1. Background
Nepal is currently pursuing several national aims and aspirations. Nepal is simultaneously pursuing implementation of constitution and institutional development of federalism, graduation from LDC status by 2022, achievement of SDGs by 2030, and ultimately realizing the long term vision of Prosperous Nepal: Happy Nepali. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are of both national and international significance in terms of achieving sustainable development, peace and justice. Within SDGs, SDG 16, a bit more broadly known as SDG 16 Plus, is particularly of civil society concern. On this backdrop, NGO Federation of Nepal (NFN) is leading the CSO initiatives with support from Alliance for Social Dialogue. Under the project *Localizing SDG 16 in Nepal*, organizing national civil society conference is one of the major activities. Accordingly, NFN organized a national civil society conference on 31 January 2020 in Kathmandu.

2. Objectives
The main objectives of the national civil society conference were:

- To strengthen policy engagement of CSOs on Goal 16, and
- To create a platform for interaction between local level CSO representatives and national level stakeholders on localization and implementation of SDGs,

3. Participants
The National Civil Society Conference was organized in two parts: inaugural and thematic sessions. The first part was very extensive with participation of a wide range of stakeholders representing Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission (NPC) which is the leading agency for SDGs, representatives of major political parties, UN representatives, CSOs from 77 districts of Nepal, INGOs, social and human right activists among others. A total of 420 participants (259 males and 161 females) were present in the conference. The detailed list of participants has been included in *Annex I*.

4. Inaugural Session
The inauguration ceremony was emceed by Mr Ram Prasad Subedi, Secretary General of NFN and Chaired by Mr. Jit Ram Lama, President of NFN. The Chief Guest of the program was Rt. Hon Ganesh Prasad Timilsina, Chair of the National Assembly. Likewise, Hon. Parbat Gurung, Minister
of Women Children and Senior Citizens and Hon. Min Bahadur Shahi, Member of NPC were the special guests. Other guests included Mr. Jeevan Pariyar from Nepali Congress, Mr. Gauri Pradhan, former of National Human Rights Commission, Mr. Netra Pd Timilsina, Former President of NFN, Ms. Sharmila Karki, Former President of NFN, Mr. Gopal Lamsal, Immediate Past President of NFN, Mr. Shanta Lall Mulmi, Former Secretary General of NFN, Mr. Pradip Pokharel, advisor of NFN, Mr. Ganesh B.K Dalit rights activist and advisor of NFN. Other guests included representatives of various networks, alliances, associations and federations. Guests and CSO representatives expressed their views and concerns in various areas of development, human rights, civil society, and governance.

Mr. Jeevan Pariya, Nepali Congress leader, duly acknowledged that civil society leaders also represent the people. Referring to the potentially restrictive measures in the upcoming CSO legal act, he emphasized that CSOs/NGOs should not be restricted to any specific area and sector for their actions. He also highlighted the need of further effectiveness and governance improvement of NGOs.

Hon. Min Bahadur Shahi, Member, NPC attempted to assure that Government and NPC are holding a lot of consultations and participatory meetings with NGOs and CSOs in order to address their concerns and increase their participation in social and economic development. He appreciated the role of CSOs/NGOs in development and social transformation as well as their role and need in localization of SDGs and Voluntary National Review (VNR) process.

Hon. Parbat Gurung, Minister, MOWCSW also assured of making the policy and program development process more inclusive and participatory. Acknowledging the role of CSOs, he said that the Government welcomes the constructive criticism of civil society and CSOs. He also advised CSOs for improving their own institutional governance and enhancing their effectiveness so that they can cleanse negative impression towards them. Referring to the ongoing CSO law drafting process and the draft of this by Ministry of Home, he assured that Government will adequately consult and discuss with CSOs and incorporate the principles of democracy, fundamental rights, and civic space. He appreciated and welcomed the role of CSOs.

The chief guest Hon. Ganesh Prasad Timilsina mainly focused on the important role of CSOs in democratic change, safeguarding human rights and socio-economic development. He requested the government to undertake the policy formulation and implementation process in participation of CSOs. When the CSO bill is sent to the National Assembly, he assured that CSOs will be consulted and discussed with.

The inauguration of the National Civil Society Conference concluded with remarks of Mr. Jit Ram Lama, President of NFN.

The inaugural session has been important in bringing in discussion the various issues and concerns of civil society and CSOs/NGOs including civil space, CSO/NGO enabling environment, laws and policies that accommodate CSOs/NGOs and make CSOs/NGOs the partners in development, and increased roles of CSOs in implementation of national development agenda including SDGs. CSO leaders from different parts of the country raised their issues in order to be addressed by the concerned minister, parliamentarian, government bodies and development partners. It was a good interface and common platform for diverse stakeholders.
5. Thematic Sessions

After inaugural session, a thematic session on **SDG Plus Forum: Localization and VNR** was organized. With key roles of the individuals as in the following table, CSO representatives from different parts of the actively participated and contributed to the discussion.

