context from 2015 when there was unitary system. Now, with different levels of government, the system must be adapted – this is a reform process just in its primitive stages. We also must appreciate there are many different stakeholders that are involved in disaster preparedness - this includes private sector and the media.

### DO YOU THINK THE EXPERIENCE OF 2015 CHANGED THE UNDERSTANDING OF RESILIENCE IN NEPAL, AS A CROSS CUTTING DEVELOPMENT ISSUE? HOW?

The attitude towards resilience among the people is changing. Before, the general thinking on disaster management, preparedness and resilience only related to



**THE MARGINALIZED POPULATION WERE MOST VULNERABLE TO DISASTERS... FROM THE RECONSTRUCTION AND RECOVERY PERSPECTIVE, SPECIAL ATTENTION IS NEEDED FOR THIS POPULATION, AS INEQUALITY HAS A MAJOR IMPACT ON DISASTER RESILIENCE."**

rescue and relief. But now it is broader, and it is understood considering different facets of society; it's now defined at levels of family, community, government or even institutional resilience. As a cross cutting development issue, building resilience is a process and we must understand it better within the various spheres of Nepal's society.

**RESILIENCE IS AN ISSUE THAT CUTS ACROSS MANY OF THE SDGS. FOR EXAMPLE, GOAL 10 FOCUSES ON REDUCING INEQUALITIES. IN NEPAL, WHAT HAS BEEN THE LINK BETWEEN EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE AND RECOVERY AND REDUCING INEQUALITIES?**

It is obvious that the marginalized population were most vulnerable to disasters and their households more affected. If we look from the reconstruction and recovery perspective, these people are still struggling to rebuild their houses. They require special attention and support. So we designed a program to identify and support them with socio-technical assistance and extra funding. We've now identified around 18,000 households and listed them as vulnerable. They are being supported by various agencies, together with the NRA, with special technical and social assistance, including the Economic Recovery

and Livelihood Support Program. Special funding and an extra top-up grant of Rs. 50,000 has also been provided. We realize special attention is needed for the marginalized populations who are very vulnerable, as inequality has a major impact on disaster resilience.

**SIMILARLY, GOAL 17 RECOGNIZES PARTNERSHIPS AS A KEY ENABLER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. WHAT HAS NEPAL'S EXPERIENCE OF EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE AND RECOVERY SAID ABOUT THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS IN DEVELOPMENT?**

We've had both good and bitter experiences. Sometimes it's been very difficult to coordinate and work together in a streamlined manner. Everyone would like to work to their own interest, with their own approach, so they seek a degree of freedom and autonomy. But the need of the overall program is to tie up everyone within a framework, with everyone as a part of an overall institutional approach instead of working in isolation.

But we've also had very good experiences. We have a Development Assistance Coordination and Facilitation Committee and different levels of development partners



like NGOs, private sector, and others. Under the leadership of the NRA, we have a platform where all stakeholders can feel they are part of the process and can share views and approaches and learn from one another.

We also prepared the Post Disaster Recovery Framework (PDRF), a five-year reconstruction and recovery plan. In this framework, there was a program package for every sector and partner, defining the work areas for private sector, NGOs, government agencies and other development partners. We have designed the institutional framework, financial framework and overall program framework, and everyone is comfortable working within that common agenda. We have been working in a very coordinated way due to this framework. We believe that the NRA, which is responsible for coordinating and leading the agenda, should be flexible to accommodate the concerns of other stakeholders without straying from the goal we must achieve. It is important to remember that process-wise one can be flexible but goal-wise one has to be very concentrated. If we can do this, partnerships can be managed very well.

### **AS NEPAL IS FEDERALIZED, HOW SHOULD THE PROCESS OF CONTINUOUSLY BUILDING RESILIENCE BE LOCALIZED?**

When localizing any agenda, we have to talk to the community about specific issues and about their needs. They will recognize these issues as their local agenda; we have to start with this approach in the community and at the local government level. Through this bottom-up approach, we can link the issues they identify to the SDGs as well. How we frame and communicate the agenda is the main concern. For example, when localizing the PDRF, we mobilized the local community and local government to devise their own reconstruction and recovery plan and request human and financial resources for it. We have already initiated a process with the local governments to come up with their own recovery plans for the first time in Nepal. The good news is that there are already such plans in 17 districts so far. Now we are integrating these local plans into the national PDRF. Through this integration the local level will consider the national PDRF as their own - as reflecting their own local issues.



A similar approach can be used to easily localize the SDGs as well. By integrating SDG processes into local plans, the SDG agenda will become their own local agenda. After this, it is important we think about the institutional structure to implement these plans and how it can be incorporated into local institutional mechanisms and systems. Similarly, financial resources are required to link these plans and programs together. When we link these, we will have the SDGs localized and integrated into the whole system, which will be sustainable in the long run.







# MAINSTREAMING THE MARGINALIZED

## Special Report

*Leaders of the community of people with disabilities express hope that no one will be left behind, be it in education, health, employment or policy formulation.*

## AS PER THE SPIRIT OF LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND ENVISIONED IN THE SDGs, PEOPLE FROM OUR COMMUNITY MUST GET EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES IN EVERY FIELD, SAYS SUDARSON SUBEDI, CHAIRPERSON OF THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE DISABLED-NEPAL.

In every country, people with disabilities remain among the most excluded and hard-to-reach communities, one which is largely deprived of good education, healthcare and income generation opportunities. The situation is worse in developing countries like Nepal where 1.94 percent of the total population has one or multiple forms of disability. They are one of the most excluded groups, as very little has been done towards mainstreaming their concerns.

The SDGs, adopted by over 190 countries including Nepal, are a comprehensive development framework that focuses on inclusive development, thereby enhancing the quality of life of marginalized communities. Among the 17 goals, seven are explicitly related to persons with disability, although all the goals are concerned with them under the overarching principle of *leaving no one behind*.

As the Nepal Government has already defined its roadmap and national SDG indicators, the leaders of the community of people with disabilities express hope that no one will be left behind, be it in education, health, employment or policy formulation.

Sudarson Subedi, chairperson of the National Federation of the Disabled-Nepal, the umbrella body of people with disabilities and representing more than 300 member

organizations, says all stakeholders—the government, organizations advocating for the rights of the disabled, and UN agencies—should work hand in hand to achieve the goals by 2030.

Thousands of children have been deprived of education for lack of accessible classrooms and trained teachers; children with blindness are often without braille textbooks; and even emergency service providers like hospitals aren't disabled-friendly. Very few people from the community have reached decision-making positions; representation in the three tiers of government is also very low. Given the lack of meaningful representation in the legislative and executive branches, their concerns often don't find a place in policies and laws.

Subedi believes equitable development isn't possible unless people with disabilities can contribute to policy formulation. "As per the spirit of leaving no one behind envisioned in the SDGs, people from our community must get equitable opportunities in every field," he says.

The Federation has prepared a comprehensive position paper clearly outlining what should be done to attain those SDGs concerned with people with disabilities. The aim of the paper is also to facilitate the mainstreaming of disability in the SDG process, accelerate progress on

SDG targets and provide policy support for disability-inclusive SDG processes.

The position paper, according to Subedi, provides a roadmap for inclusive and sustainable development. It states that all stakeholders must come together to implement the SDGs by mainstreaming disability across the board. Another recommendation of the Federation is the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As the three tiers of government are in the process of formulating their laws, they should give priority to inclusive provisions and their robust implementation.

The Federation also suggests incorporating relevant SDG targets and indicators into the National Policy and Plan of Action that is under consideration for revision. It says establishing meaningful and functional partnerships between the government and international development partners at local, provincial and federal levels could be another step towards attaining the goals. The position paper states: "meaningful collaboration and synergy among the stakeholders should be developed for SDGs processes that will be able to include disability as a core action area".

The Federation also advocates that a framework for gender-responsive and disability-inclusive local

## DISABILITY IN THE SDG ERA



governance is instrumental for promoting inclusive development. As disability and poverty have a complex and interdependent relationship, the Federation suggests prioritizing people with disability as major target beneficiaries of development and poverty reduction programs.

Another recommendation the policy paper makes is engagement with the private sector in promoting the rights of persons with disability in education, health, employment and skill development, and innovation in promoting accessibility, raising awareness and disseminating information from the center to the local level to ensure inclusive development and an equitable

society. It also suggests establishing disability and SDG forums at the sub-regional (SAARC) level in order to encourage region-wide discussion and engagement.

“We have long heard the commitments; now it is time to come up with specific, targeted plans and processes to execute the commitments,” Subedi says. The Federation is currently working on making the disability movement vibrant by reorienting itself in accordance with the federal structure of the country. It believes the recent change in the form of governance comes with both opportunities and challenges. Therefore, it is making an effort to create inclusive policies and institutions right from the rural municipalities to the national level.





## MAKING A SUCCESS OF FEDERALISM: PUTTING DATA AT THE HEART OF NEPAL'S DECISION MAKING

By Rurik Marsden, Head, UK Department for International Development (DFID), Nepal

*Nepal needs to invest urgently in strong federalism-ready data management systems, and the Sustainable Development Goals could provide the framework to support this, writes Rurik Marsden, Head of DFID Nepal.*

Nepal's new federal system is bringing decision making on public services and economic development closer to the people. This is an opportunity to improve services by matching delivery more closely to local priorities. But Nepal needs to have clear indicators of progress and robust and reliable data so that local, state and federal governments can track progress with development, learn what is working, and make course corrections. Urgent action is needed now to ensure strong data systems are in place. The Sustainable Development Goals could provide the framework to support this.



Photo: Adelanta Big Data via flickr.com

As political scientist Alexis de Tocqueville said, a federal system “combines the various advantage of large and small size for nations.” Sub-national governments are literally closer to the people who elected them, and so able to design policies and services that respond more directly to local priorities. And as governments are closer to their constituents, the constituents are better placed to make a judgement on their performance – and perhaps decide whether to vote for them again, or not.

Nepal is making progress implementing the federal system of government. Travelling around Nepal you see exciting examples of local innovation such as investment in specialist services in response to local health issues, targeted efforts to increase access to education for girls from the most vulnerable communities, or thoughtful planning to try to build resilience to environmental hazards.

