

Nepal's Climate Diplomacy: Key Takeaways

Bharat Khanal

Government of Nepal

Correspondence: Bharatkhanal15@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the contours of Nepal's climate diplomacy mostly focusing on climate emergency, vulnerabilities and its strategies, and role in global climate negotiations. Despite contributing minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions, Nepal ranks among the most climate-vulnerable nations. The research employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining quantitative content analysis with case studies, to provide actionable insights for Nepal. The research highlights Nepal's efforts to integrate climate action into national policies, advocate for climate justice, and leverage its geographical position to promote global action. By analyzing past climate negotiations, successful models from other countries, and Nepal's domestic policies, the study suggests a robust framework for enhancing its climate diplomacy. Key findings emphasize the importance of regional collaboration, science diplomacy, and equitable climate finance and improving domestic climate governance framework.

Keywords: *Climate change, climate diplomacy, climate justice, mountain agenda, negotiation, sustainable development*

Introduction

The climate emergency/crisis is a global concern and one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century. Climate issue is intense, complicated and delicate. Climate diplomacy merges climate and foreign policy by proactively linking national interest debates and international cooperation on climate change (Craft, 2014). Climate diplomacy refers to the use of diplomatic tools, negotiations, and international cooperation to address the global challenges posed by climate change. It involves fostering collaboration among nations, organizations, and stakeholders to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to climate impacts, and ensure sustainable development (Council on Foreign Relations, 2013). Climate diplomacy operates at multiple levels, from bilateral and regional agreements to global frameworks like the Paris Agreement. The Paris Agreement in Cop 21, aims to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, building resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate impacts, and securing finance and support for low-carbon and climate-resilient development (The Kathmandu post, 2024). Climate diplomacy involves the understanding complex negotiation

texts, climate science, and effective communication strategies.

Nepal's climate vulnerabilities emerge from a combination of fragile mountainous topography and ecosystems, highly variable monsoon-driven hydrology, unplanned settlements, and a lack of resilient infrastructure (MoEF, 2022). According to the Climate Risk Index, Nepal has ranked as the 10th most affected country in the world (Eckstein et al, 2021). Approximately 80 percent of its population is at risk from natural and climate-induced hazards, including extreme heat stress, flooding, and air pollution (GoN, 2018). Nepal's vulnerable communities, particularly in the mountainous regions, are at the mercy of glacial melt, flooding and landslides (The Himalayan, Feb 07, 2025).

This article discusses Nepal's current scenario of climate change and use of diplomacy to address the impacts of climate change. Highlighting the disproportionate impacts of climate change on Nepal it advocates for robust domestic institutions. It suggests the need of effective climate diplomacy to integrate climate actions into national development plans to address governance and financial challenges.

Methodology

This research is based on multidisciplinary approach with focus mixed methods. Focusing on empirical data, facts, descriptive and analytical study have been applied. Comparative cases and successful practices of other countries have been used. The study reflects both the primary and secondary data for analysis. Primary source is based on Government documents, foreign policy statements, foreign ministry reports and reports of international organizations dealing with climate change. Secondary sources include academic journals, books, magazines, theses, digital publications, websites, news reports, newspaper articles, and bulletins among others. The data collected from secondary sources have been explored, interpreted and analyzed. Media sources were also reviewed to understand various issues of Nepal's climate diplomacy.

Results

National policies on climate change

Article 51(g) of the Constitution on policies of the state mentions that "Policies relating to protection, promotion and use of natural resources: sustainable use of, natural resources available, adopting the concept of inter-generational equity, principles of environmentally sustainable development such as the principles of polluter pays, of precaution in environmental protection and of prior informed consent" (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). The major objective of National Climate Change Policy, 2019 is to address the adverse impacts of climate change, promote low-carbon development, and build climate-resilient communities. National Security Policy, 2016 identifies climate change as a threat to ecological equilibrium in Nepal. Climate adaptation, resilience, and green economic development are also key objectives of Nepal's 16th Periodic Plan (Rastriya Samachar Samiti, 2024). Other several sectoral policies also address the issue of climate change. New and integrated foreign policy of Nepal, 2020 unveils exchanging support for the study and research of science and diplomacy through science diplomacy.

