
Achievements and Issues in Sustainable Development in Nepal

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Abstract

By conducting a comprehensive literature study on viewpoints regarding sustainability and development, this research aims to synthesize the accomplishments and challenges associated with sustainable development. The study utilizes a review-based methodology that is based on discussions and debates among academics, scholars, and philosophers. In order to advance development narratives, sustainable development (SD) necessitates achieving a harmonious balance among three fundamental pillars: social, economic, and environmental. The literature draws the conclusion that SD has emerged around three fundamental concepts. Based on the available evidence, it can be firmly concluded that sustainability represents the sole viable pathway for achieving sustainable development. This entails the integration of profound contemplation, responsible actions, and the assimilation of valuable lessons from diverse successful practices on a global scale. While acknowledging the praiseworthy achievements resulting from historical endeavors and recent initiatives such as Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, it is essential to recognize the imperative of addressing the existing challenges to enhance the overall effectiveness and comprehensiveness of sustainable development efforts.

Keywords: Sustainability, Sustainable development, achievement, issues

Introduction

The term "Development" is derived from the French word "développer," which means to unroll or unwrap (Basera, 2016). It holds significant prominence in political debates, economic planning, philosophical brainstorming, and academic discussions. In essence, the concept of development represents a progressive journey that enables individuals to unleash their human potential and actively engage in socioeconomic,

cultural, and developmental dialogues to foster positive transformations in the quality of human life.

The concept of sustainable development (SD) is fundamentally rooted in the Triple Bottom Line concept, which emphasizes the need for a harmonious equilibrium among the three pillars of sustainability. These pillars encompass environmental sustainability, which entails preserving the quality of the environment crucial for economic activities and human well-being; social sustainability, which aims to safeguard human rights, equality, social justice, cultural preservation, and respect for diversity in race, religion, and culture; and economic sustainability, which is essential for maintaining the natural, social, and human capital necessary for income generation and improvement in living standards (Klarin, 2018).

As a comprehensive and cohesive approach to development, sustainable development embodies the concept of fulfilling the needs of the present generation without jeopardizing the capacity of future generations to fulfill their own needs. It necessitates ongoing efforts at the local, national, and global levels to strike a balance among the three pillars of social, economic, and environmental aspects of sustainable development while striving to achieve optimal developmental goals.

The multitude of initiatives aimed at sustaining sustainable development appears to signal a paradigm shift towards positive results and achievements, thereby influencing the trajectory of global development discussions. However, alongside these accomplishments, debates concerning issues and challenges are crucial areas that must consistently be given priority consideration by stakeholders at local, national, and global levels. It is essential for actors within the national sectors, as well as individuals and global communities, to engage in these discussions actively.

Methods and Materials

The paper aims to highlight and sensitize on issues and achievement of sustainable development with global to local attention and with a vision of the future. A critical literature review of selected publications, articles, and

book reviews based on secondary information has been utilized purposive throughout this paper.

Discussion and Analysis

Scholarly Review:

The concept of development gained popularity during the expansion of colonization and has undergone various transformations in response to changing socio-political structures worldwide. During the colonial era, development was perceived as the process of acquiring colonies and organizing European societies by exploiting the labor and markets of non-European colonies (Hoogvelt 2001; Cowen and Shenton 1996; Scott 1998; McMichael 2000). Over time, development has evolved into a pervasive notion and reality that influences numerous aspects of social, economic, political, and ecological spheres of human society and extends beyond them as well (Geise, 2014; Sapkota & Tharu, 2016).

Consequently, Sustainable Development (SD) has emerged as an all-encompassing development paradigm, serving as a catchphrase for international aid agencies, the jargon used by development planners, the central theme of conferences and academic papers, and the rallying slogan for both development and environmental activists (Ukaga, Maser, & Reichenbach, 2011). The concept of sustainable development has garnered widespread attention that other development concepts often lack, making it poised to remain as the prevailing development paradigm for an extended period (Scopelliti et al., 2018; Shepherd et al., 2016).

However, despite its widespread prevalence and popularity, there are murmurs of disenchantment surrounding the concept of sustainable development. Many individuals continue to raise questions about its precise meaning, definition, and implications for development theory and practice, yet clear answers remain elusive (Montaldo, 2013; Shahzad & Hassan, 2019; Tolba, 1984). Therefore, there is a risk that sustainable development (SD) may become a cliché similar to "appropriate technology" - a fashionable and rhetorical phrase that everyone

acknowledges, yet lacks a precise and exact definition (Mensah & Enu-Kwesi, 2018; Tolba, 1984).