However, really good decision making on policies and investments requires really good data at local and state levels. If sub-national governments can base their decisions on robust data about the costs per unit of improving maternal mortality or generating economic opportunities, they will be more likely to get the greatest value from every rupee of tax-payers’ money. Without good data, even the most committed state or local leader will be working with a significant handicap. Voters also will find it harder to judge whether politicians have actually been delivering.

Nepal is a diverse country and there is huge variation in the challenges faced by, and performance of, local governments. Over the coming months and years there is important work to be done to clarify precisely which functions should be delivered by which sphere of government, ensure local and state governments have the capable staff and effective systems that they need to deliver, nurture effective coordination between different governments, and match financial resources with responsibilities.

The government has asked the World Bank and UNDP to carry out a federal needs assessment to map out some of the key challenges. But ultimately Nepal will need to find its own solutions – and in doing so create a form of federalism that works for Nepal. Again, really good real-time data could also play an important role. Robust data about progress against development priorities will make

it easier to identify which governments are doing well, speed up lesson learning across governments and ensure that those which are struggling get extra support.

A shared framework of indicators across the country will obviously be essential to help Nepal to track progress against development priorities. The SDGs, agreed by the UN General Assembly in 2015, could provide such an overall delivery framework. 169 targets and a comprehensive set of indicators have been developed through a global process, in order to help measure progress against the 17 SDGs. The internationally agreed SDGs were designed to be broad, covering development priorities from basic health services to justice and from economic development to climate resilience. So, perhaps with careful prioritization, they would provide an excellent framework for Nepal to use to measure progress at local, state and federal level. Most importantly Nepal has already started a process of localizing the SDGs across the country.

Given the importance of data for successfully implementing the federal system, Nepal needs to invest urgently in really strong federalism-ready data management systems. The role of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) will be critical to building the trust and legitimacy of the National Statistical System.

The CBS needs to be trusted by federal, provincial and local governments to produce accurate impartial statistics that can inform decision making by all of Nepal’s 761 governments. Nepal cannot afford to waste time and resources in duplication of data collection by different levels of governments, or in disagreements between governments about statistics. It will be crucial that the CBS continues to engage with local and state governments to understand their data demands, interests and capacities.

The forthcoming 2021 census is a particularly important opportunity to build a picture of development needs across federal Nepal. It will be essential that consultations on the census start early and are based on detailed discussions with subnational governments across the country. The CBS needs to start this work now with support from across the political spectrum. A well designed and inclusive census will generate data that drives good decision making and accelerates Nepal’s development, but a poorly designed census risks creating misunderstanding and confusion.

# N-PEACE AWARDS 2016



santi Chaudhary  
Nepal





## FOR THE COMMUNITY, BY THE COMMUNITY

### Special Report

*As a former bonded labourer herself, Basanti Chaudhary has maximized her proximity to the cause and community to bring their issues into the public domain and pressure authorities to act, becoming one of the most prominent voices in the movement for Kamaiya/Kamlari rights.*

**“WHILE THE MAJOR FOCUS OF THE CAMPAIGNS WE UNDERTOOK WERE CERTAINLY TO CALL FOR JUSTICE FOR FORMER BONDED LABORERS, THEY’VE ALSO INCLUDED A STRONG ELEMENT OF ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY. THESE ARE ALL INTERLINKED ISSUES.”**

- Basanti Chaudhary

Basanti Chaudhary feels that her entry into social activism was an inevitable outcome of the kind of life she had led. Born to a family of Kamaiyas and Kamlaris—or bonded labourers—in Kailali, she was sent to work for a landlord’s family at the age of six. And for the next six years, young Basanti’s days were given over entirely to the demands and whims of her erstwhile employers—it was only when all the household chores were complete that she would steal away a little time for herself to study.

In this way, Chaudhary managed to complete the fifth grade while still a Kamlari. But by then, her parents had become involved in the campaign for the rights of bonded labourers in Nepal, and inspired, she too fled from her landlord’s house and returned home. The movement comprised separate groups for men and women, and as no other member of the women’s group could read and write, Basanti was tasked with all documentation when it came to their campaigns. This would be her initiation into a life of activism.

These efforts appeared to pay off when, in July 2000, the Government announced the official liberation of Kamaiyas, with the added pledge to provide them land and money

to aid their rehabilitation. But this proved easier said than done. The 37,000 freed Kamaiyas who had once embraced the news so enthusiastically were either made to wait an extremely long time to receive their packages, or were outright deprived of the support despite being eligible. To counter this, and to persuade the government to live up to the commitments made to former Kamaiyas, the Kamaiya Partha Unmulan Samaj (KPUS) was established.

With over 3,000 members, the KPUS has been a veritable cornerstone in the fight for the rights of freed slaves in the country, bringing their concerns and issues into the public domain and creating pressure on the authorities to take action. Chaudhary—who had already been leading campaigns at the community and district levels related to human rights, including domestic violence and discrimination suffered by Kamlaris, as head of the Kailali chapter of the National Alliance of Women Human Rights Defenders (NAWHRD)—was eventually drawn to KPUS herself, and has now been chairing the organization for five years.

“While the major focus of the campaigns we undertook was certainly to call for justice for former bonded

labourers, they've also included a strong element of advocacy for women's rights and gender equality," Chaudhary says. "These are all interlinked issues; you can't push for one without the other."

Today, 18 years since the Kamaiyas were liberated, the majority of those who have been provided the pledged packages in Kailali have made good use of the support, taking up work as farmers, auto-rickshaw owners or micro-entrepreneurs, and sending their children to school, according to Chaudhary. However, she says 926 out of the 8,910 freed slaves in the district are yet to receive any assistance from the government and are struggling to get by. "They have been forced to live in makeshift shelters on river banks or barren public land, and have very few means of making a living," she says.

Through KPUS, Chaudhary and her fellow activists are trying to raise the prospects of the community. Besides advocacy, the organization is currently offering a number of trainings in entrepreneurship and income-generating activities such as vegetable farming, tailoring, fisheries and hair-cutting, among others, which have already helped many freed Kamaiyas find alternative livelihoods.

**"NOT ONLY WAS THE N-PEACE AWARD A FITTING TRIBUTE TO THE WORK WE WERE DOING FOR THE RIGHTS AND EMPOWERMENT OF OUR PEOPLE, IT ALSO HELPED TO INTERNATIONALIZE THE AGENDA WE HAD BEEN RAISING."**

- Basanti Chaudhary







Another aspect of her work with both the NAWHRD and KPUS is to maintain social cohesion among the different communities living in a region where communal tensions have lately been heightened in the lead-up to the federal restructuring of the country, based largely on differences of opinion over provincial boundaries. To restore harmony, Chaudhary has helped set up committees that bring together members of clashing communities to settle on a peaceful way forward—mechanisms that have proved very effective in mitigating conflict.

In recognition of her work and achievements, Chaudhary was among nine women from around Asia who were honored at the 2016 N-Peace Awards—a UNDP flagship initiative launched in 2010 to commemorate peace champions in the region and celebrate their contributions to women, peace and security in their communities. “Not only was it a fitting tribute to our work for the rights and empowerment of our people, it also helped to internationalize the agenda we had been raising,” Chaudhary says. “It gave us the encouragement and motivation to fight even harder going forth.”

For the next few years, Chaudhary plans to continue working as a local campaigner, but eventually hopes to enter politics. “That kind of direct influence at the policy level would provide more opportunity to bring about social transformation,” she says. “Having worked with our people for so long and at such proximity, I feel I am best placed to represent their needs and priorities.”

## PUSHING BACK FROM THE MARGINS



When I was a child, we were free to go anywhere we wanted. I remember heading into Bardiya National Park with my parents to pan for gold on the banks of the river, or to catch fish to eat, or whatever else we needed to survive. Everything was ours, to use as we saw fit—we wanted for nothing.

Those days are long gone now. We have been rendered outsiders, aliens in our own home, our movements and activities consistently controlled. There are restrictions here, restrictions there, restrictions everywhere.

We, the people of the Sonaha community, do not own land as such, which means farming is out of the question. Our lives and livelihoods have always revolved around mining gold and fishing—it's what our forefathers did. It's what most of us still do.

Many people assume we are Tharus, and there are certainly some similarities on the surface. But we are ultimately a distinct ethnic group, with our own language and culture. And Tharus and Sonahas are poles apart when it comes to the nature of our livelihoods. Most Tharus rely on subsistence farming as their traditional occupation, while we have only ever depended on the Karnali. This is how it's been for generations, this water and these banks are our means of survival.

But now the authorities want us to change our way of life. They demand that we stop using the river, the national park, the community forests and the land. This push began many years ago, in 1988, when our right to enter Bardiya National Park was taken away. The authorities began harassing our people, confiscating our goods, and frequently arresting us for going into the park. And it didn't stop there. Eventually, we were prevented from entering even the buffer zone area.

Things only got worse with time, as divisions appeared within the community itself. Those families that had managed to acquire and register land on the banks of the Karnali began to turn against the rest of us, joining in the effort to stop us from panning gold. From 2015 onwards, it's become even more difficult—we are now barred from even those areas that do not fall within the boundaries of the national park.

What alternatives have we been given? How will we survive? What will happen to our way of life? These questions torment us every day.

The administration has failed to acknowledge a simple fact: our survival is directly linked to the river, and our rights to it have been granted to us by birth. By denying us access to the river and the forests, the government is violating its own national and international commitments to ensure the rights of indigenous people

over their ancestral lands and resources. The United Nations, civil society and other development partners must exert pressure on the government to uphold the promises it has made in being a signatory to various treaties on the rights of indigenous communities like the Sonahas.

While protection of forests and natural resources is undoubtedly important, and we appreciate the government's diligence in this regard, conservation should not be pursued at the expense of the survival of an entire people. Many of our people are uneducated, and raising a collective voice against this violation of our rights is challenging. Development partners should therefore work with us and support us in reclaiming our birthright.

Many Sonahas have already forsaken hope; they are working as labourers or farm hands to feed their families. But despite the mounting adversities, most of us have still retained our traditional ways, and have refused to bow down to the threats and abuse meted out by security agencies.

