


“Leave no one behind”



**Civil Society
Recommendations
to the Government of Nepal
on Voluntary National
Review (VNR) 2020 of the
SDGs**



Submitted by:
Nepal SDGs Forum
(Secretariat—NGO Federation of Nepal)

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The annual Voluntary National Review (VNR) process comprises the mechanism through which progress against the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is measured at both national and international levels. The review is intended to track progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda, including the SDGs and targets. The VNR aims to capture the universal and integrated nature of SDGs and all dimensions of sustainable development. With a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalized groups, the reviews must be substantive and knowledge based. The review and in-depth analysis of implementation should be done in order to effectively enhance concrete and tangible steps to be taken to ensure that the 2030 Agenda is met.

The effective implementation of the SDGs depends on their incorporation into all relevant national development frameworks. The VNR needs to analyze how well such frameworks are aligned with the SDGs and determine whether there are critical gaps. VNR process encourages the government to be specific about the main challenges and difficulties they face in implementing the SDGs, and are encouraged to provide an analysis of the causes of these challenges and difficulties.

Considering the context above, CSOs of Nepal take this opportunity to provide feedback and recommendations to the Government of Nepal on Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2020 of the SDGs as the role of major groups including CSOs with following considerations:

Considering that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Goals are the transformative roadmap for peace, prosperity, people, planet and partnership;

Bearing in mind that the 17 SDGs are integrated, indivisible and interlinked;

Understanding that the People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships are the five inseparable pillars of the SDGs;

Taking opportunity of the provisions, in 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, for follow-up and review mechanisms including VNR and participation of civil society in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the SDGs;

Firmly believing that the SDGs need to be achieved within the stipulated timeframe in the inclusive way and leaving no one behind;

Firmly believing and demanding that participation of civil society and people's organizations at grassroots is essential to achieve the SDGs;

Believing that good governance, transparency and accountability, effectiveness, data revolution and participation of all stakeholders is the key to inclusive and transformative development;

Expressing commitment and interest that civil society, NGOs/CSOs and all the groups and sections of the society continue to contribute to socio-economic transformation of the country and accelerating SDGs;

Believing that Government of Nepal will seriously consider the perspectives of the civil society organizations in this submission; and

Thanking National Planning Commission (NPC) and other government agencies for creating some space for and inviting participation of civil societies;

WE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS, ORGANIZED UNDER NEPAL SDGS FORUM, DRAW DUE ATTENTION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF NEPAL, ON THE PROCESS OF PREPARATION FOR THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW, ON THE FOLLOWING GOAL-WISE ISSUES, GAPS AND CHALLENGES:

Emerging Current Issues

1. *Assessment of Covid-19 crisis:* The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has widely impacted almost all the social and economic sectors of the country. Therefore, to understand concisely the level and severity of impacts in specific sectors and the needs therein, government should undertake impact and needs assessment of the Covid-19 crisis. We emphasize the need of immediate contingent plan and policies to readjust/address the Covid-19 crisis or context.
2. *Lack of baseline and disaggregated data:* Baseline data is unavailable for many SDG indicators. Lack of data has made it impossible to track progress, to monitor inclusive growth and improvement and make sure that no one is left behind. Lack of disaggregated data has affected transparency, accountability and just distribution of resources and focus. In addition, progress cannot be ascertained in lack of data. Data is not disaggregated and is scattered. The data revolution as part of the SDGs seems to have been ignored; undermining the participatory approaches and innovative solutions.
3. *Means of implementation for the SDGs:* Means of implementation including finance, technology, capacity and trading arrangements required to implement the SDGs are not developed as required. Financing for social sectors is not well-defined although it can contribute to structural transformation. In lack of policies and guidelines for financing for SDGs, the investment at the Local Levels depend on individual conscience and subjectivity. Pro-poor and inclusive macro-economic policies are necessary to ensure that no one is left behind.
4. *Targets and achievements:* Available Government data show that some of the SDG targets, such as poverty reduction, child health, maternal mortality, primary education, representation of women in parliament and all levels of government, basic water supply coverage, access to electricity, and GDP per capita growth seem achievable. However, they are not disaggregated by gender, social groups, geographic region, etc., to make sure that achievements are encompassing, inclusive and enjoyed universally. Moreover, based

on the preliminary data and situation predictions, most of the SDGs targets and indicators seem unachievable if the current trend goes on.