To move beyond mere rhetoric and advance toward a more substantive agenda for sustainable development, it is crucial to establish a clear definition of the concept and provide an explanation of its key dimensions (Gray, 2010; Mensah & Enu-Kwesi, 2018). This necessity, as emphasized by Gray (2010) and cited in Giovannoni and Fabietti (2014), has been advocated by both academics and practitioners in order to foster the promotion of sustainable development. Although there is an abundance of literature on sustainable development (SD), significant uncertainties persist among many regarding the concept's definition, history, pillars, principles, and their implications for human development. Consequently, despite the extensive literature available, it becomes imperative to further elucidate the ambiguous aspects of SD. Decision-makers require not only improved data and information on the interconnections among the principles and pillars of SD but also an enhanced comprehension of these linkages and their practical implications to facilitate action in the interest of human development (Abubakar, 2017; Hylton, 2019).

Prior to 1972, classical economists introduced certain elements related to sustainable development. However, neo-classical economists later emphasized the significance of pristine air, water, and renewable resources as fundamental components for the long-term functioning of the economy. They recognized the necessity for state intervention in situations involving externalities and public goods. The concept of sustainable development has been shaped through an alternative perspective, and as a result, studies on sustainable development cannot be separated from the implementation of relevant policies. Sustainable development encompasses nuanced ideas and subsequently a range of practices, exemplified by initiatives such as those put forth by the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit. The field of sustainable development has undergone significant changes, transitioning from an indistinct discipline primarily focused on environmental issues to one that addresses the challenges of declining economic growth. Scholars such as Lele (1991), Mebratu (1998), Shi et al.

(2019), and others have contributed to the evolution of sustainable development theories and the formation of a comprehensive framework.

This paper provides a review of the evolution and development of sustainable development theory during different periods: the early period (before 1972), the formative period (1972-1987), and the subsequent developmental period from 1987 onward. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) published a report titled "Our Common Future," which marked the first systematic definition of sustainable development as the development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The debate among classical development researchers spans from the simple to the complex, encompassing empirical, conceptual, theoretical, and even metaphysical aspects. Initially, the concept of sustainable development originated from the idea of sustainable forest management, which was developed and implemented in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. In the 19th century, the foundation for sustainable development was laid with the publication of the report "Man and His Environment" or the Uthant Report by the United Nations in 1969.

Subsequently, the UN Conference on the Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden in 1972, known as the Stockholm Declaration, marked a significant milestone by addressing environmental concerns, human rights, and development in a unified manner. The term "sustainable development" gained widespread acceptance in the late 1980s following its inclusion in the Brundtland Report. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) introduced the concept of sustainable development in their publication "Our Common Future." They defined sustainable development as the development that meets the present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This groundbreaking agenda emphasized the importance of integrating economic, social, and environmental aspects and making a collective effort to address poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation. These achievements paved the way for the establishment of a

solid global agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the form of Agenda 2030, as well as initiatives aimed at tackling climate change. Table 1 provides an overview of the key activities and milestones related to sustainable development discourse and the global initiatives that have been adopted.

Table 1 : Overview of Major Activities Related to the Sustainable Development Paradigm Shift

Year	Activities	Brief description
1969	UN published the report Man and His Environment or U Thant Report.	Activities focused to avoid global environmental degradation. More than 2,000 scientists were involved in the creation of this report.
1972	First UN and UNEP world Conference on the Human Environment. Stockholm. Sweden.	Under the slogan Only One Earth. a declaration and action plan for environmental conservation was published.
1975	UNESCO conference on education about the environment. Belgrade, Yugoslavia.	Setting up a global environment educational framework; a statement known as the Belgrade Charter.
1975	International Congress of the Human	Emphasized the same problems as in Stockholm in 1972.
1979	Environment (HESC), Kyoto. Japan. The First World Climate Conference.	Focused on the creation of climate change research and programme monitoring.
1981	Geneva, Switzerland the first UN Conference on Least Developed Countries, Paris, France.	A report with guidelines and measures for helping underdeveloped countries.
1984	Establishment of United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED).	The task of the Commission is the cooperation between developed and developing countries and the adoption of global development plans

