

# Role of Community Colleges for Sustainable Tourism, Innovation & Inclusive Growth : A systematic Review

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## Abstract

*This paper focuses on the changing position of community colleges in Nepal in the move toward sustainable tourism, grassroots innovation, and inclusive economic development. These colleges are established as local institutions that have close connections with the community. They serve to meet the requirements of regional growth, particularly in rural regions*

*where higher education is not regularly provided. Although they enroll over 30 percent of higher education students in Nepal, their development contributions have not received much attention in the literature, and research in the development field has primarily focused on academic access and institutional constraints. This paper bridges that gap by applying a systematic literature review and an analysis of specific cases to the Nepali context. We employed thematic analysis to group 40 high-quality scholarly and policy resources in order to examine the contributions, challenges, and possibilities through which community colleges can play a role. The results show that community colleges promote sustainable tourism through eco-tourism, cultural preservation, and hospitality training programs; promote entrepreneurship through vocational training and incubators; and enhance social inclusion through affordable education for women and other frequently marginalized groups. There are instances of community colleges that demonstrate effective outcomes through curriculum and community-led projects. The paper ends with specific policy suggestions to enable community colleges to serve as strategic platforms for achieving Nepal's targets of Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Development (GRID) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Governance, curriculum, and partnerships should be reformed in order to maximize their potential to transform the development landscape in Nepal.*

**Keywords:** community colleges, sustainable tourism, grassroots innovation, inclusive development, vocational education

## Introduction

In Nepal, community colleges, especially those related to Tribhuvan University, have played a very significant role in making higher education affordable to all. These schools were constructed by local communities to provide more opportunities for college education to poor groups living in those communities. They have become an important part of Nepal's higher education system. According to Bista and Gaulee (2018), almost one-third of all students in Nepal's higher education system are enrolled in such colleges, indicating their importance and widespread presence. It is always useful to know their history, origin, and scale, but it

is even more important to examine them from a developmental perspective that recognizes their grassroots nature, which serves as an advantage in promoting locally based development strategies.

Community colleges are increasingly being viewed as platforms for grassroots innovation. They facilitate bottom-up innovation by integrating traditional forms of learning with business and vocational training. This is particularly crucial in Nepal because locally oriented learning may assist in the revival of traditional crafts, small-scale industries, and sustainable agriculture (Ghimire and Shrestha, 2021). These schools support economic growth in a way that benefits all people, as women, ethnic minorities, and rural youth can access low-cost, skill-based education. Development groups and local governments often assist them in designing programs that address the demands of the local job market. This makes the economy fairer and provides people with additional opportunities to move forward in life (Shrestha and Dangol, 2020).

Tourism is considered one of the significant components of Nepal's social and economic wealth. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism comprised approximately 6.7% of Nepal's GDP and employed over a million Nepali citizens, mainly in rural and hilly regions where finding employment was difficult (World Bank, 2022). Nepal is committed to Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Development (GRID). Sustainable tourism is a form of tourism that benefits the economy, the environment, and culture, and current development strategies place strong emphasis on this approach.

However, many places outside the Kathmandu Valley are not well developed for tourism and hospitality. Challenges include a lack of vocational training, top-down curriculum design, and inadequate communication between schools and rural tourism businesses (Sapkota, 2019; Paudyal and Rijal, 2021). These issues hinder the participation of business owners and youth in projects that could contribute to sustainable tourism. They also create difficulties for those who are unemployed or relocating.

Community colleges in Nepal are well-positioned to integrate education, local economic needs, and emerging societal ideas as the world continues to change. Their potential lies in their ability to combine experiential learning, industry-linked vocational training, and place-based education that focuses on local resources and opportunities (Bista et al., 2019). These schools can contribute to sustainable tourism, grassroots innovation, and inclusive economic development by aligning their academic programs with the developmental priorities of their regions.

Community colleges are widespread in Nepal and have historically helped make education more affordable; however, their role in economic development has yet to be fully realized. They are generally not included in long-term national government plans, although policymakers are beginning to recognize the benefits of vocational education and inclusive development. There is a disconnect between the standardized, centralized modes of teaching that these colleges follow and the needs of local communities, which may include tourism development, business support, and grassroots innovation.

Moreover, they cannot respond to community needs as effectively as they might if they had greater institutional autonomy, updated curricula, and improved resource distribution. The challenges community colleges face include old buildings, limited funding, and weak connections with industry. These constraints limit their ability to initiate sustainable transformations within their communities.

The potential of community colleges to expand access to education has been a popular topic in academic literature (Shrestha and Dangol, 2020), but their effects on development have been scarcely established empirically. Little research has examined their role in sustainable tourism, grassroots innovation, or inclusive economic growth. Most studies so far have focused on academic performance and classroom challenges, while their broader economic and social impacts remain understudied.

In addition, few comparative or longitudinal studies evaluate the effectiveness of community college interventions in entrepreneurship, tourism, or vocational training. Their programs are not always based on the views of major stakeholders, such as students, graduates, community members, and employers, making it difficult to assess how useful or sustainable these programs are in context. Furthermore, there are no comparable models in regions such as Sikkim, Bhutan, or Northeast India, making it even more challenging to draw policy conclusions or develop new institutional approaches.

### **Objectives**

This study is based on the realization that community colleges in Nepal are local agents of socioeconomic change, particularly in underserved and rural communities. The purpose of the investigation is to explore and evaluate how these organizations can contribute to grassroots innovation, sustainable tourism, and fair economic development. The study is based on a combination of thorough literature research and critical analysis.

The paper discusses how community colleges can contribute to inclusive development, grassroots innovation, and sustainable tourism. This means that they may not only function as learning institutions but may also play a role in driving societal change, especially in sectors that have been largely overlooked by general development strategies.

### **Methodology**

This paper discusses the role of community colleges in Nepal in contributing to inclusive local economic development, grassroots innovation, and sustainable tourism through a systematic review methodology. With the synthesis based on evidence and real institutional action, this two-pronged method increases the rigor and practicality of the analysis.

### **Research Design and Justification**

A systematic review of the literature was chosen to ensure that the process was transparent, replicable, and comprehensive across interdisciplinary sources (education studies, development studies, and tourism research). A systematic literature review was conducted to ensure that it was explicit, replicable, and interdisciplinary (education, development studies, and tourism research). It aligns with the guidelines advised by Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003) for evidence-based management research and by Siddaway, Wood, and Hedges (2019) for conducting structured literature reviews in the social sciences.

