

Developing a Labor Market-Driven Curriculum for Rural Development Subject at Tribhuvan University, Nepal

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ABSTRACT

University education in Nepal is still facing academic pressure to align with labor market-driven curricular reform. This study documents the Labor Market-Driven Curriculum of the Rural Development subject recently developed by the Central Department of Rural Development with financial support from the University Grants Commission Nepal. In doing so, the study uses a participatory action research design by engaging with a total of 128 stakeholders former department heads, faculty, students, course coordinators, and external government, and non-government and private-sector representatives across five structured workshops. Workshop data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic framework to synthesize feedback into actionable curricular decisions. The resulting curriculum restructures the program into a 21-subject four-semester format guided by five principles of labor market-responsive design: adaptability, predictability, consistency, cooperation, and continuity. It integrates foundational, thematic, and applied development coursework with six new mandatory and elective subjects, emphasizing interdisciplinary learning, digital literacy, hands-on training, and specialization pathways suited to Nepal's changing employment landscape. The findings demonstrate that structured, multi-stakeholder participatory processes offer a workable mechanism for reconciling academic curricula with labor market demands within existing university governance structures. Beyond its institutional relevance to the department and university, the study offers a transferable process model for curriculum reform applicable to other universities in Nepal, South Asia and the Global South confronting similar academia–industry gaps.

Keywords: Competency mapping, Curriculum innovation, Employability skills, Participatory action research, Rural development, Tribhuvan University, University-industry linkage

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Introduction

Colleges and universities worldwide face an increasing dilemma: how to make educational programs cope with the challenges of the labor-market remains sensitive to the fast-changing realities of the market (Teichler, 2009). In Nepal, with most of the population living in rural communities, coordinating postgraduate education with employment opportunities in the development sector has become a national issue of urgency. Tribhuvan University (TU), through its Central Department of Rural Development (CDRD), is aware of this challenge, and it embarked on an extensive curriculum revision, which resulted in a Labor Market Driven Program (LMDP) for the MA in Rural Development subject.

Since its creation in 2001 as a part of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, CDRD has traditionally been a supreme rural development educational institution in Nepal. The department has over 20 years of graduates working in government agencies, I/NGOs, international organizations,

and academic organizations. Yet, with the dynamic changes of the global development perspective, namely, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the digital revolution, the need to address climate change, and a more competitive labor market in recent years, the current annual-structure curriculum needed to be revised systematically (UGC Nepal, 2019).

This paper documents and discusses the methodology, procedures, and results of the CDRD curriculum development project, carried out in mid-2024 with support from UGC Nepal. It examines how a five-workshop series, using participatory research practice (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005), led the creation of a semester-based 21-subject curriculum, which combines theoretical rigor with market practice. The research fits into the increasing field of knowledge on competency-based and labor market-responsive models of curriculum design in developing countries' higher education (Westera, 2001; Tilak, 2003).

Review of Literature

The necessity to shape the higher education curricula according to the needs of the labor market has been widely theorized within the international literature. In the global context, Teichler (2009) argues that the classical concept of academic autonomy should be tied

to society's increasing demands for graduate employability. Within the Global South, Tilak (2003) underscores the fact that there is not only a lack of generational planning of university programs in relation to the job markets, but also a lack of linkage between

university programs and the job markets, which largely explains the majority of graduates remaining unemployed despite persisting skill shortages in development sectors of interest. More so, reform of higher education in developing countries should be rooted in processes of quality enhancement and greater responsiveness to the national development agenda (Altbach et al., 2009).

The frameworks of labor market-driven curriculum (LMDC) have become predominant in response to this paradox. The DACUM (Developing a Curriculum Methodology), initially developed by Norton (1997), is a systematic procedure in which employer input is used to identify occupational competencies, which are then translated into specific learning outcomes and used to develop relevant course content. This has been applied in different fields in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to restructure tertiary education to professional needs (Tait, 2008). More recently, Brewer and Comyn (2014) illustrated through comparative case studies conducted on five Asian economies that structured industry-university curriculum ventures regularly yielded graduates who possessed greater occupational preparedness as compared to programs formulated without employer participation.