1987	WCED report Our Common Future or Brundtland report was published	A report with the fundamental principles of the concept of sustainable development
1987	The Montreal Protocol was published.	Contains results of the research on harmful effects on the ozone layer.
1990	The Second World Climate Conference, Geneva, Switzerland	Further development of the climate change research and monitoring programme and the creation of global Climate Change Monitoring System.
1992	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit or Rio Conference), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.	In the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 Action Plan principles of sustainable development were established and the framework for the future tasks as well.
1997	Kyoto Climate Change Conference. Kyoto. Japan.	The Kyoto Protocol was signed between countries to reduce CO2 and other greenhouse gas emissions, with commencement in 2005.
2000	UN published Millennium declaration.	Declaration containing eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by 2015.
2002	The World Summit on Sustainable Development. Johannesburg. South Africa.	Report with the results achieved during the time from the Rio Conference, which reaffirmed the previous obligations and set the guidelines for implementation of the concept in the future.
2009	The Third World Climate Conference.	Further development of the global Climate Change Monitoring System with the aim of timely anticipation of possible disasters.

2009	Geneva, Switzerland World Congress Summit G20, Pittsburgh, USA.	G20 member states made an agreement on a moderate and sustainable economy.
2012	UN conference Rio +20. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.	Twenty years after the Rio conference, the report the future we want to Renew the Commitment to sustainable development goals encouraged global green economy issues. Enable development and encouraged issues of the global green economy.
2015	UN Sustainable Development Summit 2015, New York, SAD.	The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was published, setting up 17 Millennium Development Goals which should be achieved by 2030.
2015	UN conference on climate change COP21 Paris Climate change Conference, Paris, France.	Agreement on the reduction of greenhouse gases to reduce and limit global warming.

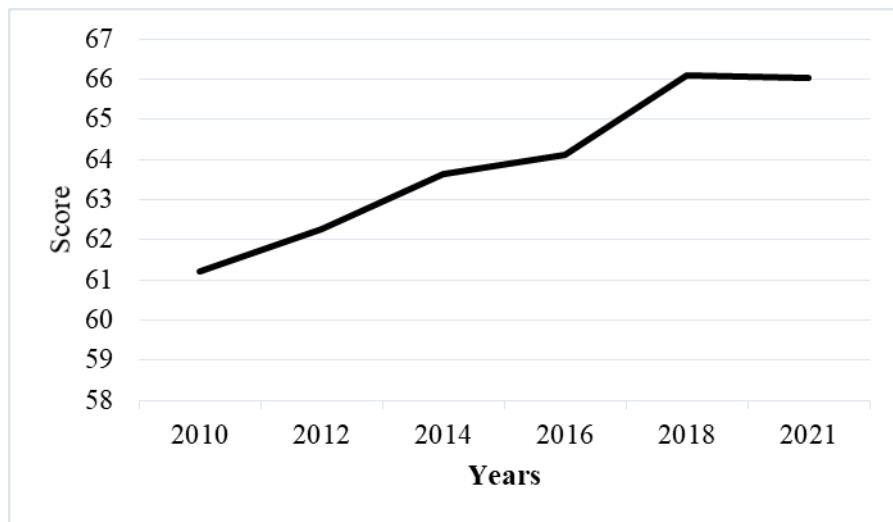
Note. Compiled by the author with adoption from Klarin, 2018

Table 1 clearly indicates the paradigm shift through major activities related to sustainable development. Thus, sustainable development rolling around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the reduction of greenhouse gases to reduce and limit global warming.

Achievements and issues:

While discussing achievements, this section aims to highlight some notable examples that deserve acknowledgment and continued efforts in the future. The world has been progressing on the implementation of SDGs, following a solid roadmap, although the progress has been mixed over time.

Figure 1: SDG Index Score over time, World Average (2010-2021)



Source: Sachs et al., 2022

As depicted in Figure 1, the SDG index score has shown an average global rate of 0.5 points per year from 2015 to 2019. During this period, the world achieved a score of 66.5 points, representing the average SDG Index. However, according to SDR (2022), this pace of progress was deemed insufficient to meet the 2030 deadline. Interestingly, poorer countries demonstrated greater advancements in SDGs compared to richer nations. However, after 2019, significant setbacks were experienced in the implementation of SDGs. These setbacks were primarily attributed to factors such as the global pandemic, conflicts like the war in Ukraine, and other military confrontations. Consequently, these events led to a slight decline in the overall performance of SDGs. Despite the challenges faced, it is imperative to continue striving towards SDG implementation and address the obstacles that hinder progress.