I am determined to keep fighting. If, however, the government is willing to hear us out, understand our concerns and provide us with alternative work opportunities, we are open to talk. But these need to be viable options. If we are expected to switch to farming, for instance, we need to be provided land.



JYOTI SONAHA

**“WHILE PROTECTION OF FORESTS AND NATURAL RESOURCES IS UNDOUBTEDLY IMPORTANT, CONSERVATION SHOULD NOT BE PURSUED AT THE EXPENSE OF THE SURVIVAL OF AN ENTIRE PEOPLE.”**



## TIME TO LOCALIZE SDG IMPLEMENTATION

By Gopal Lamsal, President, NGO Federation of Nepal

*Effectively implementing the SDGs and achieving desired results calls for adequate space for meaningful participation of civil society organizations, says Gopal Lamsal of the NGO Federation of Nepal.*

Nepal has a vibrant civil society, which is active on many fronts. Civil society organizations (CSOs) have significantly contributed to Nepal's socio-political and economic development. Civil society is also an important driving force for implementing and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2015 Joint Declaration of Nepali CSOs expressed their commitment to implement the SDGs by adopting five principles of development justice: redistributive justice, economic justice, social justice, environmental justice and accountability to the people.



CSOs in Nepal have formed a common platform called the Nepal SDGs Forum, led by the NGO Federation of Nepal, to engage collectively in implementation of the SDGs. The objective of the Forum is to exchange learning and foster collective action among CSOs. The Forum now has provincial chapters as well. We intend to review provincial level plans and policies through an SDG lens. We are also going to choose local governments for review. There is tremendous interest in incorporating the SDGs at local level.

As we know, CSOs represent the voice of both major groups as well as under-privileged and marginalized communities. This makes CSOs key partners for formulating SDG strategies and for promoting accountability in how they are implemented. Having worked at the grassroots level, CSOs understand the local context and issues and can make suitable recommendations for SDG-related interventions. They should therefore be part of multi-stakeholder bodies and thematic committees for public consultation on issues of SDG planning and implementation.

However, to work effectively CSOs require an enabling environment, which depends on support from the government. With this, CSOs can advocate for people's basic political rights but also can work to create better policies which will generate better development outcomes.

The Government of Nepal has tried to adopt multi-stakeholder approaches to encourage and facilitate partnerships between government and non-government actors. It has formed two high-level committees and nine thematic committees to support SDG implementation. These committees are responsible for providing oversight and political direction for incorporating the SDGs into government plans, policies and budgets.

The participation of CSOs is not provisioned for in the national steering committees. It is not mandatory in the thematic committees either, but recently the National Planning Commission invited CSOs to participate in thematic committee meetings. Let's hope CSOs are similarly invited to participate in other such structures as their exclusion limits their ability to represent marginalized and minority groups. We urge the government to promote an inclusive partnership approach in all structures and at all levels.

## KEY CHALLENGES

In the federal context, the central government's role is to formulate policies and to generate resources and ideas, while implementation is the responsibility of the provincial and local governments. The problem is that although there are national structures for implementing the SDGs, it is not clear how they link with the other two tiers of government. What is the provincial structure for implementing the SDGs? How should local governments integrate the SDGs? How should the SDGs be reflected in local planning and budgeting processes? With very little knowledge about the SDGs among the local government representatives, efforts at localization have been inadequate so far.

Provincial governments need to have an SDG implementation support mechanism like that of the federal level. There should be a planning toolkit and a checklist for provincial and local governments to integrate the SDGs in their programs and policies. We have requested the National Planning Commission to provide a template and guidelines for provincial and local level structures to implement the SDGs. This will ensure consistency and uniformity across the country.

Another challenge is the availability of data, including disaggregated data. In 2011, as part of the census, national data was collected. But since then there has been little initiative to generate new data. This means planning is being done using outdated data. Leaving no one behind requires disaggregated data for all sectors and at all levels.

Effective implementation of the SDGs and achieving desired results requires preparation across many fronts, such as awareness, ownership, policy coherence, localization, integration of the SDGs into development plans, resource mobilization and the establishment of a monitoring system. In the past two years we have witnessed the Government of Nepal making many such preparations, most notably in the areas of raising awareness and establishing high-level institutional mechanisms.

But it is high time for the Government to also create appropriate SDG mechanisms at the provincial and local levels, mechanisms which provide ample space for all stakeholders, including the CSOs, to contribute to the successful implementation of the Global Goals.





## A NEW KIND OF DEVELOPMENT BY TRILOCHAN BHATTA, CHIEF MINISTER OF SUDURPASCHIM

As the country has adopted a federal model for the first time in its history, we have begun a new system of governance and development. In the first provincial-level elections, the voters gave our party a strong mandate, and it is now my responsibility to fulfil people's expectations.

Every new task comes with opportunities and challenges. Province 7 hasn't seen much development; it's almost as if we have to start from scratch. What adds to the challenge is the lack of resources and budget. Our society also lacks positive thinking, which is a vital ingredient for development. It's important for everybody to adopt a positive frame of mind and contribute to development in their own ways. People need to shed their traditional mode of thinking. Those in politics should particularly be able to tackle challenges and difficulties.

What led to the problem is that the earlier system could not ensure inclusive development. It is the state that is primarily responsible for development, but if it is prejudiced and doesn't treat its citizens equally, then problems arise. Remote regions do not get to witness development. Lack of development naturally makes citizens poor, weak and unaware.

Economic development leads to many positive social changes. If we internalize the concept of inclusive development and carry out development activities in the remotest regions, it will bring about overall social improvements. People's ability to take risks and do something on their own has been hindered by a lack

of opportunities. Many, therefore, choose to work in India. A mentality that prefers working in Indian factories instead of being industrious at home is also an obstacle to development.

### AREAS OF FOCUS

The people of Province 7 have been deprived of development and also of rights. Federalism presents an opportunity to work for our own development. My focus is on four areas.

Our province is comprised of the plains, the hills and the mountains. It has a lot of arable land. We need to move away from traditional farming methods and modernize agriculture. If we can adopt a modern farming system, more people will make it their primary profession and the country's economy will grow. To this end, we need to carry out systematic studies and figure out which crops—cash and staple—are most suitable for which areas. Of course, we also need more investment in agriculture.

Tourism in another potential area. Province 7 has many prominent tourist destinations. We can identify such destinations and promote religious and cultural tourism in the province. The government will construct roads; it's the private players who need to build hotels. We're thinking of a one-house-one-tourist plan. This will supplement people's income.

Ours is also the richest province in terms of water resources. We are not only focused on mega projects

**OUR FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS IS TO SET UP A ROBUST SYSTEM. IF WE CAN DO THAT, THE PACE OF DEVELOPMENT WILL BE RAPID.**

like West Seti and Pancheshwor, but have been trying to encourage small- and medium-sized hydro projects in all the districts of the province. It seems each district can generate between 1 to 100 MW of hydro power. We can derive much benefit if we can attract private investors and encourage local residents to buy shares in these projects. Many people go to India to work and spend all their savings when they come home for a month. We will show them the path to investment and returns.

The fourth potential area is herbs. Many kinds of herbs such as *yarsagumba* (also known as Himalayan Viagra) are found in the province. We can set up an industry to identify and process these herbs.

### SOCIAL ILLS

We're talking about setting up industries in various places. We will pass the necessary laws, set up a system and formulate short-, medium- and long-term plans. We can make a lot of progress in four to five years. We are doing things differently to generate employment and alleviate poverty. We have done homework to identify appropriate development projects and formulate necessary policies and programs. Our first order of business is to set up a robust system. If we can do that, the pace of development

will be rapid. We have to abandon the idea that we will only work for others or that we will start working only after there is proper infrastructure. We have to start with whatever infrastructure we have. People also tend to buy a small piece of land as soon as they have some money instead of investing it in productive activities. We have to jettison such practices.

What we also need to jettison is our superstitious belief that is at the root of social evils like untouchability and violence against women and the poor. Three types of violence plague our society—violence based on class, caste and gender. The law should put an end to all kinds of discrimination and violence.

But the law isn't adequate; social awareness is also necessary. Those with jobs tend to be focused on their work, progress and money, and don't generally indulge in social ills. But lack of employment opportunities contributes to these problems. Apart from laws and awareness, employment and money also have a link with social ills.

We're in the process of formulating stringent laws against discrimination and violence. But we also need a





movement for social transformation. It has to start from home. Elected representatives have to initiate such a movement. There is violence against women even in Kathmandu. But it's more prevalent here. To minimize it, we will launch a movement for social transformation under the leadership of elected representatives.

Care should be taken while allocating the budget for the central, provincial and local levels. Kathmandu has always allocated a small budget for the far-west. We can see the continuity of that trend even now. We need to make good use of the resources at our disposal. We need to curb leakages and corruption. Projects have to be implemented properly. The tax bracket has to be expanded.

We will improve our security and business climate to draw private investment. The government will have fewer financial problems if we can attract private investors. Besides socio-economic improvement, we need to be concerned about the environment, so the Sustainable Development Goals are important to keep our earth habitable. We will formulate our plans and programs in line with the SDGs.

*[As told to Development Advocate]*





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SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT GOALS

# THE ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NEPAL

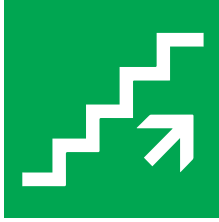
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## INTERNALIZING THE SDGS: PRIVATE SECTOR STEPPING UP

### Special Report

*In recognition of the importance of private sector engagement in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, several Nepali businesses have recently begun stepping up to the plate with a number of innovative partnerships and initiatives.*

### **GIVEN ITS POTENTIAL TO MOBILIZE RESOURCES, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION, ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF PRIVATE SECTOR ENTITIES WAS DEEMED CRUCIAL TO AIDING AND ACCELERATING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE 17 GLOBAL GOALS BY 2030.**

In September 2015, when UN member states, including Nepal, adopted the Sustainable Development Goals—a universal call to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that everyone enjoys peace and prosperity—the private sector was named among the key partners to take this ambitious agenda forward. Given its potential to mobilize resources, technology and innovation, active participation of private sector entities was deemed crucial to aiding and accelerating the achievement of the 17 Global Goals by 2030. Already, around the world, we’re seeing many inspirational instances of how the involvement of businesses has helped countries progress on the SDGs. And recently, despite being relatively small in size, the Nepali private sector has also begun stepping up to the plate in this regard.