Nepal's climate vulnerability and SDG alignment

SDGs, the right to development and climate change action as important aspects of the development diplomacy agenda for Nepal. Despite minimum contribution its highly affected. Nepal needs NPR 21.165 trillion from 2024 to 2030 to achieve the SDGs goals (NPC, 2025). This vulnerability directly affects its ability to achieve SDGs, particularly those related to poverty eradication (SDG 1), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), and climate action (SDG 13). Nepal's climate actions must be closely aligned and integrated with its SDG targets. For example: renewable energy (SDG 7): Expanding hydropower and solar energy projects can reduce reliance on fossil fuels and promote sustainable energy access. Sustainable Agriculture (SDG 2), implementing climate-resilient agricultural practices can enhance food security and support rural livelihoods. Ecosystem Restoration (SDG 15): Reforestation and wetland conservation can mitigate climate impacts while preserving biodiversity. Climate diplomacy requires institutional reforms and more investment in resources and skills to navigate in the complex situation tossed by climate change (The Himalayan, 2021).

Mountain agenda in global climate diplomacy

The mountain agenda refers to the recognition and integration of mountain-specific issues within global climate negotiations and policy frameworks. Government of Nepal has been proactive in raising mountain issues and offering mountain solutions to the global communities in CoP process. Mountains are highly vulnerable to climate change, and their ecosystems play a critical role in global water resources, biodiversity, and cultural heritage. Despite their importance, mountains have often been underrepresented in international climate discussions. The Mountain Agenda seeks to address this gap by advocating for the inclusion of mountain-related concerns in climate policies, agreements, and actions. For the purpose, Nepal is coordinating with Global Mountain Partnership alliances and ICIMOD to take mountain agenda forward. Nepal's struggle against the impacts of climate change was discussed in the British Parliament,

Alex Baker, a Member of Parliament representing the Labour Party, raised concerns about the issue in the House of Commons (The Kathmandu post, 2025). Nepal as “Water Tower of Asia,” the Third Pole, which includes the Himalayan and Tibetan Plateau regions, holds the largest freshwater reserve outside of the polar regions and influences the hydrology of some of the world’s most populous nations (Oli, K. P., & Pandey, M. R. (2024). Nepal can champion the inclusion of mountain-specific issues in global climate agreements, emphasizing the vulnerability of mountain ecosystems and communities. Changing geographies of rivers or glaciers may require diplomatic initiatives to balance interests and avoid disputes over borders or water rights (Carius et al., 2017).

Hindu Kush Himalayan Regional Cooperation

Nepal can lead or participate in regional initiatives with neighboring countries (e.g., India, China, Bhutan, and Bangladesh) to address transboundary climate challenges, such as water resource management and disaster risk reduction. Climate change always intersects with other key important sectors in this region, such as agriculture and food security, energy, trade, technical cooperation, and security (including cross-country migration because of climate change) (Pandey, 2022). Establishing a regional initiative could assist international climate diplomacy to raise the common agenda of South Asia in international forums. As seen in many South Asian countries, climate change has driven internal migration in Nepal, with communities in Himalayan, hilly, and Terai regions forced to relocate due to water scarcity, disrupted crop patterns, and extreme weather events. As climate impacts worsen, nations in the Third Pole, including Nepal and Bhutan, are using climate diplomacy to advocate for greater global recognition and support (Islam, 2022).

Climate finance and justice

Nepal as a staunch supporter of climate justice should emphasize the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” (CBDR) in international forums, highlighting that developed nations bear greater responsibility for climate

change due to their historical emissions. Nepal can advocate for financial and technical support to address loss and damage caused by climate-induced disasters, such as glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) and landslides. Nepal should advocate for prioritizing climate action to access technology transfer, capacity building, and financial assistance. There is no doubt that mountainous regions are at the forefront of climate impacts: for example, high intensity rain and mountain slope instability can wash out roads and bridges (Big News Network, 2025), thereby affecting access to rural areas, and rapid change in mountain snow will have far reaching effects on both upstream and downstream (Nepali Times, 2021). Nepal would achieve the targets only if it received financial, technological, and capacity-building support from international actors, including global funds such as Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility (The Kathmandu post, 2022). Nepal’s foreign minister led Nepali delegation to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on December 2024 at the Court’s public hearings on the ‘Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change’. It was stressed that countries like Nepal are calling for is not mere handouts or charity, but compensatory climate justice (MOFA, 2024).