Significant progress has been made in the transition to clean and renewable energy sources, indicating a clear direction towards sustainability. According to the International Energy Agency (2022), the share of renewable energy in global electricity generation reached thirty percent (30%) in 2022, encompassing hydropower, solar, and wind energy. Notably, the utilization of renewable energy sources increased from around eighteen percent (18.6%) in 2000 to approximately twenty-six-point nine percent (26.9%) in 2019. The global target for renewable energy utilization is set at sixty-seven-point three percent (67.3%) by 2040 (IEA, 2022). This shift towards renewable energy signifies the global community's collective effort to move away from fossil fuels and promote a more sustainable energy landscape.

The MDGs, implemented from 2000 to 2015, played a crucial role in lifting over one billion people out of extreme poverty, making significant progress in combating hunger, increasing access to education for girls, and promoting environmental conservation (MDG Report 2015, United Nations). These goals sparked the creation of new and innovative partnerships, mobilized public support, and demonstrated the immense value of setting ambitious targets. By prioritizing the well-being of individuals and addressing their most immediate needs, the MDGs brought about transformative changes in decision-making processes, both in developed and developing countries (MDG Report 2015, United Nations). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the period 2016 to 2030 have been embraced by numerous national governments as part of their national strategies and plans. In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly introduced the SDGs, committing to leave no one behind in all aspects of transformation and development from 2016 to 2030. As outlined in the declaration, a total of 17 sustainable development goals, including the eradication of hunger and poverty, and ensuring universal access to healthcare and education, have been established along with 169 quantitative targets and 232 global indicators. These goals also address critical issues such as gender equality, universal access to clean energy and water, job creation, economic growth, infrastructure development, sustainable urbanization, and effective governance. The SDGs aim to create a comprehensive framework that addresses various

dimensions of sustainable development and promotes inclusive and equitable progress for all.

The Sustainable Development Report (SDR) annually assesses the progress made on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) since their adoption by 193 UN Member States in 2015. With fifty years having passed since the publication of "Limits to Growth" and the first UN conference on the Environment held in Stockholm in 1972, the seventh edition of the SDR was released in 2022, highlighting multiple health, security, and climate crises. The international community is taking significant steps towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, as advised by climate science. The pursuit of a net-zero greenhouse gas emissions economy, exemplified by the EU's target for 2050, can be considered a commendable approach to promoting sustainable development. Furthermore, remarkable achievements have been observed in the conservation and protection of natural resources, such as the oceans, wildlife, and forests. Access to education, healthcare, and clean water has also significantly improved on both local and international levels. These accomplishments underscore the progress made in advancing sustainable development objectives and highlight the potential for continued positive change.

In order to effectively limit global warming to 1.5°C, it is imperative that greenhouse gas emissions reach their peak by 2025 at the latest, followed by a reduction of 43% by 2030. While there is still much work to be done in combating climate change, the years following the implementation of the Paris Agreement have witnessed the emergence of low-carbon technologies and new markets. This has led to a growing number of nations, regions, cities, and businesses setting ambitious goals for achieving carbon neutrality.

Zero-carbon solutions are gaining momentum and becoming increasingly competitive across all economic sectors, which collectively contribute to 25% of global emissions. By 2030, these zero-carbon solutions have the potential to be competitive in industries responsible for more than 70% of worldwide emissions. This positive trend is particularly evident in the

power and transportation sectors, creating numerous new commercial opportunities for early adopters of sustainable practices. Although the journey to combat climate change is far from over, the increasing viability of zero-carbon solutions signifies a promising shift towards a greener and more sustainable future.

When examining Nepal's national progress, it is evident that numerous plans and studies have been undertaken to align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the national strategy. The first national report on the SDGs was published in 2015, marking an important milestone. A comprehensive study titled "Current Status and Future Action Plan of Sustainable Development Goals in Nepal: 2016-2030" has provided an updated version that encompasses 479 indicators, along with a clear roadmap outlining the steps necessary to achieve each goal.

This study serves as a valuable tool in guiding Nepal's efforts towards sustainable development, providing a framework for monitoring progress and implementing targeted actions. In order to ensure the effective and systematic implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Nepal has established institutional, legal, and policy frameworks. One such initiative is the creation of a draft Statistics Act, which aims to develop a robust and trustworthy statistical system. Additionally, a national strategy for statistical systems has been formulated to enhance the quality and reliability of data collection and analysis. At the provincial level, specific sustainable development target indicators have been identified, and both national and provincial monitoring and evaluation directives have been implemented to track progress.