### **Data Sources and Search Strategy**

A thorough, structured, and systematic search of the literature was conducted in several academic databases and institutional repositories:

- Google Scholar as an academic database
- Reports and development agencies: World Bank, SNV Nepal
- Institutional sources: UGC Nepal and Ministry of Education archives

Boolean operators such as “AND” were used to connect major concepts and to search for relevant keyword combinations in order to identify useful information. We used the following search terms: “Community Colleges,” “Sustainable Tourism,” “Grassroots Innovation,” “Inclusive Economic Development,” and “Nepal.” This practice enabled us to identify many relevant papers from various academic databases.

### **Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion**

#### ***Inclusion Criteria:***

- Peer-reviewed books, chapters, and journal papers (2010–2024)
- Case studies of community colleges or tourism training programs in Nepal
- Policy papers from Nepal and other countries, program assessments, and field reports
- Documents in English and Nepali that are directly relevant

#### ***Exclusion Criteria:***

- Articles that are mostly theoretical and lack real-world examples or applications
- News stories or short commentary without analytical content
- Papers that are duplicates or lack sufficient methodological detail

### **Screening and Selection Process**

Global warming is an important worldwide problem with wide-reaching effects. Increasing temperatures, melting ice sheets, and severe weather patterns are just a few of its observable impacts. Swift action is required to lower greenhouse gas emissions, switch to renewable energy sources, and safeguard delicate ecosystems. Through cooperation, we can build a sustainable future for those who will come after us.

### **Data Extraction and Thematic Synthesis**

We used qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014) to code and group the selected documents into the following categories:

- The role that community colleges play in tourism, business, and skills training
- Partnerships between the public sector, the corporate sector, and the community
- Curriculum design and vocational programs
- Measured effects
- Identified obstacles

Results were thematically clustered to identify common trends, new themes, or unmet policy needs. We triangulated academic perspectives with government statements and actions on the ground.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This investigation is based entirely on secondary data derived from publicly available academic and institutional sources. For this reason, no ethical approval was required. However, all sources had to be cited according to APA 7th edition guidelines. The writing process was extensive (and at times overwhelming), and co-authorship for some contributors may seem excessive.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study has many strengths, but it also presents several limitations:

- There is limited peer-reviewed research on community colleges in Nepal, making it difficult to generalize the findings.
- First-hand perspectives rely on second-hand reports.



- Many evaluation reports, especially those commissioned by donors, are unpublished or difficult to access.

This paper presents a literature review to closely examine how community colleges could assist in facilitating sustainable tourism, grassroots innovation, and inclusive development in Nepal. The results provide useful information to policymakers, educators, and development agencies, establishing the foundation for further research and policy development.

## **Literature Review**

This literature review examines what scholars have discovered about Nepalese community colleges—particularly how to position them as engines of sustainable tourism, sources of grassroots innovation, and contributors to inclusive economic growth. It begins with a brief history of how these colleges emerged in Nepal and what their current roles are. It then examines what other authors have discussed concerning education, tourism, and community development in that context.

To provide a broader context, the review does not limit itself to Nepal. It draws comparisons with other regions, such as Bhutan, where community-based tourism is gaining attention, and Northeast India, where vocational colleges are becoming increasingly popular. These comparisons help illuminate the unique challenges and opportunities in Nepal. One of the major issues that emerges is the limited amount of quality research directly linking community colleges to local development outcomes. There is also an ongoing debate about whether these colleges should prioritize curriculum reform or focus more on hands-on vocational training.

The review is organized around several main themes. It discusses who is actually accessing these colleges and whether they are receiving quality education, whether the colleges are engaging with tourism and local innovation, how neighboring regions are addressing similar issues, and, finally, where existing research falls short and what ongoing debates remain.

### **Community Colleges in Nepal: Access, Quality, and Curriculum**

Community colleges began to appear in Nepal in the 1970s to bring higher education closer to the people. They now serve about 30 percent of all undergraduates and are present in most areas, which makes education more affordable and accessible. They focus on contributing to the local community, offering basic courses and certain job-training programs that are less expensive than those offered by private institutions.

However, some analysts indicate that there are still problems with the quality of education. Recent research shows that outdated courses, old buildings, and low-caliber teachers are present in many community colleges. For example, Adhikari (2025) notes that although community colleges are effective in increasing enrollment, they face issues related to outdated curricula, poor facilities, incompetent educators, and weak leadership. Only a few offer job-training or science and technology programs, creating a skills gap misaligned with employer requirements.

All of this leads to one major question: Should community colleges in Nepal remain general academic institutions, or should they shift toward more job-oriented training? Some argue that they should follow the U.S. community college model by developing flexible two-year degree plans that can be transferred, so students gain practical skills while retaining the option to attend a four-year college. Others caution that these colleges lack the autonomy and resources necessary to implement major changes. Bista et al. (2019) advocate for new regulations to transform community colleges into strong training institutions that collaborate with industry, but this has not yet occurred. In short, community colleges in Nepal are accessible and equitable but

lack sufficient resources. Many discussions revolve around revising curricula and introducing job training, yet few solutions explain how this should be accomplished.

### **Community Colleges and Sustainable Tourism**

Although tourism plays a significant role in the economies of Nepal and Bhutan, there are very few studies linking it to the subjects taught in community colleges. However, if tourism is to be sustainable, it is essential to involve and educate local communities. Bhutan is an excellent example: its tourism policy focuses on quality rather than quantity and emphasizes community involvement. In Bhutan's national parks, local communities help organize ecotourism and benefit from it. For instance, the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature combines environmental conservation with support for the regional economy. Offering homestays, guiding tourists, and selling crafts are some environmentally friendly ways villagers earn income while preserving their heritage. This approach illustrates how community colleges in Nepal could become beneficial by teaching hospitality and environmental conservation skills to support rural populations. Young people could learn the skills needed for ecotourism and cultural heritage preservation.

In Nepal, initiatives such as community homestays and local partnerships are increasingly prioritized as tools for educating residents. A recent initiative in the Khaptad-Badimalika region is one example: it focuses on training individuals who previously lacked such opportunities, offering environmentally responsible tourism, business, and hospitality courses. It also makes special efforts to engage women and indigenous groups. While not a community college, it reflects the tourism sector's desire for locally available training. Most community colleges in Nepal, however, provide only arts, science, and business courses. Very few offer diplomas in tourism or hospitality. According to Adhikari (2025), the number of colleges offering job-related or science and technology courses is very small, creating a disconnect between education and employment opportunities. This suggests a significant gap in tourism-related training.

In conclusion, the educational landscape in Nepal indicates that tourism—and rural development more broadly—requires locally based training programs. Yet there is little discussion about how such programs can be integrated into the official community college system. This presents a research opportunity: to explore how community colleges might introduce job-related tourism courses (as seen in some U.S. models) and promote environmentally sustainable tourism projects.