When Yeti Airlines, one of the country’s leading airliners, unveiled its aircraft freshly branded with the SDG icons in September 2017—an initiative that was part of a broader partnership with the United Nations in Nepal—the event made headlines in Nepal and beyond, with the company receiving praise for demonstrating its commitment to the Global Goals. The move was significant for a number of reasons: not only was it geared to raise awareness about

the SDGs among Yeti’s own customers and the public, but it also served to sensitize the private sector in Nepal about the role they could play to help promote and achieve the targets of the 2030 Agenda. Indeed, after Yeti took the Global Goals skyward, other private sector players were inspired to follow a similar path, with several joining hands with the UN and UNDP as partners in the SDGs.

“We were the first to take the leap, and we’re happy to see others doing the same today,” says Prabina KC, senior manager of sales and marketing at Yeti. “We entered into the partnership with the UN with the objective of providing visibility to the SDGs in the country, and we were able to achieve what we set out to do to a large extent.”

As part of the same broader agreement with the UN, the airline also branded its shuttle buses and boarding passes with SDG iconography, and included a link on its website for voluntary donations to UNDP for post-earthquake reconstruction work. Yeti also distributes leaflets and carries out regular social media campaigns related to the Global Goals.

Aside from awareness raising through this sort of action-

oriented messaging on the SDGs, the company is also trying to incorporate the spirit and principles of Agenda 2030 in its day-to-day operations, according to KC. “We have, for instance, initiated the process to transform the company into a carbon-neutral airline,” she says. “We have examined the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from air travel, vehicle use and facility operation in the company, and established a carbon baseline that we will use to monitor progress on the path to reducing and offsetting emissions and becoming carbon neutral.” Building on this, the airline plans to eventually move towards the ultimate goal of climate neutrality, which would encompass even wider areas of operation, including water use and waste management.

Yeti’s initiatives go a long way in illustrating the potential reach and impact of private sector engagement with the SDGs. “One of the key ways in which the SDGs differ from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is in the recognition of the role of private sector entities,” says Anil Shah, veteran banker and current CEO of Nabil Bank. “The MDGs relied almost entirely on governments, but the SDGs acknowledge that it is virtually impossible to attain these targets without leveraging private capital.”

This is backed by the government’s own findings.

According to ‘Sustainable Development Goals—Status and Roadmap: 2016-2030’, a report published by the National Planning Commission last year, Nepal will have to spend Rs. 1.77 trillion on an annual basis until 2030 in order to achieve the SDGs, a sum that far surpasses the government’s yearly federal budget. Without the private sector’s involvement, then, the country’s prospects of reaching the Global Goals are slim to none.

Shah, who is currently in consultation with UNDP to sign a memorandum of understanding to align the bank’s activities with the SDGs, is planning to go through the Nabil Foundation, in which one percent of the bank’s annual profit is deposited every year. “However, writing a cheque, on its own, is hardly enough...the SDGs are about more than just basic philanthropy,” Shah says. “It’s important to internalize the goals in the way we conduct regular business—the SDGs should be part of the private sector’s DNA.” In order to make the private sector’s participation as effective as possible, Shah says the government, donor agencies and other development partners have an important role to play as facilitators for such initiatives. “Many private sector actors are eager to contribute, but there needs to be the right kind of environment to take that step,” says Shah.

## “WRITING A CHEQUE IS HARDLY ENOUGH ON ITS OWN...THE SDGS SHOULD BE PART OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR’S DNA”

- Anil Shah, CEO Nabil Bank





**HARI BHAKTA SHARMA**, *President*,  
Confederation of Nepalese Industries

The private sector has a key role to play in attaining a majority of the goals. However, the private sector itself must be strong enough to play this role. The government must prepare appropriate legal and physical infrastructure where the private sector flourishes. It should also encourage the private sector to invest in areas of comparative advantage in order to increase employment opportunities.

**BHAWANI RANA**, *President*,  
Federation of Nepalese Chamber of  
Commerce and Industries

The private sector can contribute to eliminating poverty by providing employment to large numbers of the population. In the context of Nepal, thousands of youths are leaving the country each day seeking employment opportunities abroad while the industries within Nepal are facing difficulty in attracting skilled employees. We are working with the government to launch youth training programs to mitigate this problem. FNCCI is also partnering with UNDP for Goals 8 and 9, which are related to economic growth, innovation and employment generation.



## TRUE EQUALITY FAR FROM REALITY

It was around five decades ago that our family migrated to Chitwan from Dhading and settled in Ward 1 of Rapti Municipality. The village is composed of a mix of Bahun, Chhetri, Tamang and Hill Dalit people—in fact, that last group comprises nearly 20 percent of the population, with more than 300 households, of which ours is one. Despite being one of the major constituents in the area, however, Dalit families have long been subject to social, political and economic exclusion.

It's true that the so-called upper-caste folks no longer discriminate against us in public. We are not barred from entering temples, drinking water from public taps, or generally walking around and using public spaces. It's also true that Dalits are today far more visible in the political mainstream than we have ever been thanks to the constitutional provision that requires political parties to ensure proportional representation of all communities.

But discrimination still persists—it's just taken on more subtle, insidious forms. The ill treatment might not be as overt as it once was, but for those of us on the receiving end, it's hard to ignore.

We have, for instance, user committees in the village tasked with managing educational institutions, forests, water and other resources, and protecting the interests of farmers, among other areas. These committees are very important when it comes to making decisions about community affairs; they have considerable power and resources. But Dalits are seldom given space on them.

In fact, most of the committees are run by upper-caste people, even as the decisions they take directly affect all of us. And so great is their appetite for control that they do not relinquish their grasp on even those committees where their roles are relatively insignificant.

What this means is that despite making up a large share of the local population, Dalits and other groups are excluded from meaningful participation in community matters. This is the case, for example, at a primary school where most of the students come from Dalit, Chepang or Tamang families, but where there is little to no input sought from these communities when it comes to running the school. And it's the same situation everywhere, whether it has to do with managing forests, cooperatives, or any other areas of public importance.

*There has been a significant shift in the manifestation of prejudice against Dalits. Years of raising awareness and pushing for legal protection against caste-based discrimination have certainly discouraged 'high-caste' people from looking down on the Dalit community as 'untouchable'; the way they once did. But true equality is still far from being a reality: we continue to be excluded from most spheres of social life and we are seldom consulted on community issues that affect us, which are as much our concern as anyone's.*

This imbalance in power will continue so long as people's attitudes and beliefs remain the same, and that can only be altered through well-planned and consistent awareness campaigns on the part of civil society, development partners and the underrepresented and excluded communities themselves. The government, for its part, should follow through on its pledge to ensure the necessary legal framework to promote the social and political representation of these groups. It is only when all these actors come together to collectively push the agenda that the requisite changes will happen—both in social relations and the law.

There also needs to be more effort to empower Dalits, lagging as we do far behind other communities in terms of access to education, health and economic

opportunities. Most Dalits in Rapti Municipality, for instance, are poor, struggling to make ends meet, our children forced to drop out of school because we are unable to pay for their textbooks and uniforms. This was what happened to my own kids who couldn't continue their education after my husband, who had been the sole breadwinner, became bedridden following an accident. I myself had to leave my children behind and go overseas to work and earn, and my eldest had to give up school to take up labour work to support his father and brothers.

My story is testament to the fact that constitutional rights and legal provisions are not enough on their own as long as Dalits cannot meet their basic needs like food and education. Stakeholders therefore need to adopt a holistic approach to the problem: larger policy changes should be accompanied by concrete work on the ground targeting the economic and social empowerment of the community, so as to help them escape this vicious circle of poverty and exclusion once and for all.

Change is also needed in the mentality of the Dalits themselves. Many of us have internalized the prejudices stacked against us by the caste system. We've accepted that some people are more equal than others, and do not wish to challenge these supposedly 'divine laws' that were created to subjugate us. This is also the result of poor education and lack of awareness about our own rights and capabilities.

However, more and more Dalit parents are now realizing the value of education, and today more Dalit children are entering schools and colleges than ever before—we are seeing increasing numbers of college graduates in our own village. This gives us hope, of one day being able to throw off the shackles of our historical oppression, and of becoming equal citizens and participants in our communities and in this country.



SHANTI PARIYAR

**“WHILE IT’S TRUE THAT THE SO-CALLED UPPER-CASTE FOLKS NO LONGER DISCRIMINATE AGAINST US IN PUBLIC, DISCRIMINATION STILL PERSISTS IN MORE SUBTLE, INSIDIOUS FORMS, AND FOR THOSE OF US ON THE RECEIVING END, IT’S HARD TO IGNORE.”**



## BETTER DATA, BETTER DEVELOPMENT

By Kedar Khadka, Good Governance Foundation

*Comprehensive and accessible national databases are key to strengthening governance across all the Sustainable Development Goals, says the GoGo Foundation's (Good Governance Foundation) Kedar Khadka.*

The Sustainable Development Goals present a unique opportunity to end poverty, address various forms of inequality and promote the well-being of the entire population of the planet. While each of the 17 Global Goals encompass an important priority on their own, all are also deeply interlinked to one another, thereby forming a network of crisscrossing issues and objectives. And among these, SDG 16—which focuses on transparency, accountability, and peaceful and inclusive societies—particularly resonates across all the goals.





Good governance rightfully occupies a place at the heart of the current global development agenda, the result of recognizing that good governance and strong, accountable institutions are crucial to building long-lasting prosperity and peace. Given Nepal's poor scoring in international accountability and transparency surveys and measurements, there is considerable work to be done in regards to SDG 16. This requires a more substantial investment in availability and accuracy of development-related data.