5. *People's empowerment*: Quality, inclusion and equality aspects on social, economic and political empowerment lag behind. In education, for instance, creativity, skills, employability and other important qualities are lacking.
6. Promote human economy and recognize unpaid care work: Women's economic empowerment could reduce poverty for everyone. In order to achieve it, we need a human economy that works for women and men alike, and for everyone. Unpaid care work prevents women and girls from participating in economic, political, and social activities, including opportunities for education, employment, and entrepreneurship. We need to first fix the current broken economic model which is undermining gender equality and causing extreme economic inequality.

Goal 1: No Poverty and Goal 2: Zero Hunger

7. *Food and nutrition security*: Data show that the food security situation of Nepal has improved, however, about 4.6 million people are still found food-insecure, 10 percent households are severely food-insecure, 20 percent are mildly food-insecure and 22 percent are moderately food-insecure (NDHS 2017). Likewise, reducing child undernourishment, and stunting among children under five years remain challenging which is likely to be aggravated further by Covid-19 pandemic.
8. *Pockets of poverty and hunger*: According to various data, there are specific pockets of poverty and hunger consistently prevailing now for decades. For example, the geographical pockets mainly lie in Karnali Pradesh, Pradesh 2 and Sudur Pashchim Pradesh. Moreover, the mountains and hills of Karnali and Sudur Pashchim Pradesh, and rural areas of Pradesh 2 are persistently hit by perpetual poverty and hunger. Similarly, the other pocket of poverty and hunger are different social groups, mainly the poverty and hunger trodden Dalit communities, and small groups of minority communities. Therefore, intensive target programmes hitting the poverty and hunger in above pockets is mandatory to achieve SDGs 1 and 2.
9. It is more challenging to ensure access to small farmers and the most vulnerable and at-risk people in government services and facilities, including advanced seeds, fertilizers and suitable agricultural instruments, government grants, insurance and financial incentives.

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being

10. Expanding quality health coverage and services for health across all groups including poor, marginalized and deprived people, address the growing threat of non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer and diabetics including mental health, tackle antimicrobial resistance and determinants of health such as income, education, drinking water, sanitation, access to energy, employment, gender and air pollution, sustain the achievement so far made and accelerate the progress in slow-progressing areas, integrate the SDG 3 into other goals and follow transdisciplinary approach to

overcome the interconnected challenges. The current COVID 19 pandemic indicates that communicable diseases in future will put the health systems in further stress and that must be considered to address the issues in priority basis.

Goal 4: Quality Education

11. Ensuring sustainable funding for SDG 4, achieving complete enrolment of out of school children, reducing dropout rate and maintaining gender parity at all level education are the major challenges seen. Similarly, much attention is not seen to increase the access of technical, vocational and higher education to needy people, produce qualified, competent and employment oriented human resources, manage qualified and well trained teachers at all levels, mainstream vocational and technical education in the overall education system, reduce the disparity between private and public education, stop brain drain from the country, identify the role of CSOs and mobilize them for SDG 4 implementation and integrate SDG 4 into other goals at all level.

Goal 5: Gender Equality

12. There are still gross inequalities in access to paid employment in some regions, and significant gaps between men and women in the labour market. Sexual violence and exploitation, the unequal division of unpaid care and domestic work, and discrimination in public decision making, all remain huge barriers. Climate change and disasters continue to have a disproportionate effect on women and children, as do conflict and migration.