Nepal’s journey from CoP 15 to CoP 29

Where climate change is concerned, the Copenhagen Summit of 2009 is a prime example. Table 1 below shows that representation has been at the highest level and due priority is given before participation like holding national climate conferences and so on from Nepal side. It also shows that representation has been at the head of the state, head of government minister for Environment and sometimes minister for science and technology and sometimes at the ambassadorial level.

At Cop 29 it was represented at the head of the state level in Baku with a side event dedicated on mountain agenda. In most of the interaction conferences and programs our participants are like climate tourist, only responsible members who can contribute should be the member of delegations in future COP.

Table 1: Brief outline of Nepal on high level delegation to UNFCCC

S.N.	COP	Level of Participation	Venue and Date
1.	COP15	Rt. Hon. Madhav Kumar Nepal, P.M.	Copenhagen, Denmark in 2009
2.	COP16	Hon. Minister for Environment Mr. Thakur Prasad Sharma	Cancun, Mexico in 2010
3.	COP17	Hon. Minister for Environment Mr. Hemraj Tater	Durban, South Africa in 2011
4.	COP18	Hon. Minister for MoSTE, Mr. Keshab Man Shakya,	Doha, Qatar in 2012
5.	COP19	H.E. Durga Pd. Bhattarai, PR to UN NY	Warsaw, Poland in 2013
6.	COP20	Rt. Hon. K P Sharma Oli, P.M.	Lima, Peru in 2014
7.	COP21	Hon. Minister for MoSTE, Mr. Vishwendra Paswan	Paris, France in 2015
8.	COP22	Hon. Minister for MoPE, Mr. Jay Dev Joshi	Marrakech, Morocco in 2016
9.	COP23	Hon. Minister for MoPE, Ms. Mithila Chaudhari	Bonn, Germany in 2017
10.	COP24	Rt. Hon. Bidya Devi Bhandari, President	Katowice, Poland in 2018
11.	COP25	Hon. Minister for MoEF, Mr. Shakti Bdr. Basnet	Madrid, Spain in 2019
12.	COP26	Rt. Hon. Sher Bahadur Deuba, P.M.	Glasgow, UK in 2021
13.	COP27	Rt. Hon. Sher Bahadur Deuba, P.M.	Sharmel-Sheikh, Egypt in 2022
14.	COP28	Rt.Hon. Pushpa Kamal Dahal, PM	Dubai, UAE in 2023
15.	COP 29	Rt. Hon. Ramchandra Paudel, President	Baku, Azerbaijan 2024

Table 2: Major govt. agencies of Nepal involved in climate diplomacy

S.N.	Key agencies	Divisions	Major tasks
1.	Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers (OPMCM)	Cabinet Meeting and Constitutional Bodies Division	Policy guidance and coordination on climate change
2.	The Ministry of Forests and Environment (MoFE)	Climate Change Management Division	Serves as the national focal point
3.	Ministry of Finance (MoF)	International Economic Cooperation and Coordination Division	Funding and Financing climate change initiatives
4.	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)	United Nation and Specialized Agencies Division	Coordinates Nepal's climate process at global level through its mission
5.	Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP)	Policy, Planning and Monitoring Division	Coordinates health impacts of climate change
6.	National Planning Commission (NPC)	Economic Development Thematic Group	Integrates climate change considerations into national development planning
7.	Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA)	Policy and Development Assistance Coordination Division	Supports climate change policies at the local level
8.	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MoALD)	Policy and Development Assistance Coordination Division	Oversees impacts of climate change on agriculture and livestock
9.	Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport (MoPIT)	Development Assistance Coordination and Quality Division	Coordinates climate change impacts on disaster and infrastructure