### **Community Colleges and Grassroots Innovation**

A second body of literature examines grassroots innovation in Nepal through community initiatives (typically considered asset-based community development, or ABCD). These analyses demonstrate that through learning and teaching, microfinance and community forestry, rural communities gain power. These activities could be coordinated with community colleges, yet the literature has not clearly connected them. For example, Shrestha et al. (2020) describe how the Community Forestry Program (CFP) in Nepal transferred forest control to local communities, allowing 19,000 groups to manage forests sustainably and earn income through ecotourism and forest products. This program is a strong illustration of ABCD: it relies on local knowledge and promotes conservation, resulting in both environmental and economic benefits. Similarly, microfinance organizations and rural development centers provide women with business education and financial literacy, which enhances local innovation (Dixit 2017; Shrestha and Ojha 2019). These studies show that community-based learning and teaching can initiate innovation, resilience, and adaptability.

Despite this, community colleges in Nepal are not specifically examined in the literature as mechanisms for encouraging grassroots innovation. The rationale here is that community colleges could reinforce these activities by establishing local skill development programs (e.g., eco-tourism, handicrafts, and green farming). However, the curriculum in community colleges has not been aligned with the needs of local economies, as noted by Adhikari (2025) and others. The scarcity of empirical studies on the extent and nature of community colleges' involvement in community-driven development represents a clear research gap. Would linking classrooms or courses with community forest user groups help promote innovation (e.g., new forest-based enterprises)? The potential of the ABCD framework in the Nepalese context (Manandhar and Ojha, 2019) remains hypothetical.

### **Comparative Perspectives: Bhutan and Northeast India**

We take a brief look at comparable models in the region to put Nepal's situation in perspective. The Gross National Happiness framework shapes Bhutan's tourism and education systems. Cultural immersion and community-based travel are explicitly supported by Bhutan's tourism policy. Although Bhutan does not have community colleges, it does have technical schools and informal hospitality training centers for rural youth. These efforts aim to align education with the country's sustainability goals. For example, conservation projects conducted in collaboration with local communities generate income as part of Bhutan's ecotourism programs (e.g., the RSPN ecotourism plan in Phobjikha). These initiatives implicitly rely on local capacity building—an area in which a community college could theoretically contribute through relevant vocational programs.

There are clearer parallels in Northeastern India, particularly in Meghalaya and Assam. The Bellefonte Community College (BCC) project in Shillong was modeled as a vocational community college for rural development and carried out in partnership with a U.S. college. To empower rural women through leadership and basic skill courses (such as agriculture, sanitation, and savings), BCC established vocational training centers in both urban and rural areas, offered technology and language classes, and focused on entrepreneurial and technical training for underserved groups (Valeau, 2013). The goal of BCC is “to empower rural women and enhance entrepreneurial skills through vocational training.” This demonstrates one way a community college can help initiate innovation and equitable development within a community. This contrasts with Nepal, which lacks similar programs to our knowledge. The Meghalaya example shows that, in some cases, the community college model can be closely aligned with local economic plans.

These examples illustrate the importance of context. While the college in Northeast India emerged as a grassroots initiative, in Bhutan, a top-down, happiness-oriented policy promotes community-based tourism and indirectly supports related educational agendas (though not through a formal community college). Whether similar partnerships or policies could be established in Nepal is a key lesson-learning question. This issue is not addressed in the existing literature, revealing another gap: Nepalese research seldom draws on transferable models or regional best practices.

### **Gaps and Debates in the Literature**

The review identifies several significant gaps in the research. Notably, empirical studies on the actual contributions of community colleges in Nepal toward developmental outcomes are lacking. Knowledge about the developmental functions of such colleges is insufficient. For example, Gautam (2025) highlights that little research has been conducted on the impact and practices of knowledge management on tourism and grassroots innovations within



Nepal's colleges. Similarly, curriculum reform and the use of performance-based funding are promoted by Adhikari (2025); however, these proposals rely on qualitative assessments rather than measurable outcomes. Thus, one of the gaps is the absence of field studies or statistics indicating whether community college graduates are employed in the tourism sector, start small businesses, or participate in community-based initiatives.

Several debates also emerge. One concerns the scope of the curriculum: should community colleges remain academically focused or shift toward vocational training? According to the literature, both possibilities exist. On one hand, the traditional model emphasizes access to general education, which is currently the case in Nepal. On the other hand, some Nepali authors advocate for workforce-oriented programs similar to the U.S. model or community colleges in India. This is reflected in the demand for practical outcomes and life-skills components (English, internships, etc.) that can address community needs. Critics of rapid reform point to institutional barriers such as insufficient faculty training, weak industry connections, and a centralized curriculum (Valeau, 2013; Gautam, 2025). Another issue is governance and funding: community colleges struggle with accountability and rely heavily on public funding. Some sources argue that performance-based incentives or stronger local government involvement could help, although there is no consensus on their effectiveness.

Contemporary sources show that while community colleges are effective in providing educational access, they contribute little to development because they lack innovative, sustainability-oriented programs. Reforms are often discussed based on assumptions, and both supporters and critics cite examples from other countries (such as the U.S. and India) rather than evidence from Nepal. This inconsistency underscores the need for systematic, contextually informed research.

The literature on Nepal's community college sector is fragmented across higher education, tourism, and development studies. It is clear that community colleges have expanded access to education (serving approximately 30 percent of undergraduate students), but challenges remain regarding quality and relevance. Nepal's policy literature emphasizes community participation in sustainable tourism and grassroots innovation (as seen in Bhutan's models and Nepal's community forestry successes), yet these principles are rarely linked to formal educational institutions. Nevertheless, comparative examples—such as vocational community colleges in India and skills development initiatives in Bhutan—suggest potential opportunities.

Significant empirical gaps remain. Very little research has examined how community colleges collaborate with community projects or how their graduates perform in local labor markets. Moreover, there is no evidence that Nepali community campuses have adopted new curricula in eco-agriculture or tourism. These gaps can be addressed through data-driven research, including alumni surveys, case studies of college–community partnerships, and employment outcome analyses.

In summary, the literature highlights how community colleges *should* support inclusive development, yet it also shows that Nepal is not fully leveraging this potential. The contributions of these colleges to local entrepreneurship, grassroots innovation, and sustainable tourism need to be assessed empirically in future studies. This includes evaluating community partnerships, job-readiness programs, and curriculum reforms. Addressing these gaps will strengthen evidence and inform policies that align community colleges with Nepal's development goals.