### HOMEgrown DATABASE

Although we live in an era where the concept of open governments is rapidly gaining traction—in fact, Nepal already qualifies for membership in the Open Governance Partnership (OGP)—we don't yet have a comprehensive national database on the governance front, a fact that has forced us to long rely on international data sets. These can present a skewed picture. Take, for instance, the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International, which relies on a very narrow sample. In the absence of a homegrown database, however, we have few means of challenging this or putting forward a compelling alternative narrative.

What we need is a proper, functioning data hub: much of the information in government institutions is still confined to physical files and cannot be easily retrieved. This data must be digitized, archived and rendered more accessible, so that within the next three years or so, we can produce governance, accountability and transparency baseline data sets in areas such as arrears, expenses and embezzlements. If we are to truly understand our own situation, and ascertain where progress is being made and where things are not moving along satisfactorily, it is imperative that we have our own baseline data.

The new federal structure of the country offers all the more reason for the government to proactively push for data-driven development

and governance. In a federal system, we require different kinds of data than what was available in the unitary system; the boundaries of local governance have been altered dramatically, after all, and existing references for population and geography are no longer accurate.

### MORE COUNTING, LESS SHOUTING

There also needs to be a paradigm shift in our approach to advocacy. Having relied heavily on emotional advocacy in the past when pushing for human rights and better governance, we should now also focus our energies on more evidence-based advocacy.

This shift is particularly applicable to the work of civil society organizations in the country, which have been doing what they can with very limited resources. We haven't seen a clear SDGs-focused strategy so far, nor has there been much by way of thematic activities by these organizations, owing to a lack of resources on the SDGs. The donor community and development partners could play a role in this regard by supporting CSOs with expertise on particular goals—and this support should not be, as appears at present, an afterthought that is limited to a small component such as conducting a few public dialogues. This is not enough.

### WEAKENING OF CIVIC SPACE

One of the key aspects of Goal 16 has to do with systematizing inclusive decision making, an area in which Nepal is yet to make much progress. Despite appearances, meaningful decision-making is still limited to a small group of powerful individuals, and what's more, following the elections for all three tiers of government in 2017, there appear to be efforts afoot to squeeze the civic space even further. This is illustrated by the recent closure or visible sidelining of Ward Citizen Forums and Citizen Awareness Centers, which once were important mechanisms for deliberations on grassroots development.

Today, government representatives are also asking civil society entities to move through a one-door policy on decision-making. They insist that now that elected representatives are in place around the country, there is little need for civil society to speak on behalf of the people. This, in my view, is a dangerous reversal of all we have achieved as a democratic country—weakening of the civic space in this manner will put up serious hurdles in our attempt to achieve the SDGs.

### LAGGING BEHIND

Overall, I feel we are falling well short of the progress we should be making towards our SDG targets. Of course, we should be mindful that the first five years of such an ambitious agenda are generally taken up by preparations, while the remaining years constitute the implementation stage. But even by those standards, preparation has been inadequate among all stakeholders.

While it is a good sign that current Finance Minister Dr. Yuba Raj Khatriwada had earlier been involved in preparing a preliminary country report on the SDGs—the first such report to come out of South Asia—the follow up has been uneven. The National Planning Commission and the Central Bureau of Statistics must both push for action and mobilize the SDG unit at the NPC and the SDG focal persons appointed in each ministry. Civil society, meanwhile, could prepare a shadow report on the SDGs so as to constructively challenge the government's version—and in the process, compel the government to do more.

It is thus only when all stakeholders—including the government, civil society, private sector and development partners, among others—rally together as part of a more cohesive, evidence-based effort that governance can be strengthened across all the Global Goals.





# CONFRONTING CHANGE IN THE HINDU KUSH HIMALAYAN REGION

## AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. DAVID MOLDEN

Dr. David Molden, now in his second term as Director General of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), has played a key role in raising ICIMOD's standing as one of the most trusted learning and knowledge sharing organizations on issues of climate change, adaptation, resilience building and information systems, among others, in the region. Hailing from a background in water resource management and sustainable mountain development, and with considerable experience leading development and research work across Asia and Africa, Dr. Molden talks to Development Advocate about the challenges and opportunities inherent in working with mountain ecosystems and people, how the work fits into the framework of the targets set out by the Sustainable Development Goals, and what is needed to speed up progress to that end.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST PRESSING DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES IN THE HINDU KUSH HIMALAYAN (HKH) REGION?

The biggest challenge in the region has to do with change in all dimensions: social, ecological and geopolitical. While on the one hand, we're dealing with phenomena like globalization and outmigration, on the other, there are the effects of climate change and related issues to contend with. In Paris, we are talking about a 1.5°C average global

rise in temperature, but that doesn't take into account elevation-dependent warming: 1.5°C could translate to 1.8°C in the mountains, and if average temperatures rise 2°C, it could mean 2.5°C or even 3°C or more at higher elevations. The track the world is on now will result in a world warmer than 2°C, which is too hot for the mountains. And the consequences of that, in terms of a shifting ecosystem, melting of glaciers, and rise of pests and illnesses never before seen in these parts, among a host of other potential problems, is cause for great concern.

Adding to that is the high degree of poverty in communities living in the mountains, which far exceeds poverty rates in the plains in most HKH countries. The livelihoods of these people are highly dependent on the health of their ecosystems, but while the HKH is a tremendous repository of resources, the biodiversity and habitats within are slowly being lost. Keeping such ecosystems that serve so many communities in the region intact is another key challenge.

The mountains here are also a water tower of sorts for Asia—there are 10 major river systems that originate in the HKH region. Despite the seeming abundance of water, however, people still have difficulties accessing it.

**“WHILE THE HKH REGION IS A TREMENDOUS REPOSITORY OF RESOURCES, THE BIODIVERSITY AND HABITATS WITHIN ARE SLOWLY BEING LOST. KEEPING SUCH ECOSYSTEMS THAT SERVE SO MANY COMMUNITIES IN THE REGION INTACT IS A KEY CHALLENGE.”**

- Dr. David Molden, ICIMOD

**YOU'VE MENTIONED ELEVATION-BASED WARMING. ARE THERE ANY INSTANCES OF MODELING THAT HAVE BEEN DONE BY ICIMOD OR OTHERS TO UNDERSTAND HOW THIS PHENOMENON COULD AFFECT THE MOUNTAINS?**

Yes, we have done some modeling, particularly to look at the impact of warming on water resources. ICIMOD has uncovered new knowledge on the number and extent of glaciers, and their changes in the last 30 years; information on glacial lakes and potential glacial lake outburst floods; and more detailed data on individual glaciers for example in the Langtang area. The modeling work done by ICIMOD and partners, based on these and other data, has projected the degree of glacier melt into the future, and the impact on water resources in the area. The modeling points strongly to increasing variation in river flows and increases in flood and drought hazards.

**WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF YOUR WORK FOR NOT JUST PEOPLE LIVING IN THESE HIGH-ALTITUDE ECOLOGICAL AREAS BUT FOR THOSE LIVING DOWNSTREAM FROM THEM?**

What happens in the mountains has an effect downstream. Degradation of ecosystems and eco-services upstream will invariably impact lives and livelihoods downstream. Water resources are a good way to represent this dynamic to people—go to Delhi or Beijing or Islamabad and people are very concerned about what is happening to water. Energy and hydropower comprise another related area of concern to the downstream, and the demand for energy is rapidly increasing. Floods and air pollution are also among the more widely-discussed upstream-downstream issues.

**YOU'VE SAID IN THE PAST THAT THE NARRATIVE ABOUT THIS REGION SHOULD CHANGE FROM ONE OF VULNERABILITY TO THAT OF OPPORTUNITY. HOW CAN THIS HAPPEN?**

It's true that we face a formidable set of challenges. But on the other side of the equation, we must acknowledge that change can also bring opportunity. We have some very creative and resilient people in the mountains, who have been incredible at adapting to very harsh environments, and vibrant youth whose skills and resourcefulness are yet to be fully tapped into. There is work to be done in gender empowerment, allowing more women to make decisions about the use of natural resources, for instance. Outmigration brings remittances—could these be invested in mountain development? Could young people be encouraged to start enterprises? We need to look into all these areas.

The mountains are a substantial energy base for the whole region, but the question is how that potential should be sustainably utilized. Ecotourism, for example, offers significant benefits to local people, especially in a more connected world like today where information can be shared easily—but we must be careful that we don't erode the very cultures and spaces that are being promoted. And with urbanization and changing diets, there is more demand for grains like sorghum and millet—as well as for other high-value niche mountain products—to be sold to cities.

The other big opportunity is in the partnerships between people and countries that are working together to address these problems, sharing knowledge and resources. We need to continue telling the stories of the mountains to the rest of the world if we want to bring more attention and funds to the region.

**ICIMOD TAKES A TRANS-BOUNDARY APPROACH, WORKING ACROSS DIFFERENT COUNTRIES IN THE REGION. HOW DIFFICULT IS IT TO WORK LIKE THIS WITH MULTIPLE JURISDICTIONS?**

I have been fortunate to meet people from all different countries in the HKH region, who love to meet and talk to each other about science and climate and other issues. Yet, South Asia is still one of the least connected regions in the world. This doesn't really make sense, considering the potential that exists for working together to address shared challenges. I think there is certainly the will to work together, but a lot of trust-building needs to happen still. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) should really pick up, for one, and more work needs to be done on trans-boundary cooperation on different fronts, including power, energy, trade, water and biodiversity.

That isn't to say there aren't areas where people are already working across boundaries—our experience at ICIMOD is that there is a degree of cooperation in a number of fields - one of these is in the science related to climate change, another has to do with floods and disasters. Knowledge, science and adaptation are excellent entryways to establishing trust, and Nepal is a wonderful place from which to foster cross-boundary collaboration. Think about how, after the 2015 earthquakes, people came together to help those in need. But there's a long way to go.

**HOW DO THE SDGS RELATE TO WHAT ICIMOD IS DOING?**

The SDGs comprise an important framework that gives relevance to the work that we do. At ICIMOD, we are finishing up the Himalayan Monitoring Assessment Programme, an IPCC-like report (UN climate panel report published in 2018), which has brought together more than 300 professionals and policymakers

to answer important questions about sustainable mountain development. The team has developed a list of priorities for the region using the SDGs as a basis: end poverty in the mountains; build resilient, equitable and inclusive communities; achieve gender equity; establish sustainable production systems to ensure nutrition security for mountain people; address women's changing role in agriculture; and ensure year-round security of access to water.