Freire (1970) and subsequent scholars have suggested participatory curriculum development, based on the principles of participatory action research, as a form of democratizing educational knowledge production. Mapped onto university curriculum reform, it facilitates the incorporation of different

voices into the structure of the academic programs, such as those of students, employers, and other stakeholders of the community as well, which in turn increases the relevance and ownership of the academic programs (Bovill et al., 2011). McNiff and Whitehead (2011) also believe that action research within educational contexts produces not only practical improvements but also theoretical knowledge so that it is epistemologically useful to research in institutions.

Another theoretical basis of the current study is competency-based education (CBE), which puts the mastery of specific competencies as the main indicator of educational achievement. CBE frameworks fit well with labor market expectations because they clearly define what graduates are expected to know and be able to do by the end of the program (Westera, 2001). Spady (1994) believes that outcome-based education provides a curriculum to be reorganized around what students are able to show at the culmination of a learned experience, not just around coverage of content—another idea that forms the basis of much of the logic of the restructured CDRD curriculum.

Digital literacy and technology-enhanced learning have also brought a lot of scholarly interest when they were incorporated in curricula of development education. According to Selwyn (2011), digital competencies have taken center stage in professional practice in virtually all sectors, including development. The new computer-based approach in the CDRD curriculum is an indication of this worldwide change in pedagogy. UNESCO

(2015) also promotes embedding of digital skills within institutions of higher learning as a pre-requisite of graduate employability in the 21st-century knowledge economy.

In the Nepalese context, UGC Nepal (2019) has given growing importance to outcome-based education and industry-academia co-operation as the higher education reform priorities in the Nepali context. But there are few empirical studies to be found that record the entire process of stakeholder-aided curriculum revision in Nepali universities. Khadka and Sharma (2021) observe that, although curriculum policy on employability language has been firmly integrated into them in Nepal, there has been a lack of documented consistency in its implementation at the departmental level. The gap is one which this paper fills by providing an empirical description of curriculum innovation in CDRD, TU. However, another noteworthy theoretical issue is the sustainability in curriculum reform. According to Fullan (2007), the three pillars of sustainable change in education are leadership commitment, professional learning communities, and alignment of coherent policy. These are directly embedded in the sustainability plan laid out by CDRD that institutionalizes the review of the curriculum after every two years, faculty development programs and engagement with other sectors as channels of ensuring updates to the curriculum are relevant over time (Khatrri & Pasa, 2022).

Dahal and Baral (2024) argue that Nepal's higher education system remains constrained by weak governance, limited re-

search capacity, and a gap between academic curricula and labor market demand, and they call for competency-based, industry-linked reform. Khatrri (2023), whose qualitative study of employers and graduates in Nepal, also found a clear horizontal mismatch between the technical and generic skills taught in university programs, in which centralized curriculum-design culture leaves limited room for practitioner or industry input. Khadka (2025) also found that teamwork and problem-solving skills and practical/field-based training were stronger predictors of graduate employability than formal university curricula alone, suggesting that curriculum reform in Nepal must move beyond content revision toward experiential and skills-based pedagogy. Similarly, Dahal et al. (2025), using structural equation modeling of 411 Nepali youth, found that the higher education environment alone did not significantly improve employability. Therefore, curriculum innovation must be paired with applied, career-oriented pedagogical delivery rather than treated as a purely structural or content-based exercise. Such a pattern is particularly visible in technical, vocational, and rural-facing programs, which are the closest disciplinary analogues to Rural Development education.

Adhikari (2023) documents how Nepal's Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training has repositioned curriculum development around industry advisory boards and market-responsive skill updating, explicitly citing rural and underserved communities as priority beneficiaries of this alignment. Even in agricultural edu-

cation, Chaurasia et al. (2025) found that Nepali technical-vocational graduates' career choices were shaped strongly by workplace quality, job security, and future employment prospects, underscoring that curriculum relevance to actual rural livelihood and employment conditions, not just subject content, drives student and graduate outcomes. The above review reinforces the argument that labor market-driven curriculum reform in programs such as Rural Development requires (a) closer industry and employer engagement in curriculum design, (b) a shift toward competency and skills-based pedagogy rather than theoretical content, and (c) direct integration of applied or experiential learning components and themes.