When comparing Nepal's global profile with other countries in terms of SDG performance, it ranks 98th out of 163 countries. The country's score is 66.2, slightly above the regional average score of 65.9. These rankings and scores provide valuable insights into Nepal's progress towards achieving the SDGs and serve as a benchmark for further improvement and targeted interventions.

Figure 2: Nepal Average Performance till 2022

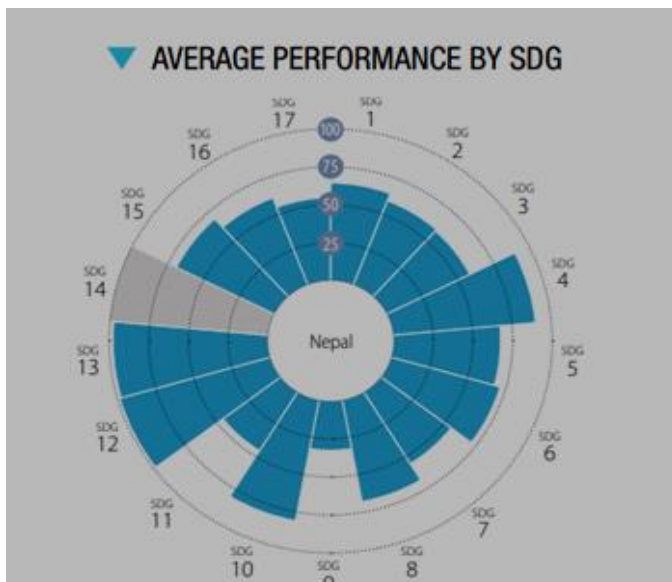
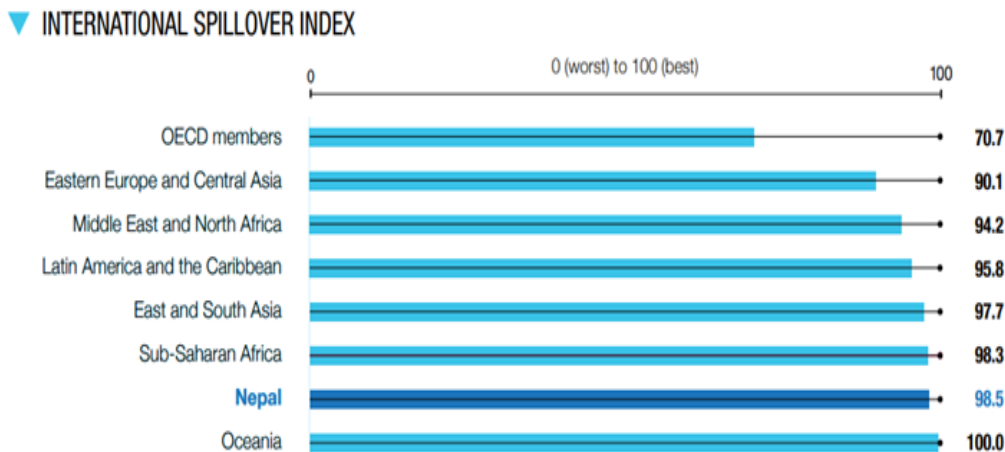


Figure 2 shows, Nepal's average performance till 2022 on SDGs global performance of goal numbers SDGs 6, SDGs 12 and SDGs 13 are on track or maintaining SDGs achievements, goal numbers SGD 1, SDGs 2, SDGs 3, SDGs 4, SDGs 5, SDGs 8, SDGs 9 and SDGs 17 have moderate improvement, goal number SDGs7, SDGs11, SDGs15 and SDGs16 have stagnating and goal number SDGs10 and SDGs14 trend information unavailable trends.

Figure 3: International Spillover Index and Nepal



Note. Adopted from Sachs et al., 2022

Figure 3 indicates about comparison of the international spillover index, where Nepal has secured significant progress of 98.5 percent which is greater among East and South Asia. Thus, Nepal aligned with its national policy and program has developed the SDGs Status Report and Roadmap 2016-2030, SDGs Needs Assessment, Costing and Financing Strategy, and SDGs Localization Guidelines that spell out baselines, targets and implementation and financing strategies for each SDG.

Contestations of SDGs

While acknowledging the successes, it is important to recognize that there are also issues at the global, regional, national, provincial, and local levels that need to be addressed in the discourse on sustainable development in the future. Despite the increasing use of renewable energy sources, there is still a reliance on fossil fuels and non-renewable resources such as coal,

natural gas, and nuclear energy. Environmental degradation and the loss of biodiversity, income inequalities, social conflicts, and a lack of access to necessities persist for many people in developing countries. Natural disasters and crises such as climate change and vulnerable diseases like the COVID-19 pandemic pose pressing challenges in the execution of sustainable development goals.