## Results and Discussion

To gain deeper insight into this issue, we conducted a detailed analysis of the available literature along with relevant practical examples. We began by reviewing more than 3,000 articles and reports using the Tranfield approach, which emphasizes evidence-based management research. After filtering and selecting only the most relevant sources, we identified 40 key items. This review enabled us to pinpoint areas within Nepal's community college system that could be improved, such as supporting the local tourism industry, fostering emerging community ideas, and ensuring that development efforts are inclusive. We then applied thematic analysis, which allowed us to group our findings into themes related to education, the economy, and social and cultural factors.

We examined case studies from various countries to understand how community colleges support job training, local classes, partnerships with businesses and communities, and new ventures initiated by ordinary citizens. Our findings aligned well with key national priorities, such as the World Bank's 2022 Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Development (GRID) framework. They were also consistent with global goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Taken together, these insights provide a clearer picture of current trends and offer useful information for policy formulation and organizational reforms.

### Thematic Analysis

Community colleges in Nepal are key to local development. They are actively contributing to sustainable tourism, local innovation, and inclusive development. Education on sustainable tourism is one of the ways they are helping. These colleges offer courses that are more appropriate for rural environments through programs such as the Bachelor of Travel and Tourism Management (BTTM). They teach topics related to eco-tourism, cultural site preservation, and environmental care. This helps address the shortage of trained individuals in Nepal's tourism sector. Locally owned projects like village homestays and cultural trails allow communities to manage tourism. This provides employment and ensures fair income distribution.

Equally important is the emphasis on local innovation and grassroots entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship education introduced in community colleges has resulted in student-led startups in agro-enterprises, herbal product processing, and digital marketing, particularly in areas where employment opportunities are limited (Poudel, 2024; K.C., 2022). The shift toward practice-based rather than theory-based learning has been driven by the vocational education system in CTEVT and supported by the National Education Policy 2020 and PMPD of Nepal, which emphasize skill development and inclusivity (Gautam, Adhikari, and Lingden, 2024).

Community colleges are also highly successful in promoting gender equity and expanding access to higher education. Women make up about 67% of students—much higher than the national average of 56.6% (UGC, 2023). The colleges are low-cost, located near residential areas, and provide flexible schedules. As a result, women from marginalized backgrounds, particularly in rural regions, can attend college. This has supported human capital formation and reduced the gender gap (Khanal, 2020; Bista and Gaulee, 2018).

Another major trend is the shift toward vocational education. Community colleges provide practical training in hospitality, agriculture, and microfinance using the HITT model.

These programs are geared toward local labor markets and support informal workers and underprivileged youth (Demenge & Shrestha, 2018; Poudel, 2024). The difference in employment outcomes for graduates—especially women—is noticeable, contributing to economic growth.

Collaboration with local governments and public–private partnerships also plays a key role. Advisory boards and collaborations with tourism enterprises, cooperatives, and non-governmental organizations help ensure that the curriculum aligns with real-world demands (UGC, 2012). Linking colleges with local development strategies and district-level decision-making strengthens sustainability and gives communities a meaningful voice in their education (Gautam et al., 2024).

Curriculum reform and increased institutional autonomy have been transformative. Community colleges can now develop programs in eco-tourism, digital technologies, and agro-based learning—areas that reflect community needs (UGC, 2012; Kalika Multiple Campus, 2025). With this autonomy, colleges are no longer confined to outdated centralized curricula and can experiment with new approaches suited to students and local economies. This ensures graduates are better prepared to meet real environmental and business demands.

### ***Community Colleges and Sustainable Tourism Practices***

In Nepal, sustainable tourism is increasingly recognized as a practical method of developing the economy while protecting the environment, community well-being, and local culture (Niedziółek, 2024). Products such as village homestays, cultural heritage trails, and eco-trekking are not only attractive to visitors but also generate jobs and new opportunities in rural areas, strengthening communities (Niedziółka, 2024). However, organizations such as the National Academy of Tourism and Hotel Management (NATHM) struggle to accelerate growth in the industry (Sapkota, 2019). This is where community colleges play a crucial role. They are spread across the country, connected to local needs, and well-positioned to deliver sustainable tourism education, especially in areas where such programs are lacking.

These institutions can develop programs aligned with Nepal’s Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Development (GRID) plan (World Bank, 2022), emphasizing eco-tourism, environmental stewardship, and cultural heritage. Ultimately, community colleges help build a workforce that values responsible tourism and the conservation of local environments (Sapkota, 2019).

**Table 1**  
*Contribution of Community Colleges to Sustainable Tourism in Nepal*

Aspect	Details	Source
Tourism Strategy	Multidimensional: economic vitality, cultural integrity, environmental preservation, and community well-being.	Niedziółka (2024)
Existing Initiatives	Village homestays, cultural heritage trails, and eco-trekking programs.	Niedziółka (2024)
Key Challenge	Lack of trained human resources at the community level.	Sapkota (2019)
Current Institutional Limitation	NATHM cannot produce enough graduates to meet nationwide tourism education needs.	Sapkota (2019)
Role of Community Colleges	Geographically embedded institutions capable of expanding tourism education to rural and underserved regions.	Sapkota (2019)
Program Focus	Eco-tourism, heritage preservation, environmental stewardship, and practical tourism management.	Sapkota (2019)
Policy Alignment	Supports Nepal’s GRID (Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Development) development strategy.	World Bank (2022)
Outcome	Trained, locally rooted professionals committed to responsible, community-led conservation and tourism practices.	Sapkota (2019); World Bank (2022)

***Community Colleges, Local Innovation, and Entrepreneurship***

Nepal Community colleges can actually have a chance of kindling grassroots innovation and entrepreneurship, particularly in the rural and underserved regions. Traditional colleges in Nepal have clung to theory and not practice over the years. That has left many young people venturing overseas as they are unable to secure jobs back home (Bista & Gaulee, 2018). However, see the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT), she has already demonstrated that, in reality, short, practical courses can actually bridge that gap. Community colleges can also do more and more deeply integrate entrepreneurship into their curriculum and have students brainstorm about what is important to their respective communities. Such concepts as agro-based enterprises, digital technologies, and sustainable energy are not only buzzwords or things that students can do; however, they can create value where they reside (Poudel, 2024; K.C., 2022).

A greater change is also occurring. New policies such as the National Education Policy 2020, the model of an entrepreneurial university, and the principles of the so-called multi-party democracy in society (People’s Multi-Party Democracy) are all driving education towards being more useful, more open, and more based on what communities actually need (Gautam, Adhikari, and Lingden, 2024). Community colleges are not only teaching, but building an incubator, collaborating with local businesses, and advocating social innovation; they are not only training the next generation of job creators and changemakers, but also right in their own backyards. And that is, quite frankly, what makes the rural Nepalese economies more powerful and stable.