Institutional Context and Background

The Central Department of Rural Development

Central Department of Rural Development (CDRD) was formed in 2001 with the visionary mission of generating knowledgeable, skilled, and competent human resources that can respond to the multifaceted problems of rural development in Nepal (CDRD, 2024). The department is part of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at TU's main campus in Kirtipur, Kathmandu, where it offers the M.A. in Rural Development and the MPhil-PhD in Rural Development.

The programs at CDRD are offered at the central campus and at over a dozen constituent and affiliate campuses throughout Nepal, such as Padma Kanya Campus, Tribhuvan Multiple Campus, Patan Multiple

Campus, Bhaktapur Multiple Campus, and a variety of regional campuses in Biratnagar, Pokhara, Chitwan, Butwal, and Dhangadi. This geographic distribution indicates the program's national importance and the department's expanding mandate (TU, 2023).

CDRD has established vast institutional relationships with other organizations such as the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA), the National Planning Commission (NPC), WWF, IFAD, WFO, the Municipality Association of Nepal (MUAN), the Rural Municipality Association of Nepal (RUMUAN), and the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB). Such strategic alliances have long been used to facilitate research, training and placement of graduate students as part of what Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) call the tripartite helix model of university-industry-government interaction necessary for knowledge-based development.

Rationale for Curriculum Revision

Although the department is successful, a SWOC (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges) analysis carried out during the curriculum change process has identified significant areas the department should focus on. Among the major flaws were the lack of an official curriculum evaluation division, the lack of integration between teaching and research and the obsolescence of some course material relative to the modern practice of development. Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) remark that curriculum obsolescence is a cross-cutting issue

in higher education institutions, especially in multidisciplinary areas where knowledge boundaries are fast-moving across multiple contributing disciplines.

The possibility of reorganizing the annual system into a semester-based system proved to be a reform conduit. The semester system enables more regular curriculum review cycles, modular course design, and consistent assessment patterns, all of which contribute to labor market responsiveness (Kennedy et al., 2006). Moreover, the LMDP grant offered by UGC Nepal provided the financial and institutional support required for this re-

form and indicates the commission's broader policy commitment to improving graduate employability in Nepali universities (UGC Nepal, 2019).

Principles of Labor Market Driven Curriculum Design

The curriculum revision was grounded in five internationally recognized principles of labor market-intensive curricula (Table 1) (Brewer & Comyn, 2014). These principles guided the entire design process from needs assessment through to final course approval.

Table 1

Principles of Curriculum Development

Principle	Descriptions
Adaptability	Curriculum focuses on cultural, general, and professional skills graduates need
Predictability	Curricula align with employer needs and national socio-economic development goals
Consistency	Course structure and content are well-organized to meet current and future employer needs
Cooperation	Curriculum creation is a joint effort between universities and the labor market
Continuity	Strong partnerships ensure continuous improvement of educational content and methods

These principles ensured that the updated curriculum was not just a cosmetic tweak of the current one but a profound reorientation of program philosophy, structure and content to the reality of Nepal's developing labor market in the 21st Century. Unless the curriculum planning process is based on clear organizing principles, as stated by Ornstein and Hunkins (2018), the result is an incoherent program that cannot lead to improvement in the long run.

Materials and Methods

Research Approach

The curriculum development process used a participatory action research (PAR) approach, in which various stakeholder groups actively engaged in defining curriculum gaps, making suggestions, and co-designing course content. The methodological framework used, PAR, is appropriate because it aligns with the knowledge production process and the needs of the communities and organizations the curriculum is intended to serve (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). McNiff and Whitehead (2011) also observe that PAR is especially applicable to education reform settings because it yields context-related, action-oriented knowledge rather than generalizations.

The primary data were gathered in the form of five structured workshops, which were held during Ashwin and Poush 2081 (October-January 2024-25). Secondary data included an examination of resource availability in existing courses, UGC policy reports, labor markets, and international development frameworks such as the SDGs, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, and ILO conventions. The workshop tools, especially the needs assessment exercises and the occupational competency mapping exercises, were designed based on the

DACUM methodology (Norton, 1997). For ethical considerations, formal institutional ethical approval was not sought for this study, as the workshops constituted a routine curriculum-review process undertaken within Tribhuvan University's standard subject committee procedures rather than an independent human-subjects research protocol. However, participation was voluntary, participants were informed of the purpose and intended academic use of their feedback before each session, and verbal consent was obtained from all participants. No sensitive personal data were collected, and all reported feedback is anonymized by role and workshop rather than by individual identity.