Discussion

Although Nepal is grappling with the complexities of climate change its voice remains largely unheard in international climate forums. Managing climate change is a global problem, the solution of which mandates the unified efforts of the entire international community (Hristova, A., & Chankova, D. 2020). Climate change is science based but it is more of diplomatic and political agenda. Nepal's voluntary carbon markets, national commitments and regional climate projections offer opportunities for strategic climate diplomacy. Climate change is an appalling injustice and a searing indictment of the fossil fuel

age for Nepal. Nepal needs to assume a leadership role in global climate platforms through a dedicated team of experts in its journey to transition to climate change (Pandey, C. L., & Dahal, N. 2022). Climate diplomacy, as an important component of economic diplomacy, needs to play a key role in receiving international assistance to deal with the climate crisis in Nepal (Malla, U. B. (2024).

Need for whole of the government approach in climate negotiations

Increasingly, countries are realizing that “whole of government” approach is needed to address climate

change, and this approach must be reflected in the design and scope of climate diplomacy. Nepal needs robust legal system on climate change that requires mainstreaming climate issues in domestic documents before articulating national interest internationally. Whole of the government and concerted efforts are most in dealing with climate diplomacy. Nepal should segregate data based on scientific knowledge and disseminate with proper articulations. Nepal lacks research and development, good investment in it can produce good results. Tabel 2 shows that the issues of climate change is not the specific job of any government agency rather it is whole of the government approach.

Reinventing climate governance and climate authority at all levels

Nepal needs to strengthen institutional frameworks and need of dedicated high-level climate change authority with clear mandates, resources, and decision-making power to coordinate climate actions across ministries and agencies. That can enhance and improve collaboration between government departments, local governments, and stakeholders to ensure coherent policy implementation and avoid duplication of efforts. Nepal needs to decentralize climate actions from the federal agencies and integrate other governments and sectoral ministries. Functional coordination among all agencies is required. The Ministry of Finance needs coordination with the sectoral ministries regarding climate financing. MoFE is not alone to handle all the climate change related programs and needs to delegate the functions and resources to the sectoral ministries. The climate ambition must be translated into action by three tiers of government. Functions, functionaries, responsibilities and resources need to be devolved to the line ministries of federal, provincial and local governments to deliver effectively and efficiently.

As home is the first step of successful climate diplomacy, investing in training and capacity-building for negotiators and policymakers is crucial. The MoFE has made significant progress in developing climate change related national policies, strategies, and plans at the federal level, Inter-Ministerial Climate Change Coordination

Committee (IMCCCC) and provincial level the Provincial Climate Change Coordination Committee (PCCCC) have been established and are operating to facilitate the functional coordination among government entities. Nepal needs a dedicated, high-level climate change authority with clear mandates, resources, and decision-making power to coordinate climate actions across ministries and agencies. Extreme weather events and climate-related disasters such as floods and landslides, have posed a significant threat to Nepal 's developmental ambitions (Government of Nepal, 2021). Climate change has also subsequently increased the risk of erratic monsoons as floods and landslides have become more frequent endangering and displacing entire communities (Government of Nepal, 2024).

Innovative initiatives on climate diplomacy

Small states should work to preserve and fully participate in a rules-based multilateral system that allows them to negotiate complex matters on an equal footing, regardless of size, population, strength or economic capacity. Bhutan has actively integrated legal expertise into its climate diplomacy efforts. Similarly, Denmark's Green Diplomacy (Copen Pay Initiative) has integrated climate action into its foreign policy, using its leadership in sustainability to enhance its global influence. Similarly, Green Frontline Missions of Denmark established 18 embassies focused solely on promoting climate diplomacy, emphasizing partnerships and financial support for developing countries. Ethiopian Panel on Climate Change plays an important role, generating evidence to support climate advocacy, and provides diplomats with a firmer foundation for influencing international negotiations.

Sagarmatha Sambaad

Government of Nepal successfully hosted Sagarmatha Sambaad in Kathmandu from 16 to 18 May 2025 under the theme of "Climate Change, Mountains and the Future of Humanity". Sagarmatha Sambaad is an appropriate platform for Nepal to pursue Nepal's just cause of Climate change. The rapid melting of snow and unpredictable precipitation have transformed once snow-clad glittering white mountains into black rocks.