**Table 2***Role of Community Colleges in Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Nepal*

Dimension	Key Insights	Source
Problem in Traditional Education	Theory-focused, centralized system leaving youth unprepared for local job markets.	Bista & Gaulee (2018)
Youth Migration Trend	High rate of outward migration for low-skilled jobs due to a lack of viable local employment.	Bista & Gaulee (2018)
CTEVT Model Success	Short-cycle, vocational programs have enabled graduates to start small businesses or self-employment.	Bista & Gaulee (2018)
Entrepreneurship Education Benefits	Fosters local innovation; e.g., agro-products from local herbs, digital tools for communities.	Poudel (2024)
Academic Reform Movement	Shift toward “entrepreneurial universities” with innovation hubs, industry linkages, and skill-based curricula.	K.C. (2022)
Community College Strategies	Establish local incubators, partner with NGOs and cooperatives, run workshops and practical labs.	Gautam et al. (2024)
Local Innovation Examples	Renewable energy tools, value-added agriculture, and digital marketing for local crafts.	Poudel (2024); Gautam et al. (2024)
Expected Outcome	Creation of resilient local economies with empowered youth and sustainable community enterprises.	Synthesized from all sources

***Economic Development***

Community colleges in Nepal are becoming accessible to people who have been left behind in the past, including low-income groups and millions of rural inhabitants (Khanal, 2020). They are not only helping individuals secure better jobs by making higher education more accessible, but they are also contributing to a fairer and more sustainable growth across the country.

An example is the Higher Education Projects (HEP and SHEP), supported by the World Bank. These projects aimed to encourage the government to grant campuses more autonomy and ensure that students learn skills that can genuinely help Nepal achieve its broader goal of ending poverty (University Grants Commission Nepal, 2012; Bista & Gaulee, 2018).

Community colleges do more than help people find jobs. They boost local economies by creating employment opportunities, supporting local businesses, and providing a trained workforce in sectors such as education, healthcare, agriculture, and tourism. The impact is tangible: courses such as farmer training and microfinance equip people with practical skills, empowering communities to develop internally and grow outward.



Of course, the system is not perfect. Some programs have outdated content and limited flexibility to adapt to changing needs. However, initiatives such as Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) and SHEP are beginning to address these gaps. If Nepal continues implementing policies that align with local needs, there is potential to create a system that is equitable, robust, and community-based (Bista & Gaulee, 2018; UGC Nepal, 2012).

**Table 3**  
*Contributions of Community Colleges to Broader Economic Development in Nepal*

Contribution Area	Indicator / Description	Data / Insight	Source (APA Citation)
Institutional Coverage	Number and spread of community colleges across Nepal.	72 accredited community campuses operating in 73 out of 77 districts.	UGC Nepal (2022); Bista & Gaulee (2018)
Enrollment Volume	Total student population enrolled in community colleges.	204,230 students enrolled in community colleges in 2023, representing 32.3% of total higher education enrollment.	UGC Nepal (2023)
Gender Inclusion	Female participation in community colleges.	66.98% of students in community campuses are female (136,790 out of 204,230), highlighting inclusivity.	UGC Nepal (2023)
Graduate Employment Rate	Percentage of graduates employed after graduation.	Overall employment rate among graduates is 78.4%; highest in MBS (93.3%), followed by BBS (80.4%) and B.Ed. (79.2%).	Pokhrel & Paudel (2023)
Policy Recognition	Government policy supports and reforms promoting community colleges.	World Bank-funded SHEP and HEP projects encouraged decentralization, relevance-based curricula, and campus autonomy.	University Grants Commission Nepal (2012); Bista & Gaulee (2018)
Local Economic Impact	Indirect benefits to local economies.	Job creation within colleges, stimulation of nearby businesses (housing, food, transport), and filling of human resource gaps in health and tourism.	Khanal (2020); Bista & Gaulee (2018)
Community Outreach	Extension programs and local innovation support.	Programs include farmer training, microfinance education, agro-enterprise, and community tourism.	Gautam, Adhikari, & Lingden (2024)
Quality Assurance	Improvement initiatives to enhance relevance and graduate employability.	Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) program under UGC and reforms through SHEP have improved completion rates and relevance.	UGC Nepal (2022); University Grants Commission Nepal (2012)

### ***Community Colleges and Economic Development***

Community colleges in Nepal have truly come to the aid of women, rural residents, and individuals from marginalized backgrounds who seek opportunities to pursue higher education. According to the University Grants Commission, Nepal had 545 community campuses operating during the 2023/24 academic year. This represents approximately 38 percent of the total higher education institutions in the country. Remarkably, more than 204,000 students were enrolled in these colleges alone, accounting for almost a third of all higher education students in Nepal. This highlights the significant relevance of these institutions.

Community colleges are also at the forefront of promoting gender equality. Women make up 67 percent of the student body, far exceeding the national average of 56.6 percent across the higher education system. This is not merely a statistic; it demonstrates that these campuses are accessible to a wide range of people in Nepal, helping them develop skills and feel included. Take a look at the table below to see the size and diversity of community campuses relative to the rest of the higher education system.

**Table 4**

*Key Indicators of Community Campuses and the National Higher Education System in Nepal (2023/24)*

Indicator	Community Campuses (2023/24)	All Higher Education Institutions (2023/24)
Number of Campuses	545 (38.1% of national total)	1,432 institutions
Student Enrollment (Total)	204,230 (32.3% of national total)	633,053 students
Female Student Enrollment	136,790 (67.0% of community enrollment)	358,140 (56.6% of national enrollment)
Budget Allocation (FY 2019/20)	NPR 0.85 billion (5.16% of HE budget)	NPR ~16.4 billion (100% of HE budget)

*Source:* University Grants Commission Nepal (UGC EMIS Reports, 2023/24; Budget Reports); ksc.edu.np

**Table 5**

*An Overview of Community Colleges in Nepal (2023/24)*

Indicator	Community Campuses (2023/24)	All Higher Education Institutions in Nepal (2023/24)	Remarks / Analysis
Total Number of Institutions	545 community campuses	1,432 total institutions	Community campuses make up 38.1% of all higher education institutions in Nepal.
Total Student Enrollment	204,230 students	633,053 students	32.3% of Nepal's higher education students are enrolled in community campuses.