According to SDR (2022), it is noted that rich countries contribute to negative international spillover, which is manifested through unsustainable trade and supply chains. Insufficient global finance and varying levels of policy efforts and commitment to supporting the SDGs among countries, including G20 countries, are identified as major barriers. The pilot score of the government's commitment and effort for the SDGs, compiled for more than 60 countries, reveals that among G20 member states, the United States, Brazil, and the Russian Federation exhibit the least support for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Developing countries face some issues in implementation, such as ensuring programs fit the local context, conflicts between nations, and the political will to transform development programs into sustainable long-term practices. Due to the nature of a volunteer approach and soft laws, there are still challenges in many countries facing poverty. When it comes to the national level, the success of SDGs depends on a reliable database and a robust monitoring mechanism. However, the current statistical system faces several issues, such as dispersed data sources and the exclusion of social and governance-related surveys from the coverage of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), beyond census and economic surveys. The advent of the big data revolution, driven by technological advancements and the development of open data systems, among other factors, still requires further progress.

From the standpoint of the SDGs, every periodic development plan needs to undergo a budget audit. Moreover, prioritization should be conducted based on different ranks, such as priority one, priority two, and priority three. This prioritization should be guided by funding and resource allocation to improve progress within the targets and indicators. Resource

mobilization at the local level can involve the contribution of non-governmental organizations, cooperatives, and community sectors alongside the government in funding certain SDGs. In terms of financing the SDGs, the private sector can incorporate them into their business model and raise equity and loans from the domestic market, as well as through foreign direct investment.

Despite moving in a positive direction, Nepal needs to maintain a central focus on the swift implementation of the SDGs. Key actions that need to be addressed include resource mobilization, strengthening global partnerships, promoting good governance and institutionalization, ensuring environmental resilience, and enhancing an integrated approach and equity. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a significant negative impact on partnership mobilization, resource mobilization, and capacity for achieving the SDGs.

Nations with multiple vulnerabilities, similar to Nepal, will face disastrous effects on their social, economic, and health systems. These effects will have both short- and long-term consequences for countries classified as Least Developed Countries (LDCs), which have limited health capacity and internal resources, and rely heavily on a few sources of foreign currency receipts such as tourism, exports, remittances, investment, and international assistance and cooperation. Likewise, it is crucial to consider coping strategies for pandemics and other types of disasters. These strategies will help mitigate the adverse impacts and enable these vulnerable nations to progress towards achieving sustainable development goals. Nepal recognizes the significance of SDGs in mitigating the severe impacts and implementing a robust recovery strategy. With the aim of tackling pressing global challenges such as economic crises, food shortages, climate change, unemployment, and other urgent issues, Nepal is exploring the potential of SDGs as a means to address these issues effectively. To achieve this, it is essential to prioritize the strong implementation of the global agenda of 2030 SDGs, ensuring that the goals are pursued with determination and commitment. By doing so, Nepal and the global community can work towards a better future, fostering

sustainable development and addressing the pressing issues that demand immediate attention.

Conclusion

Despite facing numerous barriers and difficulties, the global efforts and initiatives towards sustainable development are commendable and have resulted in observable benefits. A study finds Nepal's progress in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the overall picture appears to be mixed. National Review of Sustainable Development Goals 2020, shows Nepal made significant progress in poverty reduction and certain goals related to human development, such as education, gender equality, empowerment, and biodiversity. The country has also shown positive developments in the areas of water and sanitation, energy, and infrastructure. However, achieving moderate progress on goals related to hunger, industrialization, and addressing the impacts of climate change. Challenges need to be accounted for in the implementation of SDGs, including the need for mainstreaming at the subnational level, resource mobilization, data management, coordination, and monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, issues of accountability and internalization at the federal, provincial, and municipal government levels are pressing and of vital importance.

The federal government of Nepal, mobilizing its wings, needs to prioritize practical measures such as enhancing ownership, aligning with institutional structures, mobilizing policy instruments, prioritizing programs and resources, ensuring efficient implementation, and tracking monitoring of performance. Recognizing that the federal government alone may not be able to achieve all goals, an integrated approach involving governmental and non-governmental entities, including the commercial sector, media, and civil society, could be beneficial.

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