There is a mountain-specific agenda within the SDGs, created of the particular context and needs of the region—including the fragile environment, difficulties in access, and the unique ways in which communities manage resources.

**WE HAVE ABOUT 12 YEARS REMAINING TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS. WOULD YOU SAY YOU'RE SATISFIED WITH THE LEVEL OF PROGRESS MADE IN THE HKH REGION?**

Twelve years is not very long, and I do think progress has been very slow. We have to double down and accelerate efforts to reach the goals. I'm sure climatic events like extreme heat or floods will send us some wake-up calls, but we can't wait for that to happen. We need to keep pushing and we need to act together as one people rather than as individual countries. This is very important.



# THE RIGHT TO LOVE



It started in the sixth grade, the feeling that I was different somehow. But I couldn't put my finger on what it was exactly; I didn't yet have the vocabulary. When I turned 16 or 17, I thought maybe I was gay—that's certainly what other people seemed to think, and online searches told me that's what men who are attracted to men are called, so that's how I began to identify myself.

But that wasn't it either—the profile didn't fit. I was so confused and found this so frustrating, so overwhelming, that I actually attempted to end my own life on two occasions, but thankfully didn't succeed.

One day, there was a program on Nepal Television that opened my eyes to who I really was: even though I was born a boy, I realized I was a transgender woman. The revelation was shocking for me, to say the least. Although it rendered my identity a bit clearer, which was a relief, it also complicated matters more, because now I was certain that I could not carry on with life as I knew it: I would either have to come clean to everyone, which I was not ready to do, or run.

*I chose the latter, and went to Cyprus on the pretext of studying. Meanwhile, family members in Nepal were putting pressure on me to get married, to settle down. I kept putting it off, but I knew that once I returned to Kathmandu, there would be no more excuses. And if I gave in to my family's wishes, not only would I be relegating myself to a lifetime of unhappiness, but the poor girl would as well. I couldn't do that, so when I landed in Nepal, I didn't go home.*

For two years after that, I hid from my family. It was only after a photo of me was published in a local paper that they found out about me, and who I was. My mother refused to talk to me for a long time, which was very painful.

Today, however, they've accepted me—to an extent, anyway. They've resigned themselves to the fact that this is my reality, that it's not going to change, and that I am doing some good work. Still, there are barriers between us that have not yet gone away.

## PAPER ACHIEVEMENTS

One can't deny that progress has definitely been made in Nepal with regard to LGBTI rights. LGBTI identity is now legally recognized, which is great. But even though the government says all citizens enjoy equal rights, our community has yet to fully claim these rights, because our access and opportunities to enjoy them are still limited. So there's still a significant disconnect between what's promised on paper and our everyday reality.

For instance, there are very few fields in which LGBTI people are openly employed, where they are visible—this is proof of the lack of opportunities made available to them. And a dearth of employment opportunities translates to difficulties in supporting ourselves financially. Several LGBTI people have gotten jobs at the Blue Diamond Society and the Federation of Sexual and Gender Minorities Nepal, and the donor-supported programs they run. But for the rest, options are scarce, particularly for transgender persons, forcing many into the sex trade for the sake of survival.

This has, in a way, also reinforced the common assumption people have about transgender people being sexually promiscuous. It's because of this that you often encounter a lot of physical harassment, inappropriate touching, particularly while traveling. People are quick to taunt, but they don't even try to understand the real reason so many transgender people are in the sex trade—that the rejection by family and society have led them there.

Needless to say, we still encounter problematic behavior, whether direct or indirect, on a daily basis. Just today, I was at a restaurant and got a lot of judgmental stares because of my voice—I look like a woman, but sound like a man. That might not seem like a big deal, but it's not always about a single dramatic event, is it? Just being called something nasty when walking down a street, for instance, can have a deep impact. These little things—taunts, looks—they add up.

In terms of our influence in decision-making processes, it is only possible if we are represented by someone who has lived our reality, and who has first-hand experience of our struggles. Having Sunil Babu Pant as a member of the Constituent Assembly was a big triumph for the community, and he certainly did a lot for us—the Constitution reflects that. But in the recent elections, we were once again rendered invisible.

All this shows that while change has come, it hasn't happened at the pace—or achieved the depth—that we had hoped for; people's mindsets are still much the same, and until this is the case, the community cannot rest easy or feel that they are "equal" in any way.



SIMRAN SHERCHAN

**“THERE ARE FEW FIELDS IN WHICH LGBTI PEOPLE ARE OPENLY EMPLOYED. THE DEARTH OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES TRANSLATES INTO DIFFICULTIES IN SUPPORTING OURSELVES, FORCING MANY INTO THE SEX TRADE AND REINFORCING THE ASSUMPTION ABOUT TRANSGENDER PEOPLE BEING SEXUALLY PROMISCUOUS.”**

## SOLUTIONS IN THE SDGS

Health and well-being are a key issue in the community. Many transgender people need to take hormones regularly, and some even elect to have surgery—procedures that are very costly. There are no hormone specialists in Nepal, so a lot of transgender people self-medicate, taking birth control pills, for example, which raises the risk of cancer. This just goes to show how desperate these people really are, that they would put their lives at risk just so they can embrace their true selves.

It's not just about physical illness, of course; social and mental well-being are just as important. The very fact of having to

hide who you are, and the discrimination that you encounter when you do come out, is deeply impacting, and can lead to depression and suicidal thoughts.

We realize that a lot of the stigma around us is owing to lack of awareness, which is why we frequently visit schools and colleges to talk to young people about sexuality and diversity. But unless this sort of effort is institutionalized by the government—much as it has been with bringing the practice of Chhaupadi to an end—we won't be able to have as widespread an effect.

This is where the UN comes in, to advocate on our behalf, to encourage the government to better protect LGBTI rights, and to create equal opportunities for people of all genders and sexualities to lead lives of dignity. Perhaps the donor community could also take these causes into account when providing financial support to entities in the country.

Opportunities could also be provided by the private sector, because that's where most of the jobs are, after all. Partnerships with the LGBTI community could be a chance to demonstrate corporate social responsibility.

Essentially, our problems and demands coincide with the core mantra of the SDGs, which is to leave no one behind in all areas, including in decision-making, education, and employment, among others. Until and unless the LGBTI community is socially and economically empowered and brought into the mainstream of public life, whatever progress we might make on paper will be meaningless.

**“WE STILL ENCOUNTER PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOR ON A DAILY BASIS. IT’S NOT ALWAYS ABOUT A SINGLE DRAMATIC EVENT. JUST BEING CALLED SOMETHING NASTY WHEN WALKING DOWN THE STREET CAN HAVE A DEEP IMPACT. THESE LITTLE THINGS, TAUNTS, LOOKS, THEY ADD UP.”**









## SDGS AND NEPAL'S ASPIRATION FOR DEVELOPMENT AND PROSPERITY

By Mohna Ansari, Member of the National Human Rights Commission

*Unlike the MDGs, which overlooked some important human rights aspects, the 2030 Agenda is strongly grounded in international human rights law and the SDGs clearly adhere to human rights principles and standards of non-discrimination and equality.*

Agenda 2030 is a comprehensive development framework, which guides for inclusive development and pledges to leave no one behind. More specifically, within the current national spirit of development and prosperity and with a relative political stability, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs framework provide opportunity for Nepal to boost the socio-economic development in a sustainable manner and also to advance the realization of human rights for all, without discrimination.



Nepal aims to advance from the group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) by 2022 and to become a middle-income country by 2030. Nepal's current (14th) Periodic Development Plan has been aligned with the Global Goals to achieve these aspirations. What is needed is an effective implementation and close monitoring of the plan as well as keeping in line the human rights principles and standards throughout this process. Despite making progress in education, health and women empowerment indicators and reducing poverty, the preceding periodic plans failed to meet the targets due to financial and human resource gap, weak institutions, low implementation capacity, poor monitoring and absence of accountability mechanism, followed by the deep-rooted culture of corruption, nepotism and social exclusion. Those constraints continue to remain and are likely to impede progress of the present day plan, unless mitigating measures and robust reforms are introduced.

For example, according to National Planning Commission statistics, Nepal has decreased absolute poverty from 42 percent in 1995 to 23.8 percent in 2015. Yet, there are critical disparities in rates of poverty by region, social groups and gender. The socially excluded groups, rural population and women have been deprived of benefitting from equitable dividend of the progress. In this situation, it is prudent to keep the principle of inclusivity, central to the National Periodic Plan so that no one is left behind. Within this context, respect for human rights must remain as the core element to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Nepal witnessed a decade-long armed conflict followed by prolonged political instability, which nurtured a culture of human rights violations, insecurity, impunity and weak rule of law. Transitional justice has been an overdue agenda in Nepal as victims of human rights violations during the armed conflict are yet to see justice. The earthquake victims of 2015, especially the poor and marginalized groups including women, have waited long to receive rehabilitation support. Thousands of people affected by the 2017 monsoon in Terai were deprived of adequate assistance and housing facilities. For the first time, the country is exercising the federal governance system with federal, provincial and local governments implementing the development programs.

With this development, it becomes judicious to align the National Periodic Plan and SDGs into the provincial and local development plans and also develop SDG indicators

for each level of government. Strong collaboration between federal, provincial and local government would be essential to achieve this harmony between the periodic plans and SDGs. It is very important to involve civil society, human rights activists, women, youth, elderly, local communities as well as private sector in this process. The SDGs cannot be achieved without collaboration and partnership of the governments, private sector and the community. Addressing the historical practices of exclusion, discrimination and denial of the rights will address the deep-rooted cause of conflict and pave way for lasting peace and development. As envisioned in the Constitution Nepal is yet to establish the specific independent commissions for women, Dalits, Janajatis, Madhesi, Tharus and Muslims. The National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) should also be capacitated to contribute, monitor and follow up implementation of the SDGs.