(Sagarmatha Sambaad, 21 January 2025). The first edition of the Sagarmatha Sambaad concluded in Kathmandu with the adoption of the 25 action points 'Sagarmatha Call for Action' - a comprehensive and urgent appeal to the international community to address the escalating climate crisis, with an emphasis on the world's mountain ecosystems (The Kathmandu Post 2025).

Conclusion and way forward

Climate change is likely to continue in the future. Nepal should continue to advocate for transformative climate actions and secure adequate international funding, increase political capital, bolster national credibility, increase negotiators moral confidence. From Table 1, it can be concluded that Nepal had participated at the highest level in CoP process. But there lacks a national authority which is permanent in nature for overcall coordination. From Table 2, it can be said that climate change is no longer a technical issue, it's a political and geo-strategic issues involving various government departments. Nepal should Strengthen institutional coordination and capacity, mobilize additional climate finance from domestic and international sources, enhance community participation and ensure inclusivity in climate actions, leverage technology and innovation for effective implementation. Climate change and national security issues must be integrated. Nepal should carry out assessment, evaluation and monetary value in terms of compensation to take benefit from loss and damage fund. In the leadership of MoFA, an inclusive permanent type of inter disciplinary and multi-agency involved negotiation team must form for bilateral and multilateral climate CoP negotiation processes. Such team must include thematic ministries and outsider experts' team including research institutions, private sectors and universities. Nepal can be the best platform and neutral venue for regional climate initiation and share its experience with India and China.

Climate change, security and development issues should be closely worked out. Climate Negotiations team should include legal experts, data experts, climate researcher and geo strategic experts and should possess institutional memory. Climate diplomacy must be creative and proactive if it is to

succeed. Make-shift attempts and quick fix solution are not always beneficial. There is an urgent need of climate research centre in our country. Today climate diplomacy is more of foreign and security policies. Further, Nepal should apply the concept of green economy in all economic sectors to strike a balance in the environment and adapt to climate change. With high moral ground Nepal should continue for urgent actions with evidenced based negotiations based on facts, figures and data and well documentation of past initiatives. Nepal's domestic policies should align with its diplomatic goals.

References

- Council on Foreign Relations (2013). The Global Climate Change Regime. <https://www.diplomacy.edu/resource/the-global-climate-change-regime/>
- Country Climate and Development Report, (CCDR, 2022) Nepal. World Bank Group <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/38012>.
- Craft, Brianna (2014, August 06). Engaging in climate diplomacy-policy pointers from an LDC. *International Institute for Environment and Development*. <https://www.iied.org/engaging-climate-diplomacy-policy-pointers-ldc>
- Dhakal, Majeet. (2021, August 11). Mountainous regions face catastrophic impacts without urgent climate action. *Nepali Times*. <https://nepalitimes.com/opinion/mountainous-regions-face-catastrophic-impacts-without-urgent-climate-action>
- Eckstein, David, Vera Künzel, and Laura Schäfer. 2021. Global Climate Risk Index 2021: Who Suffers Most from Extreme Weather Events? WeatherRelated Loss Events in 2019 and 2000–2019. Berlin: German watch.
- Gentle, Popular. (2024, August 6). Nepal's journey to climate justice. *The Kathmandu Post*. <https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2024/08/06/nepal-s-journey-to-climate-justice>
- Government of Nepal (2016). National Security policy, 2016. Ministry of Defense.
- Government of Nepal (2019). National Climate Change Policy, 2019. Ministry of Finance.