GOAL 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

13. Main challenges remain to practically ensuring improved and equitable access and use of safe and sustainable drinking water and sanitation services, manage sustained financial resources for the availability and sustainable management of water, sanitation and hygiene, complete ongoing projects on time considering wide gap between demand and supply of quality drinking water and sanitation, repair and maintain completed projects, increase the coverage of quality services, enhance the quality of drinking water and sanitation and control waterborne diseases.

GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

14. There is an inter-linkage of SDG 7 with several Goals and Targets: SDG 1 Poverty, SDG 2 food insecurity, SDG 3 Good health, SDG 6, irrigation and water resource management Project), SDG 8 Creating jobs, SDG 10 reducing inequality, SDG 12. sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources, SDG 13 Climate action and indicators, SDG 15 reduce degradation of natural habitats among others. SDG 7 is a condition for economic development, poverty alleviation (SDG 1) and reducing inequalities (SDG 10). All of SDG 7 target areas are critical enablers for universal health coverage and will advance progress towards achievement of SDG 3. Cities in developing countries should

invest in green industrial transformation (SGD 9), creating new jobs (SDG 8) in connection with manufacturing and assembling (SDG 12) cleaner energy technologies, and electric appliances. Trade-offs among the goals are major challenges.

GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

15. Developing the importance of saving and saving capability in citizens, converting import-oriented economy into productive economy, ensuring maximum return on savings and investment, keeping inflation within desired limits and adopting the latest tools related to saving operations, attracting and expanding, transmitting income into productive investment and consumption are the major priorities to be undertaken.
16. Issuance of new labour, social security and employment laws, prioritizing technical education and skill training, legal provision of minimum wage, loan facilities for educational and foreign returned unemployed youths, implementing child labor prevention master plan and expanding the employment information center to local level are to be taken into account.

GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

17. Main challenges are seen in creating an investment friendly environment attracting domestic and foreign investment in the industry of comparative advantage and competitive potential and analyzing the challenges and opportunities created by economic liberalization, globalization and multilateral trade agreements and setting priorities and requirements in the areas of trade and investment.

GOAL 10: Reduced Inequality

18. Inequality manifests in many forms and has far-reaching implications; from a lack of protection for the collective lands of indigenous and peasant communities, to fiscal policies that incentivize and share the benefits of exploitation of natural resources unequally.
19. Skewed patterns of landownership have also been compounded by a deeply discriminatory and strictly hierarchical society that has excluded women, ethnic minorities, and Dalits who are facing caste-based discrimination and untouchability. In this way, land inequality also mirrors and exacerbates other divisions in Nepal. Approximately 80 percent of Nepal's indigenous population are marginal landowners, meaning they have less than 1 acre of land holding. Dalits are also more likely to have little or no land. Landlessness is as high as 44 percent among Dalits in the Tarai, and 22 percent among Dalits in hills.¹ Despite the fact that women in Nepal work hard and long hours on agricultural land, they own very little of it. 81 percent of women are landless, and overall women own just five percent of land in Nepal. Also, women cannot sell

¹ Dalit's population in Nepal is 13.6 per cent according to the Population Census of 2011.

produce, even from land that they own themselves, without the permission of a male family member.²

GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

20. Nepal is one of the least urbanized countries of Asia, however its spatial, demographic and economic transition point towards inevitable future urbanization is the major issue. Level of urbanization has remained low, but the pace of urbanization has been in rise, with inter-census urban growth rate of 3.43 per cent, 2.4 per cent higher than that of rural areas.

GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

21. Natural disaster is acting as a major challenge for the production, for example, floods across the country in 2008 affected over 6 million people (30% of the population) and crop production the following winter declined by over 15 percent due to drought³. Quality assurance with productivity, agriculture and forestry production with business module and implementation of sustainable approach for industry and businesses are also major challenges.

GOAL 13: Climate Action

22. *Climate justice*: The implementation of policies related to combating climate change from the perspective of justice is too weak in general. Subnational levels of government have not yet been able to adapt and internalize the policies with operational modalities.