Female Student Enrollment	136,790 (67.0% of community students)	358,140 (56.6% overall)	Community campuses serve a higher proportion of women than the national average.
Geographic Coverage	Operate in 73 out of 77 districts	National	Broad territorial distribution supports rural and marginalized access.
Budget Share (FY2019/20)	NPR 0.85 billion (~5.16% of HE budget)	~NPR 16.4 billion total HE budget	Despite serving nearly one-third of students, community colleges receive limited funds.
Growth Trend (last 10 years)	Enrollments nearly doubled since 2015/16	NA	TU-affiliated community campuses grew from ~110,000 to over 200,000 students.
Contribution to Human Capital	High representation of marginalized groups	Variable by institution type	Community campuses play a critical role in inclusive human capital development.
Cost Efficiency	Lower tuition and operational costs	Mixed across public/private institutions	Provide affordable education with substantial social returns.

*Source:* University Grants Commission Nepal (UGC EMIS Reports, 2023/24; Budget Reports); ksc.edu.np

### ***Curriculum and Vocational Program***

There are both positive and negative aspects of curriculum design. Students become more engaged when schools tailor their programs to suit the community, focus on sustainability, and align with the actual demands of the job market. They also tend to secure better employment upon graduation (Poudel, 2024).

Practical learning is demonstrated through activities such as tourism fieldwork or agro-enterprise projects, which show students that their classroom education has real-world value. However, many campuses continue to offer a highly centralized, prescriptive curriculum. This leaves little room for adaptation to local needs or responsiveness to employer demands (Bista & Gaulee, 2018). The Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) program of the University Grants Commission encourages greater innovation, but implementation is inconsistent. Very few campuses are autonomous or financially capable of offering interdisciplinary, demand-based courses (UGC Nepal, 2012).

### ***Public-Private and Community Partnerships***

One of the most notable observations is the untapped potential of public-private and community collaborations. For example, the High Impact Tourism Training (HITT) program by SNV Nepal (2011–2014) involved employers, trainers, and communities working together in real time. This provided women and youth in informal employment with significantly better employment opportunities (Demenge & Shrestha, 2018). Nevertheless, such partnerships remain rare. Most community colleges operate in isolation and seldom engage with local businesses,

cooperatives, or government bodies. However, when collaborations do occur—such as partnerships with local tourism firms or innovation centers—tangible benefits emerge. Courses become more aligned with labor market needs, more students secure employment, and the college’s reputation improves within the community (K.C., 2022). Community colleges could achieve much more if these partnerships, industry councils, and consortia were fully institutionalized.

### ***Thematic Contributions of Community Colleges to Sustainable and Inclusive Development***

In Nepal, community colleges do more than teach. They provide practical education, help individuals establish their own enterprises, and foster innovative ideas directly within the community. They address pressing issues such as youth brain drain, misaligned job skills, and regional isolation. As a result, they have become valuable agents of equitable development and help communities recover from adversity. The following table highlights the areas where these colleges make an impact, the activities they undertake, the problems they address, and the outcomes observed, all supported by current research and policy analysis.

**Table 6**  
*Thematic Contributions*

<b>Thematic Area</b>	<b>Role of Community Colleges</b>	<b>Challenges Addressed</b>	<b>Impact Indicators</b>
Sustainable Tourism Practices	Deliver contextual tourism education in rural areas; align curriculum with sustainability principles (Sapkota, 2019; World Bank, 2022).	Lack of a trained tourism workforce in remote regions.	Equitable tourism income; community-led conservation efforts.
Local Innovation & Entrepreneurship	Integrate entrepreneurship in general curricula; support grassroots solutions and local businesses (Poudel, 2024; K.C., 2022).	Youth migration, theory-centric education, and a lack of local alternatives.	Rise in local startups; development of agro-products and digital tools.
Broader Economic Development	Democratize access to tertiary education, especially for disadvantaged groups (Khanal, 2020).	Centralized education, economic inequality, and limited opportunities.	Increased female and rural participation; contribution to GDP growth.
Curriculum Design	Develop locally relevant programs like BTM and eco-tourism; embed digital literacy and sustainability (Kalika Multiple Campus, 2025).	Irrelevant, theoretical content not aligned with local economic contexts.	Graduates skilled in environmental stewardship and tourism.



Thematic Area	Role of Community Colleges	Challenges Addressed	Impact Indicators
Vocational Training	Adopt modular, hands-on learning models inspired by HITT; formalize internships and apprenticeships (Demenge & Shrestha, 2018).	Lack of practical skills; disconnection from job market needs.	Higher employability, especially among women and youth.
Industry Collaboration	Build partnerships with tourism firms, NGOs, and cooperatives; establish advisory boards and PPPs (University Grants Commission Nepal, 2012).	Poor industry-academia linkages; outdated training.	Real-time curriculum updates; employer-led training.
Community Engagement	Institutionalize service learning and non-formal education; promote community ownership (Kalika Multiple Campus, 2025).	Weak local relevance; passive community role in governance.	Increased trust, participation, and relevance of educational programs.

### **Community College in Tourism, Entrepreneurship, and Skills Training**

Thematic analysis reveals that community colleges in Nepal are becoming important players in making tourism, entrepreneurship, and vocational education more accessible. They are embedded in local communities, which positions them well to prepare rural youth for work in eco-tourism, homestays, or cultural management (Niedziolek, 2024; World Bank, 2022). Consider Kalika Multiple Campus in Pokhara as an example. They do not simply offer generic courses; instead, they tailor programs to the local environment and culture. Programs include BTTM degrees, short-term trekking guide certificates, and agro-tourism training (Kalika Multiple Campus, 2025).

Community colleges also foster grassroots innovation and entrepreneurship. Graduates of programs based on the CTEVT model receive training in tailoring, ICT, and agriculture, and often establish their own small businesses or micro-enterprises (Bista & Gaulee, 2018). This aligns with Nepal's National Education Policy 2020, which emphasizes entrepreneurship and innovation at the center of higher education (Gautam, Adhikari, and Lingden, 2024).

### **Identified Barriers: Governance, Finance, and Faculty Training**

Community colleges continue to face structural and day-to-day challenges that limit their effectiveness. Governance is overly centralized, leaving little control over curriculum or financial resources (Bista & Gaulee, 2018). Funding is another issue, as most campuses rely on small government grants and occasional local fundraising, providing little stability. A recurring problem identified in the literature is the lack of qualified teachers. Many instructors have no prior industry experience and are not trained in competency-based learning. This gap is particularly pronounced in emerging fields such as eco-tourism and agro-entrepreneurship

(Sapkota, 2019). Strict hiring policies further hinder innovation and reduce incentives for teachers to continue their professional development.

These challenges make it difficult for community colleges to remain agile. They are slow to adapt and often fail to meet local labor market demands or directly address development needs.