Nepal's Constitution expresses 2015 expresses commitment for ending discriminations relating to class, ethnicity, region, language, religion and gender and to create egalitarian society on the principles of proportional inclusion and participation, equitable economy, prosperity and social justice. It has included economic, social and cultural rights as legally enforceable human rights. Appropriate laws need to be enacted and amended through consultative process to realize these rights while faithful implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the human rights based approach will make it a reality. Once again, the capacity building and involvement of the NHRIs will be important to contribute and monitor that the constitutional rights are equally enjoyed by everyone without discrimination.

Nepal has a long way to go to establish a just and prosperous society. It requires political commitment, national consensus, people centered development strategy, accountable institutions and broader partnership to achieve this longing aspiration. With completion of three layers of elections, which brought about 40,000 elected representatives into federal, provincial and local governments, the people of Nepal now expect the nation to focus on the agenda of development and prosperity. The stage is now set to kick-start and move forward with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. This is an opportunity and should not be missed. Likewise, Nepal's development partners should join hands and support the inclusive development initiatives built on the human rights principles.





## BETTER TOGETHER: PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE

### Special Report

*The ongoing partnership between UNDP Nepal and the Himalayan Consensus Institute was born of the belief that a holistic, multi-disciplinary and community-based approach is essential to conflict mitigation and crisis prevention in the region.*

## TO TACKLE COMMON REGIONAL CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE PEACE, THERE ARE NO ALTERNATIVES TO A HOLISTIC, MULTI-DISCIPLINARY AND COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH.

The formulation of shared agendas with regard to conflict can be a crucial ingredient in ushering nations and regions along the path of development. The involvement of local communities is also tremendously important in this process, ensuring inclusive participation, representation and decision making. Policies, institutions, laws and regulations are, after all, more effective when they enjoy the engagement with and backing of the people.

Nowhere is this better encapsulated than in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which strongly emphasizes the importance of inter-linkages between the “five P’s” — people, planet, peace, prosperity and partnership — as contributing to the mitigation of conflict and crises. It recognizes that to tackle common regional challenges and achieve sustainable peace, there are no alternatives to a holistic, multi-disciplinary and community-based approach.

It was with this in mind that UNDP Nepal and the Himalayan Consensus Institute (HCI) entered into a partnership in 2017, to collaborate in conflict mitigation and crisis prevention in the Himalayan region, an area where vulnerability to natural disasters and complex

demographic realities consistently threaten to exacerbate tensions between people. The partnership is set to focus, among other things, on developing systematic early warning systems and building local mediation capacities ahead of environmental catastrophe, so as to aid governments and communities in their response to such events.

The pilot program in Nepal is expected to serve as a model for conflict prevention and mitigation in countries affected by climate change and underdevelopment. Nepal is one of the 20 countries that are most vulnerable to climate change impact and other kinds of hazards.

“This initiative has the potential for far-reaching impact beyond the borders of Nepal. It is envisioned that similar programs could be adopted across the developing world to address conflict at its root cause rather than its effects,” says Laurence Brahm, founder of HCI. The initiative will also focus on training local mediators on the principle “that the community knows best”, and will conduct second-track dialogues through workshops where crisis can be mitigated and avoided.

"The new facility we have put in place will help the government and people of Nepal take informed decisions, better prepare for climate-induced and other kinds of disasters and respond to crisis more systematically," says Renaud Meyer, Resident Representative a.i. of UNDP Nepal.

### THE KEY IN CARDAMOM

The Cardamom for Peace campaign was launched as part of the joint UNDP - HCI initiative, where the idea was to use a high-value crop, like cardamom, to help communities generate income while at the same time protecting the fragile ecosystems in which they lived. In this way, by working to improve livelihoods and social cohesion, on one hand—conflict frequently erupts due to systematic marginalization of a particular group and deprivation from economic opportunities — and promoting environmental resilience on the other to mitigate natural disasters, the campaign sought to solve two problems in one go. The initiative was piloted among the Thamis, a 30,000-member minority community indigenous to certain pockets of Dolakha district, who have long remained economically disenfranchised. The community was mobilized to establish and manage an integrated approach to production and distribution of cardamom, a plant that has a deep, extensive root system conducive to maintaining moisture in the soil. "Owing to its high value, low volume and low perishability, cardamom enjoys a comparative

advantage over other crops," says Surendra Raj Joshi, Program Coordinator for Resilient Livelihood with ICIMOD Nepal. Cardamom is in great demand in both the regional and global markets, as it is widely used to flavor a variety of food and drinks.

For the leading role she played in the campaign and in lifting the fortunes of her community, Chhali Maya Thami of Sorung Khola was conferred the Leadership Award for Community Resilience at the Himalayan Consensus Summit 2018 held in Kathmandu on 23 March 2018.

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**THE IDEA WAS TO USE A HIGH-VALUE CROP, LIKE CARDAMOM, TO HELP COMMUNITIES GENERATE INCOME WHILE AT THE SAME TIME PROTECTING THE FRAGILE ECOSYSTEMS IN WHICH THEY LIVED.**





**CHHALI MAYA THAMI,**  
Social Worker and Community Leader

“Cardamom farming has not just become an important source of income for the women of the Thami community in Dolakha, offering them a ticket to financial independence, it has also proven crucial to fostering friendship and harmony among community members. Cultivating cardamom has also promoted greenery and improved soil fertility in our farms, as well as raising the life expectancy of the animals that feed on the byproducts. It’s a crop that just keeps on giving.”

**GREGORY K. TANAKA,**  
Founder, Sierra Consensus Institute

“The Cardamom for Peace campaign is very much in the spirit of bottom-up community building as well as economic and environmental sustainability. Cardamom helps promote organic agricultural practices, soil fertility and ultimately contributes to a sustainable ecosystem. The initiative has created employment opportunities and is now seeking investments and proper marketing strategies for market expansion.”



## THE SDGS AND TRADE: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR NEPAL?

By Posh Raj Pandey, Chairman, South Asia Watch on Trade Economics and Environment (SAWTEE)

*For least developed countries like Nepal, international trade plays an important role in achieving sustainable development. But harnessing the potential benefits of trade requires a thought-through approach to policy, writes SAWTEE's Posh Raj Pandey.*

The Sustainable Development Goals, take a holistic approach by pursuing economic, social and environmental development. The 17 Goals are intertwined; they address issues that are or should be central to holistic development in one form or another. These Global Goals are seen as a means to generate productive employment, promote women's empowerment, ensure food security and reduce economic inequality. There is also a clear link between international trade policy and achievement of the SDGs.





Whether directly or indirectly, implementation of the Global Goals will influence international trade and its regime. Goal 17 specifically outlines a plan to promote an open, universal, rules-based, fair and multilateral trade system. It intends to double the share of developing countries in world trade by 2020, and to help least developed countries gain market access through quotas. More indirectly, world trade will also be influenced by other goals such as ending hunger and ensuring food security (Goal 2), guaranteeing healthy lives (Goal 3), achieving durable and sustainable economic growth (Goal 8), reducing inequality (Goal 10), conserving community resources (Goal 14) and protecting, reviving and promoting bio-diversity (Goal 15).

The problem of hunger and food insecurity has to be addressed by means of trade. To this end, the plan is to promote trade in farm products and to eliminate distortions in the international market caused by agricultural subsidies. To facilitate access to essential medicines, an appeal has been made for flexible implementation of the WTO's proclamation on public health. There is emphasis on the need to raise the productive capacities of developing and least developed countries; the concept of 'aid for trade' has been advanced as a strategy to this end. Also mentioned is the plan to reduce intra- and inter-country inequality. In order to bring down inter-country inequality in particular, effective implementation of the Special and Differential Treatment provisions for least developed countries in multilateral trade systems is stressed. In order to ensure sustainable fisheries, the agenda refers to the need to cushion farmers from the impact of subsidies given to multinational fishing companies. It also reflects the need to protect endangered species and curb trade in them.

For least developed countries like Nepal, international trade plays an important role in achieving sustainable development. By concentrating economic activities in competitive sectors, international trade facilitates income generation and helps attract foreign investment and technology. An increase in income across the board expands government revenue, which in turn helps the government to mobilize financial resources for meeting targets on health, education, food security, environmental conservation, and other priorities. Trade also offers non-financial benefits. Greater trade and access to markets raises workers' income, which has a positive impact on health and nutrition. Trade in essential medications contributes directly to better health. Similarly, by facilitating access to technology, international trade addresses the problems of ecological imbalance and

adverse climatic effects; technology has a major role in minimizing and adapting to climate change. The SDGs refer to technology transfers by means of trade. Meeting the SDG target on international trade will also help meet other targets. The major conceptual question, then, is whether these targets can be achieved through current trade policies and systems. Adopting a completely market-oriented system without regulating trade risks increasing inequality. If we do not regulate the market, assuming there is a perfect market system, inequality would increase in terms of the distribution of expected outcomes and labour. Therefore, we need complementary policies if we want to exploit trade to achieve SDG targets. Such complimentary policies are required both at the global and national levels.

The SDGs have been embraced by the world. Unbridled markets cannot deliver universal prosperity and peace. First, the global market is not a level playing field. Least developed countries lack export surplus and productive capability, and international assistance is imperative in order for them to improve on these two fronts. The Special and Differential Treatment provisions for these countries in international trade need to be strongly implemented. Because of unequal resource distribution, the market alone cannot ensure fairness. There is also the possibility of market failure. Therefore, the market has to be regulated for it to function well. The goal of the overall economic and market policy should be pro-poor economic growth. The growth rate of the poor's income should outstrip the growth rate of the wealthy's income. In other words, growth in trade will be pro-poor if wages take up a relatively greater share of profits from trade than capital. Otherwise, growth in trade and in the economy will not automatically lead to the attainment of the SDGs.

**MEETING THE SDG TARGET ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE WILL ALSO HELP MEET OTHER TARGETS. THE MAJOR CONCEPTUAL QUESTION, THEN, IS WHETHER THESE TARGETS CAN BE ACHIEVED THROUGH CURRENT TRADE POLICIES AND SYSTEMS.**



## INFRASTRUCTURE UNDERPINS HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

By Nripa Bahadur Odd, Mayor, Dhangadhi Sub-metropolis

*Some representatives at the ward level focus excessively on roads and bridges. But I have also been emphasizing health and education, which are equally important.*

People expected a lot from us when we were elected as representatives in last year's local elections that were held after almost two decades. We have already presented the budget twice under the new federal structure. Because of limited resources, the budget allocated to a ward is only between Rs. 20 to 25 million. But each ward needs over Rs. 1 billion. That's not because people are greedy. They have reasonable demands; they want basic infrastructure like roads and culverts. But they are also impatient for development.