23. *Financial and natural resources management*: Current Covid-19 pandemic is certain to bring a huge shock to the Nepalese economy, hence financial resources to be invested for the SDGs are likely to be diverted to respond the Covid-19 crisis. Similarly, the crisis is also going to have additional burden on natural resources, biodiversity and environmental sustainability. Most of the funding partners are severely hit by global Covid-19 pandemic, hence the chances for garnering encouraging international partnerships for finance, technical expertise and technology have been bleak.

GOAL 15: Life on Land

24. Main issue seen in this sector is to protect, promote, and make environmentally friendly and sustainable use of, natural resources available in the country, in consonance with national interest and adopting the concept of intergenerational equity, and make

² Ministry of Agriculture (2012). STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON NEPALESE AGRICULTURE (Executive Summary), Agricultural Development Agri-Business Promotion and Statistics Division Statistics Section, Singha Durbar, Kathmandu, Nepal

³ MOALD (2018),SDG Localization through Integration of Climate Change in Agricultural Planning and Budgeting at the National and Sub-national Levels

equitable distribution of fruits, according to priority and preferential right to the local communities.

GOAL 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions

25. *Inadequate institutional arrangements and localization*: When it comes to integration and localization of the SDGs, the progress is satisfactory at national level but poor at the province and local levels. Some of the provinces have not been able to set up their own focal organizations as others have managed, though with inadequate human resources. Specifically, Far-western Province doesn't yet have dedicated agency in place for planning, streamlining and implementation of SDGs. Hence, the programs related to awareness raising on the SDGs and integrating them into the sub-national plans are of particular concern while one-third period of the SDGs is about to elapse. The priorities of local governments are not necessarily guided by the SDGs.
26. *Capacity building*: There are no systematic efforts to enhance institutional as well as human resource capacity at sub-national levels for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs. Lack of capacity building programs, knowledge and expertise to the staff in implementing agencies has hindered localization and integration of the SDGs in policies, programs and budget at all levels. Inadequate staff and frequent turnover of the staff at province and the local level have added to this challenge.
27. *Coordination and harmonization*: Different government ministries, departments and institutions seem to lack harmony and coordination. Non-government organizations, cooperatives, private sector, and academia are working and attempting to contribute but have not been properly coordinated and harmonized by the government. The SDG stakeholders do not have adequate level of coordination and coherence. Thus, the priorities and investments of development partners are not adequately aligned with the SDGs and national priorities. There is lack of vertical and horizontal coordination and monitoring mechanism as well as operational guidelines.
28. *Mobilization, regularization and streamlining of private sector*: Private sector has the capacity and potential to invest large amount of resources, identify innovative solutions and utilize technology to contribute to achieving SDGs. However, mechanism to engage, facilitate and regulate them is inadequate and unclear. While the investment of government in public sectors is too low, the investment of private sector as public investment in health and education services are often criticized as not being affordable to the poor.
29. *Governance and institutions*: Governance remains one of the serious challenges which has overarching effect in implementation of all other goals. Cases of corruption and bribery are rife and some government processes often become controversial and lack transparency and accountability. This has been compounded by the weak oversight bodies.

GOAL 17: Partnerships to achieve the Goal

30. Main challenge is seen as lack of institutional clarity, roles and responsibilities among governmental agencies engaged in the 2030 Agenda, lack of adequate institutional arrangements and human resources, lack of coordination with strategic allocation of resource, poor productive capacity of private sectors. Priority is to be given for expanding diplomatic capabilities capable of protecting and promoting national interests in the changing environment of the world.