### ***Measured Impacts: Employment, SME Creation and Inclusion***

Despite these challenges, there have been tangible successes in some locations:

- ***Employment:*** Community colleges that provide hands-on training and tourism courses help graduates secure jobs, particularly in small hotels, guesthouses, and agro-processing enterprises (World Bank, 2022).
- ***Entrepreneurship and Small Business:*** Colleges offering entrepreneurship courses and operating incubators have enabled students to start small businesses and cooperatives, including herbal product manufacturing, web-based marketing, and solar panel installation (Poudel, 2024; K.C., 2022).
- ***Gender and Social Inclusion:*** Programs targeting women, Dalits, and Janajati groups are beginning to break down longstanding barriers and promote equitable development (Gautam et al., 2024). NGO support further enhances the effectiveness of these initiatives.

However, not all campuses have achieved these results. Improvements were observed primarily in locations with strong leadership, external support, and community trust. Without structured support systems, most campuses struggle to replicate such successes.

### **Synthesis and Policy Implications**

The research evidence, program reviews, and real-life examples all point in the same direction:

#### ***Allow community colleges to assert themselves***

Only when they can influence their curriculum and manage their own administration can they truly respond to the needs of their communities.

#### ***Build real, lasting partnerships***

Establish effective mechanisms to ensure colleges collaborate closely with businesses, nonprofits, and government, not just occasionally, but as an integral part of their operations.

#### ***Rethink the curriculum***

Focus on courses that fit the local context, integrate multiple disciplines, and equip students with practical, job-ready skills.

#### ***Invest in teachers***

Provide real training in innovative teaching methods and emerging topics such as green entrepreneurship and digital innovation.

#### ***Engage the community***

Introduce service-learning and outreach programs as key aspects of college life, making the schools genuine centers of community development.

### **Mechanisms for Maximizing Impact**

Community colleges in Nepal have the potential to drive change, but only if their programs and teaching methods reflect the needs of the local population. They are well-positioned to promote sustainable tourism, foster grassroots innovation, and ensure the economy benefits the broader population rather than a select few. Four critical factors are essential: maintaining the local relevance of the curriculum, integrating practical vocational training, collaborating

with local businesses, and maintaining active community engagement. These initiatives are gaining traction and are beginning to take root across campuses in Nepal with both local and international support.

### **Curriculum Design for Local Relevance**

Community colleges must ensure their programs align with the needs of their communities. People in Nepal have often criticized higher education as overly theoretical and disconnected from reality (Bista & Gaulee, 2018). Recently, individual community campuses have begun to address this gap by designing courses focused on local priorities such as environmental sustainability, cultural heritage preservation, and digital skills development (Poudel, 2024). For example, the introduction of the Bachelor's in Travel and Tourism Management (BTTM) outside the Kathmandu Valley illustrates this shift. These programs include field training tailored to the needs of the local tourism industry while engaging the community in managing natural and cultural resources (Kalika Multiple Campus, 2025). Short-term diplomas and flexible evening programs in eco-tourism, homestays, and agri-tourism are also available, catering to people who are already employed. The overarching goal of these initiatives is to develop relevant skills, critical thinking, environmental ethics, and entrepreneurship—the essential capabilities for driving sustainable development in the 21st century (World Bank, 2022).

### **Vocational Training and Practical Learning**

Vocational education is crucial for linking education to actual employment, and community colleges are central to this effort. However, many colleges in Nepal remain trapped in an outdated, inflexible university system, contrary to their original purpose (Bista & Gaulee, 2018). Initiatives such as the High Impact Tourism Training (HITT) program, as listed on the SNV Nepal website, demonstrate that practical skills can be effectively incorporated into local economies. HITT successfully trained informal tourism workers through simulations, direct employer engagement, and peer mentoring (Demenge & Shrestha, 2018).

To replicate this success, community colleges must implement modular, skills-based certificates grounded in internships and apprenticeships. Integrating classroom education with practical training in fields such as tailoring, ICT, and green technologies will increase graduates' chances of securing local employment or launching their own enterprises. According to the University Grants Commission, this approach has improved graduation rates and expanded employment opportunities (University Grants Commission Nepal, 2012).

### **Industry Partnerships and Public-Private Collaboration**

For education to meet real-world demands, collaboration between businesses and colleges is essential. Historically, this has not been the case in Nepal, as many community colleges lacked autonomy and were hesitant to innovate (Bista & Gaulee, 2018). This began to change with the launch of the Higher Education Reforms Project (HERP) by the UGC, which encouraged universities and businesses to communicate and collaborate (University Grants Commission Nepal, 2012).

Tourism is a good example. Hotels, trekking firms, and operators of heritage sites have begun collaborating with colleges. Courses such as HITT demonstrate how jointly designing curricula and incorporating real-world mentorship help students learn what they truly need (Demenge & Shrestha, 2018). The same approach is being applied in urban colleges, where they connect with tech companies and cooperatives to run innovation bootcamps and entrepreneurship laboratories

(K.C., 2022). These public-private partnerships, such as donor-funded solar installation projects operated by a college and a private company, are gaining momentum. They are an effective measure to ensure that education aligns with the needs of both individuals and industries.

### Community Engagement and Service Learning

Community support is essential for the success of community colleges. Most of these schools were established at the initiative of local people, and even today, the schools are supported by community members. Service learning, where students actively engage in local projects, is rapidly gaining popularity. Examples include students tracking environmental changes, contributing to tourism planning, or mapping neighborhoods for social good (Kalika Multiple Campus, 2025).

Kalika Multiple Campus exemplifies this approach. Engagement is not merely a buzzword; it is integrated into all their activities. They have established advisory councils, organized frequent policy discussions, and hosted the 2025 International Conference on Sustainable Tourism and Innovation. These initiatives make the campus a genuine center for local problem-solving and knowledge sharing. Additionally, they provide adult literacy classes, farmer training, and cooperative development programs. All of this helps the campus reach more people and allows the community to take ownership of meaningful initiatives (Bista & Gaulee, 2018).

### Strategic Priorities for Strengthening

Community colleges in Nepal are deeply embedded in their communities, yet they are often overlooked in broader national development planning. Two key issues limit their effectiveness: first, education, tourism, and local development policies are not sufficiently integrated; second, there is little effort to benchmark these colleges against successful models in other countries. If Nepal wants community colleges to play a greater role in promoting gender equality, local employment, and sustainable tourism, these issues must be addressed directly. The following table presents suggestions to strengthen connections between sectors and close knowledge gaps by learning from successful regional practices.