Stakeholder Consultation Process and Methods of Data Analysis

The major tool of curriculum co-creation was the five workshops (Table 2). The workshops were specific about the inputs each stakeholder group would provide so that the final curriculum would represent a wide range of knowledge and be rich in expertise. This multi-stakeholder design is sequenced in the principle evident in the work of Bovill et al. (2011) where a design entity must have identified opportunities in which each group of stakeholders would play a substantial role at various points of the design process.

Table 2
Overview of Curriculum Development Workshops

Workshop	Date	Participants	Key Outcomes
1st	2081/6/16	20 (Former Heads & Teachers)	25 academic feedback and suggestions on curriculum structure
2nd	2081/8/17	41 (Students)	18-point suggestions on pedagogy, assessment, and employability
3rd	2081/8/18	28 (Course Coordinators & Teachers)	Subject-wise technical feedback on 21 course contents
4th	2081/8/19	30 (Key Stakeholders)	Linkages to global frameworks (SDGs, Sendai, ILO, UN)
5th	2081/9/26	9 (Course Coordinators)	Finalization of course content and 50-50 theory-practice ratio

Data generated across the five workshops (participant feedback forms, facilitator notes, and workshop minutes) were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework: (1) familiarization with the raw workshop notes and transcripts; (2) generation of initial codes for recurring issues raised by participants (outdated content, weak employability linkage, assessment mismatch); (3) group-

ing of codes into candidate themes aligned with the study’s curriculum-design objectives (structure, pedagogy, assessment, employability, global framework alignment); (4) review of themes against the original workshop outputs to check internal consistency; (5) naming and defining final themes; and (6) synthesis into actionable curriculum recommendations.

Results

Consultation with Former Heads and Teachers

The first workshop involved 20 individuals, of whom three former heads of department were involved. They provided feedback as experienced academics with long institutional memory, producing 25 substantive recommendations on course structure,

teaching, evaluation, and content updating. Among the recommendations were mandatory use of computer applications across courses, integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) methodologies in research courses, creating at least three course specialization options, and eradicating overlaps of content between the courses. The application of AI to research pedagogy reflects the growing

academic belief that research competencies are increasingly digital and that every researcher who graduates to the graduate level must be competent in their field (Selwyn, 2011; UNESCO, 2015). In this workshop, the first draft of a 21-subject course cycle was also developed, and an expert working group was set up to work out further development.

Student Consultation

There were 41 students attending the second workshop, which was structured into four thematic working groups. Student contributions are especially important because they are the immediate beneficiaries of the curriculum and are uniquely positioned to identify gaps between program content and career preparation. Bovill et al. (2011) state that student involvement in curriculum design leads to higher student engagement and program satisfaction. Student recommendations highlighted in the 18 points include: introducing academic and professional writing courses; introducing ICT to rural development practice; training on computer applications; assigning graduates to practical fieldwork; training on using AI for research; and implementing mandatory three-month internship programs for graduates. To further support the principle of outcome-based education of matching assessment to demonstrated competency, the students also recommended a new internal-external assessment ratio of 60:40 to encourage more practical learning (Spady, 1994).

Course Coordinators and Faculty

The third workshop involved 28 course coordinators and faculty working on subject-specific technical updates of each of the 21 proposed courses. Some special content propositions were as follows: incorporating the digital economy and Industry 4.0 framework into Development Economics (RD 501); embedding Eastern philosophies (Hinduism and Buddhism) and Western development theories into Sociological Views (RD 502); introducing legal provisions on good governance and digital governance frameworks into the Governance course (RD 503); and including global value chain analysis, e-marketing, and best practices in academic quality assurance, as well as standardizing all references using the APA 7th edition and discarding references more than ten years old, as suggested by the faculty (Kennedy et al., 2006).