CONSIDERING THE ABOVEMENTIONED ISSUES AND CHALLENGES, THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS OF NEPAL URGE THE GOVERNMENT TO SERIOUSLY CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. *Undertake Covid-19 impact and needs assessment.* Based on the impact and needs assessment of Covid-19 crisis, specific policies and implementation measures including quick socio-economic recovery plan responding the impacts of Covid-19 crisis should be in place. Such plan must be put urgently in place to minimize the potential impacts on the attainment of the SDGs as envisaged. In responding to the problems as a result of this crisis, necessary revision of the SDGs roadmap and sectoral plan must be made as soon as possible to minimize the impacts at present and in future.
2. Create a collaborative and harmonious environment between the government and civil society including the community organizations to work together to achieve the SDGs. Multi-stakeholder monitoring, review and coordination mechanisms should be in place at all levels of the government.
3. Build CSO-friendly policies and create enabling environment, mobilize them and utilize their strengths and expertise in order to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs.
4. Generate and invest more resources dedicated to the SDGs.
5. Nepal needs to strongly negotiate with international community for privileges and preferential treatments in trade, technology transfer, foreign direct investment, debt cancellation and development cooperation in accordance with the various international agreements and declaration in this regard.
6. Achieve efficiency and effectiveness by making an optimum utilization of resources and technology, including e-governance.
7. Encourage small and medium enterprises and generate more employment opportunities. Introduce programs to protect the livelihood of small landholder farmers, landless agricultural workers, slum dwellers, daily wage laborers, and other poor and vulnerable groups, including returnee migrant workers.
8. Formulate necessary food and nutrition security strategies with adequate implementation and monitoring measures, including regulations and implementation guidelines for right to food and food sovereignty act, in order to defeat poverty and hunger, ensure food and nutrition security, and full enjoyment of right to food and food sovereignty.
9. Implement specific targeted plans and programs, for instance, feeding the most affected and vulnerable people including children, pregnant women, lactating mothers, people

living with HIV/AIDS, chronically sick and older people. Similarly, the poverty and hunger related policies, plans and programmes must focus both the geographical as well as social pockets that mainly lie in mountains and hills of Karnali and Sudur Pashchim Pradesh and rural areas of Pradesh 2, and among Dalit communities.

10. Increase access to clean, safe and piped drinking water, waste management, improve sanitation and hygiene particularly at schools and health facilities.
11. Regulate and manage both domestic as well as cross-border markets for quality food products and affordable/reasonable prices of food items. Cross border market needs to be strictly regulated in order to promote local food production and marketing, and achieve self-sufficiency in food within a reasonable timeframe.
12. Formulate and enforce master plan and operational manual on total sanitation with adequate consideration of the SDG 6, and integrate it in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sectoral plan.
13. Pro-poor and inclusive macro-economic policies need to be adopted to ensure that no one is left behind. Macroeconomic policies need to be revisited in order to make them coherent with the financing needs of the SDGs.
14. Introduce concrete programs in order to create inclusive space where everyone can participate in economic activities and get employed/self-employed.
15. Learning from the disasters and shocks created by Covid-19, diversification of trade, investment, financing and alternatives must be in place.
16. Multi-hazard disasters in the past must be considered while formulating development policies and plans. Government should increase investment and planning in construction of disaster resilient infrastructure for agriculture, service delivery and economic activities.
17. Preserve and promote useful indigenous knowledge and skills of farmers, and plant seeds and animal breeds while increasing access to and promoting agriculture technology, inputs and irrigation.
18. Develop objective, evidence based and transparent mechanism to prioritize and select projects from the local level through province to the central level in alignment with the SDGs and national priorities.
19. Although the government has policy provisions in relation to planning and implementation of the SDGs, the implementation aspects at subnational levels lag behind. So, we reiterate for the strengthened, effective and accelerated mechanism for implementation and localization of the SDGs.
20. Develop guidelines and frameworks, enhance capacity and support subnational governments in planning, resource allocation, implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. Also build awareness, involve and mobilize other stakeholders including the local communities for transparency, accountability, ownership, sustainability and effectiveness.
21. Government should establish robust knowledge hub, database system on the SDGs from local, to provincial and central levels. Disaggregated, reliable and updated data should be publicly available in an integrated and open data standard so as to monitor the progress and achievements and develop plans. Up to date data need to be publicly available in an open data format so that it can be utilized by the public, CSOs, private companies, cooperatives and other sectors alike for critical analyses, identification of gaps, and

innovative solutions. Take opportunity of the upcoming census to collect necessary disaggregated data.