We have been focusing on infrastructure development. For example, constructing an airport is high on our agenda. That will promote local tourism. But infrastructure alone cannot bring about development. We have to think about overall human development. Some representatives at the ward level focus excessively on roads and bridges. But I have also been emphasizing health and education, which are equally important.

We have formulated various plans for sustainable development. We want to make riverbed farming more systematic, and have conducted a study to this end. Here, riverbed farming is spread over 4,600 bighah (about 740 hectares) of land. Goat farming is another area that we are looking into. We have carried out a survey that solicited public opinion on what else can be done to improve agriculture. Of course there is also the Prime Minister Agriculture Modernization Project (PMAMP) to assist farmers.

We need to support our farmers. We will process everyone's application for the subsidy provided by our sub-metropolis. We have allocated equal budget for all the applicants. Those who have not been informed about

the subsidy will be included in the next round. We will evaluate the progress made by the beneficiaries and encourage successful practices.

We were required to present the budget within 30 days of our election last year. We also needed to carry out a town meeting within a month. But we did not know how to do both of these things. So we discussed these issues with experts and bureaucrats and considered their suggestions.

In the past year, we travelled to almost all parts of our constituency. So we have a good understanding of what people need. Many of these are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. For this year's budget, we have formulated programs that will help meet these goals. But we haven't been able to do much because of the limited budget. Not all places have been able to benefit from our development budget, which is only between Rs. 400 to 450 million. But each ward is demanding over Rs. 1 billion. We have issued instructions not to leave any region behind. We even conducted a training program for ward chairpersons and secretaries. There may still be some shortcomings though.



In order to make development more effective, we have put forward the concept of public–private partnership. In fact we have already passed necessary laws to this end. Depending on the areas in which the private sector is interested in investing, we are willing to provide assistance. We have been elected representatives for five years. We have already spent more than a year now. I am determined to do some important work during my tenure; I want to do something different. My primary focus is on education. I want to bring about some changes in this sector. Of the 75 community schools, I have made arrangements with 15 to have English as their medium of instruction. We have been monitoring these schools every two to four weeks. By the time my tenure ends, I also want at least 90 percent of Dhangadhi's citizens to have access to clean drinking water. To this end, we have started drinking water projects in 16 wards. We will soon launch similar projects in the remaining three wards. We are making preparations for that at the moment.

My third area of focus is agriculture, in which we need to make a significant leap. Because of a dearth of skilled human resources, we will not be able to make a similar leap in other sectors immediately. Those with skills have mostly gone abroad. A small percentage might join the civil service. For the rest, agriculture is the only option for now. We need to adopt a public–private partnership model to modernize agriculture. We are willing to assist the private sector in the form of tax concessions. I will certainly make Dhangadhi an agricultural hub within my tenure.

As far as health services are concerned, Province 7 is different. We procure drugs straight from pharmaceutical companies. We have established health centers even in remote areas.

Ward 17 of Dhangadhi sub-metropolis is like an island such as Sri Lanka. It's surrounded by rivers on all sides. It's



hard for them to come to Dhangadhi during the monsoon. So we have made sure that there is enough provisions for three months. Given such a situation, we haven't been able to completely solve the problems of education, health, drinking water and so on, but we have definitely started managing them better.

The responsibility of local governments is not only limited to the development of infrastructure but also the dispensation of justice. We are serious about the issue of justice. We have been resolving 15 to 20 cases every day. We have already settled countless cases.

We have launched many political movements. We were sent to jail; we were even beaten. Now we have to fulfill our economic and social responsibilities. There is no alternative to prosperity and development.

I intend to develop Dhangadhi into a smart city. People should be spared the bother of withdrawing cash from their banks to pay utility bills. Even today, 40 percent of Dhangadhi's population cannot use technology. But if 60 percent of the people make use of technology, the remaining 40 percent will get some relief in the form of better services.

We are in the process of laying optical fiber in 19 wards. We are studying how it can be best used. We are also planning on constructing IT centers in 19 wards. We have already installed a couple of computers for the benefit of ordinary citizens. For better services to our citizens, we have been working hard to manage our budget, human resources and technology.

*[As told to Development Advocate]*







# TEACHING TO TRANSFORM

## Special Report

*Teach for Nepal was born of concern over poor academic performance and enrollment rates in government-funded schools inspiring a group of young Nepalis to conceive of a movement for social transformation through improved public school education.*

**“STUDENTS STUDYING IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS WERE GETTING A CLEAR ADVANTAGE OVER THOSE IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS... WE WANTED TO BRING DOWN THAT INEQUITY THROUGH STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE TEACHING-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.”**

- Shishir Khanal, CEO TFN

The Shree Bidhyadishwori Secondary School in Asrang was among 15 schools from Lalitpur selected by Teach for Nepal (TFN) in its very first year of operation in 2013. With a 225-strong student body—consisting predominantly of children from the Tamang community—it was, at the time, similar to many government-funded schools around the country, characterized by dismal academic performance and poor enrollment rates.

Concern over the deteriorating quality of education in public schools was precisely what led a group of young Nepalis to conceive of TFN: as a means of ending inequity in public school education by engaging university graduates and professionals in teaching. The idea was to mobilize a group of dedicated fellows, selected, trained and then stationed full-time in public schools—generally two fellows for each school—for two years at a time, tasked with the ambitious goals of transforming the teaching-learning process, improving student performance and gaining the trust of both the children and their guardians so as to boost enrollment.

In that first year, two fellows from TFN were hired as Shree Bidhyadishwori as teachers. During their time there they threw themselves into revamping the quality of education,

including by incorporating digital tools into classrooms, and establishing a more interactive dynamic between teachers and students, among other efforts.

Today, the intervention is succeeding; where less than one-third of students passed the School where less than one-third of examinees were found passing the School Leaving Certificate test (now Secondary Education Examination or SEE) in the past, the success rate has currently risen to 100 percent. Indeed, all 28 examinees from the school got through the grade 10 exams this year, with one of them securing an impressive 3.5 grade point average. Enrolment too has gone up by approximately 30 percent in these last five years, and the student population now stands at 325.

Apart from these accomplishments, according to principal Thal Prasad Timilsina, the overall environment at the school has also been significantly altered following TFN's involvement in the institution. “The students are now much more creative, and certainly more enthusiastic in their approach to studies,” he says. “What’s more, the dedication of the TFN fellows has encouraged other teachers in the school to work harder to place Shree Bidhyadishwori among the top public schools in the

district.”

In what is thus a testament to the effectiveness of its model and the kind of positive perception the initiative has garnered in its short period of existence, TFN now receives hundreds of applications from potential fellows every year, from which a few dozen are chosen. And what started with just 15 schools in Lalitpur has now extended to over 50 schools across five other districts—Sindupalchowk, Dhanusha, Dang, Lamjung and Parsa—directly benefitting around 10,000 students in total. There are presently over 150 fellows deployed across TFN’s working areas.

Chief Executive Officer and co-founder at TFN, Shishir Khanal says that Teach for Nepal was born of a thorough analysis of different public schools in Nepal where the quality of education was found to be deplorable. “We saw that this had created a dividing line: students studying in private schools were getting a clear advantage over those in public institutions,” Khanal says. “We wanted to bring down that inequity through structural changes in the teaching-learning environment.”

And Khanal is happy to report that, much as in the case of Shree Bidhyadishwori, the results of TFN’s engagement have been promising overall. If the SEE is any indication, he says, expected improvements have been achieved: the SLC success rate in the 15 public schools in Lalitpur alone, which was 54 percent before TFN arrived, has now jumped to 99 percent (considering a GPA of 1.65 as the minimum score for success).

**“IT’S AN EXCEEDINGLY VALUABLE EXPERIENCE; THE FELLOWS DEVELOP DEEP BONDS WITH THE LOCALS AND BECOME WELL-VERSED IN THE ISSUES AFFECTING THEM, AS WELL AS GETTING A CHANCE TO HARNESS AND HONE THEIR LEADERSHIP SKILLS.”**

- Shishir Khanal

TFN fellows focus on teaching science, English and mathematics—subjects that students generally have the most difficulty with—from grades 7 through 10. Each fellow receives a modest monthly stipend of Rs. 17,000, 20 percent of which is provided by the school where she or he has been assigned.

However, with the number of TFN schools steadily increasing and with Nepal’s transition to a federal system, Khanal says efforts are ongoing to place the responsibility of paying the fellows entirely in the hands of local governments, while TFN’s support will be directed towards training the teachers and other activities. “This is a more sustainable, far-sighted modality,” he says “And leadership at the local level has shown a great deal of interest and keenness in engaging with us.

Of course, while TFN is largely geared as a movement for social transformation via improved public education, Khanal acknowledges that the benefits of the program run both ways—not just to the communities, but to the fellows too. “It’s an exceedingly valuable experience; the fellows develop deep bonds with the local people and become well-versed in the issues affecting them, in addition to getting a chance to harness and hone their leadership skills,” he says.

Proof of this internalization of TFN’s mandate and commitment, Khanal says, is in the fact that many fellows, after completing their two years of TFN service, tend to dedicate themselves to social work, primarily related to education. A group of TFN alumnae, for instance, has been working to revitalize the Bhanu Primary School in Siddhipur, Lalitpur—an institution where student numbers had fallen to 20 two years ago, and which the government had been considering merging with another school for this reason. With the group’s support in management and pedagogy, however, Bhanu Primary has 125 students as of this year, and is functioning well. Similar initiatives are ongoing in three schools in Budhanilkantha Municipality.

“We hope that by the time our program ends in 2030, we will have had over 6,000 fellows working for communities across the country,” Khanal says. “We see them as agents of social change and we expect great things from them.”







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Resilient nations.*

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