Key Stakeholder Consultation

The fourth workshop brought together thirty external stakeholders from government ministries, NGOs, INGOs and private sector organizations. This consultation produced numerous links between international development systems and individual course materials. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Sendai Framework on DRR to courses on disaster risk management, ILO Conventions to project management pedagogy, and the UN Framework on Gender Equality to courses on disaster resilience were related by stakeholders to climate change education, DRR courses,

project management pedagogy on disaster resilience, and gender equality courses on disaster resilience. Incorporating global frameworks into localized course content reflects a vision of globalized curricula designed to suit local developmental factors (Altbach et al., 2009). One of the most common and actively promoted suggestions was implementing mandatory internship programs, in line with evidence that experiential learning has a substantial impact on graduate employability, particularly in development-sector jobs (Tait, 2008).

Final Validation by Course Coordinators

The fifth workshop brought together nine course coordinators to validate and finalize the entire course structure. This workshop defined the principle of a 50-50 ratio of theory and practice content in each subject, developed organizational visits in collaboration with government, non-government and the private sector and ensured the adoption of agro-tourism, wellness tourism, indigenous knowledge systems and value chain development into the curriculum. This focus on indigenous knowledge also reflects growing academic awareness that development curricula must be proactively designed to integrate local epistemologies alongside global development models (Freire, 1970; UNESCO, 2015). After the fifth workshop, the Standing Committee approved the new course; it was presented to the Dean's office, and the Academic Council endorsed it. The updated curriculum has been in place since

the 2081 Batch (CDRD, 2024).

The New Labor Market Driven Curriculum

Structural Overview

The new M.A. in Rural Development is a 2-year academic program consisting of four semesters, semester-based (CDRD, 2024). The first three semesters include five papers (48 contact hours per paper), totaling 15 credit hours per semester. The fourth semester combines three mandatory papers, one elective paper (out of three options), and a 6-credit-hour thesis, totaling 18 credit hours. The entire course will total 57 credit hours across 21 subjects (Table 3).

The program is designed to be learning progressive in its structure: the first semester will establish the basic interdisciplinary understanding; the second semester will design the thematic expertise in critical areas of development; the third semester will cover sectoral application; and the fourth semester will integrate the advanced knowledge of application with the research of the thesis. This architecture reflects the competency-based educational principle of building a general conceptual base for specific application (Westera, 2001). Kennedy et al. (2006) also propose semester-structured programs in which individual courses clearly align their learning outcomes with program-level competences and enable cumulative, coherent graduate development.

Table 3

Semester-wise Course Structure of the Revised M.A. in Rural Development

Semester	Course Code	Course Title	Credit Hours	Teaching Hours
I	RD: 501	Economic Perspectives of Development	3	48
	RD: 502	Sociological Perspectives of Development	3	48
	RD: 503	Government, Governance and Development	3	48
	RD: 504	Natural Resource Management	3	48
	RD: 505	Research Methodology	3	48
II	RD: 551	Community Development	3	48
	RD: 552	Sustainable Development and Climate Change	3	48
	RD: 553	Planning and Public Policy	3	48
	RD: 554	Rural Urban Linkage	3	48
	RD: 555	Agriculture and Development	3	48
III	RD: 601	Tourism and Development	3	48
	RD: 602	Gender and Development	3	48
	RD: 603	Migration and Development	3	48
	RD: 604	Disaster Risk Management	3	48
	RD: 605	Statistical Application	3	48
IV	RD: 651	Project Management	3	48
	RD: 652	Political Economy of Development	3	48
	RD: 653	Academic Research and Scientific Writing	3	48
	RD: 654-1/2/3	Elective (Entrepreneurship / Computer Application / Microfinance)	3	48
	RD: 655	Thesis (Compulsory)	6	—

Pedagogical Innovations

Another characteristic of the revised curriculum is its focus on changing pedagogy alongside content changes. The new curriculum provides that every subject has a 50-50 percent ratio between theoretical teaching and practical work. Practical elements consist of field visits, institutional placements, case study analysis, project-based assignments, practitioner lectures and data analysis exercises on the computer. This equilibrium reflects the idea that deep learning requires combining theoretical knowledge with prac-

tical application (Spady, 1994; Westera, 2001).