22. Give utmost importance in ending all forms of intersectional discrimination, violence, exclusion, exploitation and inequality of women, children, Dalits, indigenous peoples, marginalized groups, LGBTIQ, poorest of the poor, older people, people living with HIV/AIDS, people with disabilities, people living in remote rural areas and other vulnerable groups. Consider the special needs of these groups.
23. Undertake public awareness programs and community mobilization about the special needs of older people and their integration in family and society, provide them psychosocial support, and give special preferences and privileges in public services.
24. Create enabling environment for identity, education, decent employment and dignified life of sexual and gender minorities, and people with disabilities.
25. Take urgent measures in order to improve governance, transparency, accountability and effectiveness of the implementing agencies and empower the oversight bodies at all levels: federal, province and local. As current electoral contests are largely becoming expensive and most likely to increase policy corruption, it needs urgent reform.
26. Introduce rules, regulations and programs and implement them in order to safeguard the fundamental rights of the people, as enshrined in the constitution of Nepal and/or enacted into relevant laws.
27. Create and strengthen forums and systems for learning and sharing of lessons, best practices, innovative solutions, constructive feedback and insights. Put emphasis on Goal 16 as a critical enabler and accelerator as it cuts across many themes and the SDGs.
28. In the context of Covid-19, take urgent measures to protect public health, seriously consider the risks and damages caused by health problems other than Covid-19 such as the alarmingly increasing maternal mortality.
29. Take all necessary measures to build on the gains of the MDGs and other socio-economic development endeavors in the past.
30. The government of Nepal should negotiate with the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to operationalize fair and equitable benefit sharing, by all the nations of the world including the LDCs, arising from the sharing of COVID-19 digital sequence information and samples as recognized by the Convention on Biological Diversity (which has 196 Parties) and its Nagoya Protocol (which has 123 Parties). "A Coordinated Global Research Roadmap: 2019 Novel Coronavirus" agrees that "virus materials, clinical samples and associated data should be rapidly shared for immediate public health purposes and that fair and equitable access to any medical products or innovations that are developed using the materials must be part of such sharing."
31. The effect of Covid-19 and lockdown has caused long term adverse effects on children and ultimately the future of the nation. So, protect children's physical and psychosocial health, address their learning needs and find ways to recover the loss. Likewise, establish women and children focused institutional arrangements at subnational levels.
32. Provide free, inclusive, equitable and quality education and learning opportunities as guaranteed by the Constitution and ensure necessary legislations at local, province and federal level. Local governments need to be equipped with implementable policies,

resources and capacities to manage the schools. Socially, economically and physically disadvantaged children must be covered by launching focused programs.

33. There need to be targeted and focused programs with higher budgetary allocation in order to address the intersectional marginalization and discrimination faced by women. Recognize unpaid care work as part of the economic activities, integrating it to the national economy to end gender discrimination. Gender responsive budgeting needs to be institutionalized down to the local level.
34. Impacts of climate change must not be underestimated; so, mitigation and adaptation measures must be considered timely. Climate change as well as disaster risk management should be integrated at all levels by strengthening capacity of the local levels.
35. Ensure conservation, sustainable use and fair distribution of natural resources and biodiversity while utilizing them for income and livelihood of the people, especially indigenous groups.
36. Establish suitable mechanism for participation of youth in policy and implementation, provide opportunity to them for technical and vocational education, sexual and reproductive health rights and services to them, and their mobilization is crucial to achieve many SDGs.

In addition to the above, some specific issues and recommendations provided by other thematic writers and focal organizations have been included in Annex I. A more detailed report of the civil society organizations will be submitted to National Planning Commission at the end of June 2020.

Many individuals and organizations have indirectly contributed to this report, but some direct contributors to this report have been listed in Annex II. This document is an outcome of the various subnational and national levels of discussions and consultations held by various CSOs mainly the conveners, co-conveners and thematically focused contributors. The credit for this report also goes to all the organizations and individuals that have been a part of Nepal SDGs Forum.