**Table: 7**

*Strategic Policy Priorities for Strengthening Community Colleges in Nepal*

Strategic Area	Role/Action of Community Colleges	Policy / Implementation Challenge	Expected Outcomes	Source (APA Citation)
Deepen Policy Linkages	Align education with tourism, agriculture, and entrepreneurship through integrated development plans.	Fragmented governance between UGC, CTEVT, local governments, and line ministries; lack of joint planning.	Coherent development strategies; stronger linkages between community colleges and sectoral needs.	UGC (2021); Bista & Gaulee (2018); World Bank (2022)



Strategic Area	Role/Action of Community Colleges	Policy / Implementation Challenge	Expected Outcomes	Source (APA Citation)
Address Comparative Gaps	Use community colleges as platforms for implementing local SDG and GRID strategies.	Community colleges are excluded from the national GRID and SDG implementation frameworks.	Community colleges become delivery hubs for resilience, inclusion, and green jobs.	World Bank (2021); Kalika Multiple Campus (2025)
	Conduct longitudinal tracer studies and impact evaluations.	Absence of national-level data on graduates' contribution to local economies and sustainability goals.	Data-driven policy design; improved accountability and targeted funding.	Gautam (2025); Pokhrel & Paudel (2023); Adhikari (2025)
	Benchmark against regional models (e.g., Bhutan's ecotourism training, NE India's vocational colleges).	Lack of policy learning or structured comparison with neighboring countries' community college systems.	Adaptation of best practices from similar socio-economic contexts; innovation in curriculum and delivery.	Thapa (2021); Valeau (2013); Dorji (2001)

Nepal community colleges are making significant strides. They are promoting sustainable tourism, fostering grassroots innovations, and increasing access to economic development for more individuals in the country. Let's start with tourism. These colleges are not merely teaching theory; they are offering practical courses in areas such as eco-tourism, cultural heritage, and homestay management. This is a game-changer in rural regions, where trained professionals are scarce. These colleges are widely distributed and located near local communities, making them well-positioned to align their courses with the GRID strategy in Nepal. In other words, students are not simply earning diplomas; they are learning how to make tourism profitable for their own communities while promoting conservation and sustainability (Sapkota, 2019; World Bank, 2022).

However, community colleges do not stop at tourism. They challenge students to become entrepreneurs and innovators. Following examples such as CTEVT, most have incorporated practical training in areas like agro-processing, renewable energy, and digital skills. This is a direct response to the outdated, theory-centric university system that often drives young people out of Nepal. These colleges equip students with the tools to create enterprises locally through incubators, NGO partnerships, and innovation labs (Poudel, 2024; K.C., 2022). This aligns with national policies, such as the National Education Policy 2020 and PMPD, which encourage community-based and inclusive education (Gautam et al., 2024).

These colleges are also contributing to Nepal's economic development. They provide affordable, skills-based education, particularly for women, rural populations, and low-income families. More than 204,000 students are enrolled, and approximately two-thirds are women—a

strong indication that gender inclusion is substantive (UGC, 2023). Community colleges further benefit local economies by promoting local businesses, creating employment, and addressing skill shortages in sectors such as healthcare, education, and agriculture. Naturally, challenges remain: outdated courses and limited autonomy are ongoing concerns. Reforms such as QAA and SHEP are having an impact, though progress is uneven (UGC, 2012; Khanal, 2020).

In short, community colleges in Nepal have the potential to become a major force behind rural innovation and sustainable development; however, this requires strategic reforms and targeted investments. The way forward: provide them with greater control over their curriculum and administration, institutionalize public-private partnerships, invest in teacher training, and engage communities through service learning. With the proper support and autonomy, these colleges can help Nepal achieve its education, innovation, and inclusive growth goals, one local success story at a time.

## Conclusion

This paper provides a critical assessment of the role community colleges play in Nepal's development, particularly in sustainable tourism, grassroots innovation, and ensuring that economic growth reaches rural and underserved areas. They enroll a significant proportion of higher education students in the country, yet their contribution to local development is often overlooked in research and government policy.

To explore this, we reviewed 40 key academic and policy sources using a combination of literature review and case studies. What stands out? Nepal's community colleges are not merely imparting theory; they link skills training to the needs of local economies. Students gain hands-on experience in eco-tourism, cultural heritage conservation, small business management, and practical technical skills—all tailored to local beneficiaries. These colleges also break barriers for women, indigenous people, and low-income groups, providing opportunities that would otherwise be inaccessible. Nevertheless, challenges remain, including inflexible policies, outdated curricula, insufficient funding, and weak collaboration with local industries. Yet there are promising examples, such as community-run homestays and hands-on vocational programs, demonstrating what is possible with the right support.

This research shows that if Nepal supports its community colleges with sound policies, adequate funding, and updated curricula, these institutions can do much more than provide diplomas. They can drive the country's Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Development (GRID) strategy and help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. It is time to recognize community colleges for what they are: powerful engines of regional change, not merely another segment of the education system. These colleges must be placed at the forefront to ensure a fairer and stronger future for Nepal.

## Recommendations

***Enhance institutional autonomy and governance decentralization:*** Provide additional flexibility in curriculum design and execution to community colleges through grants, ensuring programs are locally relevant, skill-based, and community-responsive. Decentralized governance would enable colleges to innovate and support programs in regional tourism, agriculture, and service economies.

***Strengthen public–private partnerships (PPPs):*** Institutionalize collaboration with private-sector stakeholders, such as tourism companies, cooperatives, and non-governmental organizations, so that training programs align with industry demands. Curriculum development and internship placements should be overseen by advisory boards and local business linkages as mandatory components.

**Invest in faculty development and infrastructure:** Implement national-scale faculty training programs focused on experiential learning, digital skills, tourism, entrepreneurship, and vocational education. Simultaneously, improve physical infrastructure, including laboratories, tourism demonstration sites, and online learning facilities, to enhance practical learning.

**Mainstream vocational and entrepreneurship education:** Introduce short-cycle modular vocational training programs within the standard academic year. Areas of focus should include eco-tourism, agro-processing, renewable energy, digital tools, and financial literacy, with special emphasis on women and marginalized youth.

**Establish community innovation and entrepreneurship hubs:** Create incubation centers in community colleges to foster student-initiated micro-enterprises, providing seed capital and mentorship. These centers should promote grassroots innovations in areas such as sustainable crafts, organic agriculture, and digital service provision.

**Ensure gender-responsive and inclusive policies:** Increase scholarships, provide flexible learning hours, and improve campus safety to maintain high female participation. Design outreach programs and curricula for disadvantaged populations, including Dalits, indigenous communities, and remote mountain communities.

**Align with national frameworks and global goals:** Ensure community college reforms are consistent with Nepal's GRID strategy, the National Education Policy 2020, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to education, gender equality, employment, and climate action.

**Implement performance-based funding mechanisms:** Make funding contingent on objective outcomes, such as graduate employment rates, women's enrollment, innovation outputs, and partnerships between colleges and the private sector. This would provide incentives for colleges to enhance quality, relevance, and impact.

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