Assessment structures have also been reformed. Students and course coordinators have suggested a 40:60 internal-to-external ratio, which has been endorsed. These internal assessment elements include class participation (5 marks), individual assignments (5 marks), practical collaborative assignments and peer appraisal (10 marks), field-based project presentations (10 marks), and a midterm examination (10 marks), totalling 40 marks. The other 60 points are

measured by the end-semester external test. This redesigned assessment design is consistent with the principle of constructive alignment by Biggs and Tang (2011), in which an assessment task is explicitly created to measure a set of learning outcomes (written within course objectives). A non-credit applied course curriculum is also implemented in the form of SPSS and GIS training aimed to provide students with additional analytic abilities necessary to write their theses and get employed in data-driven development agencies. These tools reflect the broader trend in development practice toward evidence-based, data-driven decision-making (Selwyn, 2011).

Curriculum Innovations and Key Additions

Under the modified curriculum, six new subjects are not found in the last cycle of the course. These are: Computer Application in Research (RD 654-2), a combination of tools (KoboToolbox, MAXQDA, SPSS, and Mendeley), and Academic Research and Scientific Writing (RD 653), which builds students' capacity to write a thesis, a report, and a journal article. The significance of Microfinance as a rural development tool has long been recognized in the literature, but Yunus (2007) illustrates through the case study of the Grameen Bank that group-based micro-lending can effectively address rural poverty by empowering marginalized societies.

Additional major content elements include explicit integration of Artificial Intelligence and digital literacy across a range of courses, integration of Industry 4.0 structures in de-

velopment economics, and making gender-responsive approaches, such as Eastern philosophical concepts of gender, mainstream throughout the curriculum. The disaster risk management course (RD 604) has been developed to include social protection frameworks and DRR principles, as the Sendai Framework recognizes the establishment of community resilience as a fundamental element of sustainable development (UNDRR, 2015). The migration course (RD 603) has also been modified to cover global migration trends and the specific policy issues faced by Nepal, acknowledging that labor migration is one of the largest socioeconomic phenomena defining modern rural Nepal (Khadka & Sharma, 2021).

The elective system: Entrepreneurship Development, Computer Application in Research or Microfinance and Cooperatives in the fourth semester is a notable structural innovation in which the students specialize based on their career goals and, at the same time, the program is still coherent. The rationale is Biggs and Tang (2011), who argue that curriculum flexibility, when organized around concisely defined core competencies, leads to greater student motivation and improved graduate employability outcomes.

Sustainability Mechanisms

The long-term sustainability of the revised curriculum is supported by a ten-indicator Sustainability Plan Matrix created as part of the project (CDRD, 2024). The main sustainability indicators are: the curriculum responsiveness to labor market needs (bien-

nial review based on employer feedback and job placement statistics); faculty development (assessment introduced after every two years); the use of data-driven curriculum development with labor market analysis tools; cross-disciplinary learning opportunities through interdepartmental collaboration (assessed after every two years); benchmarking with national and international universities (assessed after every two years). The inclusion of labor market feedback as a curriculum indicator is systematic and is adopted as a strategy in maintaining relevance in curriculum content in vocational and professional higher education programs (Brewer & Comyn, 2014).

The CDRD has a wide network through government ministries, other international organizations, and civil societies, which supports institutional sustainability of CDRD. The department's Monitoring Directorate offers the only official way to continuously assess the curriculum. The sustainability framework is intertwined with annual stakeholder meet-

ings, employer advisory boards, student focus groups, and the alumni survey. Fullan (2007) highlights three pillars of sustainable educational change: sustained leadership commitment, professional learning communities, and coherent policy alignment, which are clearly spelled out in CDRD's sustainability architecture.

The sustainability plan specifically recognizes risks such as limited industry involvement, rapid changes in labor market demand, and difficulty securing continuous funding to develop the faculty. Mitigation activities will involve diversifying stakeholder relations, developing adaptive cycles of curriculum reviews and seeking external grants and bilateral agency grants. The way risk is spelt out in the plan indicates an evidence-based approach to planning. Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) also argue that curriculum sustainability planning should project possible implementation obstacles rather than the straightforward adoption of the practice.

Discussion

Several valuable lessons about curriculum development in the context of higher education in developing countries are embedded in the process described in this paper. First, the participatory, multi-stakeholder workshop methodology was very effective in producing diverse, contextually informed curriculum inputs. The sequencing of activities (institutional memory (former heads) followed

by current users (students), content experts (faculty), and external validators (stakeholders)) led to final validation (coordinators). Bovill et al. (2011) also reveal the benefits of structured student and stakeholder partnership in curriculum development. Second, the strategic design of the curriculum development process was based on the five principles of the labor market-intensive curricula:

adaptability, predictability, consistency, co-operation and continuity (Brewer & Comyn, 2014). This strategic design provided a clear theoretical structure that informed decision-making in all five workshops. This principle-guided approach helped overcome potential conflicts between academic tradition and market relevance while reforming higher education in the 21st century (Teichler, 2009). Third, the shift from an annual to a semester system is not just a structural change but an indication of a philosophical shift in which education is based on outcomes and competencies (Spady, 1994; Westera, 2001).