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<td>Mr Hum Bhandari, NFN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chair and Moderator</td>
<td>Mr Ganesh BK, Dalit Rights and Development Activist,</td>
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<td>Sharing on localization of</td>
<td>• Mr Dev Raj Joshi, Program Director, NPC</td>
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<td>SDGs, SDG 16 Plus, and</td>
<td>• Mr Dharma Swarnakar, Policy Advisor, UNDP</td>
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<td>VNR</td>
<td>• Ms Shanta Laxmi Shreshta, President, Beyond Beijing Committee</td>
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<td>(BBC), Nepal</td>
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<td>• Mr Arjun Bhattarai, Deputy Secretary</td>
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<td>General, NFN (civil society initiatives and plans on VNR)</td>
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<td>• Mr. Charles Allen, Institute of Economics and Peace, Australia</td>
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<td>Conclusion and vote of</td>
<td>• Mr Ganesh BK, Dalit Rights and Development Activist</td>
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The workshop was chaired by Mr Ganesh BK and began with the introduction of the participants. The starting presentation was given by Mr Dev Raj Joshi, Program director at NPC. He mainly introduced institutional mechanisms and policies of Government of Nepal, SDGs targets and indicators, sub-national level and challenges, and finally SDG 16, 16+ and VNR. He mentioned that SDGs localization, management of detailed baseline and database for progress tracking, financial gap, weak coordination, outdated technology, weak implementation capacity, and realignment of policies are some of the challenges.

Next, Mr. Dharma Swarnakar from UNDP Nepal stressed that social, economic and environmental dimensions need to be addressed in order to successfully achieve the SDGs. He stated that SDGs should be everyone’s goal and not just the government’s because the aim is to leave no one behind. He also informed that UNDP is working with NPC mainly in terms of mainstreaming, accelerating and policy support. UNDP is also developing a guideline for localizing the SDGs and also developing resource persons in collaboration with Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC). He suggested of overcoming challenges such as localization, data management, and financial arrangements in order to succeed in achieving SDGs.

Another presentation was made by Mr. Arjun Bhattarai on **CSOs' Prospective on SDG 16+ and VNR**. Mr. Bhattarai started with a short story to set an example which most people in the audience could relate to. His story stated that SDGs can only be understood and achieved if we
customize them in local context. Highlighting on the five P’s of SDGs namely People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership, he said that the interventions and impact need to be people-centered and inclusive. At the moment when localization of SDGs has been realized as a challenge, he pointed out that CSOs can contribute to localize, implement and monitor the SDGs. He stated NGOs must follow up on the goals to make sure we are on the right track. He concluded with some actions ahead, that included policy alignment, setting up effective implementation mechanisms down to the local levels, awareness raising, capacity building, increasing participation and ownership, optimum use of IT, and budget allocation and tracking, among others.

Ms. Shanta Laxmi Shrestha looked at SDGs mainly from gender perspectives. She suggested that reaching the furthest behind and considering the gender at the same time is necessary. As a cross-cutting issue, she stated that SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) is interconnected and imbedded with many other goals. For instance, she mentioned, eighty-five global indicators are directly related to SDG 5 and spread across all SDGs.

The final sharing of the workshop was made by Mr. Charles Allen who presented the findings of Global Peace Index 2019. He related the positive peace with SDG 16 and how peace contributes to accelerating overall development. He proceeded to state that SDG 16 is very much linked to positive peace because research shows that countries with higher positive peace have better social wellbeing, resilience, economic development, and environmental conservation. Presence of peace would make it possible to achieve the SDGs faster.

Finally, moderator and chair of the session summed up the session and concluded thanking everyone for their time and contribution. In doing so, he stressed on the need of coordination and collaboration.

**Plenary**

The presentations were followed by a plenary in which participants raised their queries and concerns which were addressed by the presenters. The key issues, opinions and advice are summarized below:

- SDGs must be aligned adequately by all provincial governments;
- Making SDGs gender inclusive is very important in achieving them;
- Peace is the most important factor that needs to be achieved in order to be able to realize SDGs;
- VNR is an important innovation that will help achieve and maintain the SDGs;
- Reports and data relating to SDGs should be available to the public in order to maintain transparency and encourage meaningful involvement of the civil society and also to find the gaps;
6. Conclusion
The national civil society conference with thematic session on SDGs has increased awareness on SDGs and more particularly on SDG 16 Plus as well as VNR. In the common forum which had representation of government, development partners and civil society, CSO leaders have been aware of the national process and progress. At the same time, the CSO representatives from different parts of the country got opportunity to interact with central level stakeholder who have listened to the issues and concerns of civil society or CSO. Hopefully, it will help in accelerating Agenda 2030, and CSOs will have better space and effectiveness. Continuity of such discussions will be necessary to promote civil society engagement.

7. Annexes
Annex I: List of participants

8. Photographs