- Government of Nepal (2020). Nepal's Foreign Policy, 2020. Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Government of Nepal, Ministry of Forests and Environment Vulnerability and Risk Assessment and Identifying Adaptation Options: Summary for Policymakers ' (2021) xii, 56.)
- Hristova, A., & Chankova, D. (2020). Climate diplomacy—a growing foreign policy challenge. *Juridical Tribune/Tribuna Juridica*, 10(2).
- Islam, M. N., Tamanna, S., Noman, M., Siemens, A. R., Islam, S. R., & Islam, M. S., 'Climate change diplomacy, adaptation, and mitigation strategies in south Asian countries: a critical review' (2022) India II: Climate Change Impacts, Mitigation and Adaptation in Developing Countries, 1–32.
- Kandel, Pem Narayan (2022, November 28). Forest, Environment and Climate Change Sectors of Nepal Achievements, Lessons Learning and Reform Agenda. Ministry of Forests and Environment Nepal. <https://mofe.gov.np/uploads/documents/exit-reportp-kandelpdf-0552-517-1672633573.pdf>
- Kunwar, Aaryan. (2025, Feb 07). Nepal's climate crisis: Role of youth in advocating for action. *The Himalayan*. <https://thehimalayantimes.com/opinion/nepals-climate-crisis-role-of-youth-in-advocating-for-action>
- Malik, Khalid Umar. (2025, January 2025. Kathmandu to Commons: Nepal's flood woes take center stage in London. *Big News Network*. <https://www.bignetwork.com/news/274958668/kathmandu-to-commons-nepals-flood-woes-take-center-stage-in-london>
- Malla, U. B. (2024). Climate Diplomacy: Implications and Prospects for Nepal. *NCWA Annual Journal*, 55(01), 28–36. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ncwaj.v55i01.62974>
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2024, December 9). Press Statement. [https://giwmscdntwo.gov.np/media/pdf_upload/Press%20Release%20—Nepal's%20Oral%20Statement%20at%20the%20ICJ%209%20December%202024%20\(1\)_sssx9nu.pdf](https://giwmscdntwo.gov.np/media/pdf_upload/Press%20Release%20—Nepal's%20Oral%20Statement%20at%20the%20ICJ%209%20December%202024%20(1)_sssx9nu.pdf)
- National Planning Commission. (2024). Sixteenth Five Year Plan.
- National Planning Commission. (2025, February). Nepal's Sustainable Development Goals Needs Assessment, Costing and Financing Strategy. An Update. <https://npc.gov.np/content/6460/nepal-s-sustainable-development-goals-needs-assessment—costing/>
- Oli, K. P., & Pandey, M. R. (2024). The Horizon of the Third Pole: Mapping future scenarios and strategic responses. *Environmental Policy and Law*, 18785395241293282.
- Pandey, C. L., & Dahal, N. (2022). Rethinking Climate Diplomacy Gains: Strategic Benefits to Nepal. *Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 2(01), 69–87. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jofa.v2i01.44005>
- Pandey, Subash (2022, September 22). Nepal's NDC on climate change. *The Kathmandu post*. <https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2022/09/22/nepal-s-ndc-on-climate-change>
- Pandey, Subash. (2022, November 1). Can climate diplomacy revive SAARC? *The Kathmandu Post*. <https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2022/11/01/can-climate-diplomacy-revive-saarc>
- Pokarel, Nabin. (2025, January 16). Nepal's climate change issue raised in UK Parliament. *The Kathmandu post*. <https://kathmandupost.com/world/2025/01/16/nepal-s-climate-change-issue-raised-in-uk-parliament>
- Poudel, Purushottam. (2025, May 19). Sagarmatha Sambaad ends with urgent call to save the mountains. *The Kathmandu Post*. <https://kathmandupost.com/climate-environment/2025/05/19/sagarmatha-sambaad-ends-with-urgent-call-to-save-the-mountains>
- Rastriya Samachar Samiti (2024, November 07). COP29: Nepal determines agenda priorities. *The Himalayan*. <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/cop29-nepal-determines-agenda-priorities>
- Sagarmatha Sambaad. (2025, January 21). Launching Event of the Sagarmatha Sambaad. <https://sagarmathasambaad.org/launching-of-the-sagarmatha-sambaad/>
- Secretariat, C. A., & Durbar, S. (2015). Constitution of Nepal 2015. *Kathmandu: Constituent Assembly Secretariat*, 19, 505.
- Shrestha, Madhav. (2021, Oct 08). Climate diplomacy: An impelling challenge to meet. *The Himanalayn*. <https://thehimalayantimes.com/opinion/climate-diplomacy-an-impelling-challenge-to-meet>