The 50-50 theory-practice ratio, the new assessment structure based on constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011), and the establishment of non-credit courses focused on skill development are part of an overarching pedagogical change that extends beyond content updates.

Nonetheless, the study also raises significant challenges. Faculty ability to implement in-

novative pedagogical strategies, sufficient infrastructure to support field-based and practical learning processes, and the institution's commitment to curriculum review and monitoring are critical to the successful implementation of the revised curriculum. Fullan (2007) cautions that curriculum reforms, no matter how well one has developed it, often fall short because of a lack of capacity building among those mandated to deliver. These implementation problems are typical in university reform processes in Nepal and the Global South more broadly (Altbach et al., 2009; Tilak, 2003) and must be addressed regularly by institutional leaders and policymakers. The same can be said in a related context by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000), who contend that the achievement of university-industry-government collaboration hinges on continuity in institutional commitment as opposed to consultative events on a case-by-case basis, an issue that CDRD needs to pay close attention to in the sustainability plan of their stakeholder engagement.

Conclusion

This study has documented the systematic design of a Labor Market-Driven curriculum for the MA Rural Development program at Tribhuvan University, Nepal. The study has used globally accepted curriculum design precepts, and anchored by determined institutional leadership, curriculum innovation in tertiary education can generate results that sensitively close the bridging gap

between academia and industry. The new 21-subject, semester-long curriculum was developed through five multi-stakeholder workshops involving over 128 participants from diverse backgrounds, representing a significant change in MA Rural Development education at the University. Its focus on hands-on learning, digital literacy, a mix of disciplines and elective specialization prepares

graduates to compete in Nepal's dynamic employment market. The study provides a curriculum reform model that other Nepali universities and institutions in South Asia and the Global South can replicate. The impact of the revised curriculum on the labor market should be empirically tested in the future by following graduate employment outcomes across cohorts to assess the revised curriculum's performance and to examine how sustainability mechanisms can keep the curriculum relevant over time.

However, this study has a couple of limitations. First, workshop participation, while substantial (128 participants across five sessions), was drawn primarily from within the TU-affiliated academic and institutional network; the perspectives of private-sector employers outside the workshop stakeholder list, and of rural communities as ultimate beneficiaries of the discipline, were not independently or systematically sampled. Second, qualitative, consensus-based synthesis of workshop feedback, while appropriate for a participatory action research design, is inherently interpretive and may be subject to facilitator or research-team framing effects. Overall, for university administrators and curriculum committees, structured, multi-stakeholder workshop sequences (alumni/former faculty, students, subject coordinators, and external stakeholders in turn) offer a practical mechanism for surfacing both pedagogical and employability-related feedback in a manageable timeframe. For national higher education bodies, the case illustrates how competency- and employability-oriented re-

form can be pursued within existing university governance structures, without requiring wholesale institutional restructuring. For institutions considering similar reform, embedding global framework alignment as an explicit workshop agenda item, as done in this study's fourth workshop, helps ensure that locally designed curricula remain internationally legible and portable for graduates.

For future research, the labor market impact of the revised curriculum should be empirically tested by following graduate employment outcomes across successive partners. This must examine how institutional sustainability mechanisms such as periodic stakeholder review cycles, curriculum audit committees, or formal industry advisory boards can be established to keep the curriculum responsive to labor market change over time. Besides, subsequent studies incorporate systematic employer surveys and comparative analysis with curriculum reform processes at other Nepali or South Asian universities to test the transferability of the participatory model proposed here.

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use and Disclosure

In preparing this manuscript, AI tools were used for some sections, with minimal or no editing.

Similarity and Originality Confirmation

The manuscript is original, not under review elsewhere, and complies with CDJ publication ethics.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability

Data will be available from the corresponding author on request.

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