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Abstract

This study focuses on the agenda of UN conference to be achieved by 2030. The main objective of the study is to assess the sustainable development goals achieved by Nepal in different points of time and its work progress made by Nepal. Based on the qualitative as well as descriptive method, this study explores the localization of sustainable development goals in the context of Nepal. It has found out 17 goals, out of which Nepal has made high performance in goals 5, 12 and 13 and doing satisfactory progress in other goals like 4, 6 and 1, respectively. However, the country is surpassing through the difficult situations in order to achieve the goals by the timeframe. Nepal has added more indicators to localize sustainable development goals in the context of the country. The post covid-19, natural disaster and nation's internal political instability, political commitment and insufficient resources are considered hindrances in achieving the declared goals.

Keywords: Good governance, millennium development, Nepal, performance, sustainable development

Introduction

‘Development’ as a concept has been associated with the diverse meanings, interpretations and theories from various scholars. It is defined as ‘an evolutionary process in which the human capacity increases in terms of initiating the new structures, coping with problems, adapting to continuous changes, and striving purposefully and creatively to attain new goals (Peet, 1999). According to Reyes (2001), ‘development’ is understood as a social condition within a nation, in which the needs of its population are satisfied by the rational and sustainable use of natural resources and systems. Todaro and Smith (2006) also define ‘development’ as a multi-dimensional process that involves major changes in social

structures, attitudes, and institutions, as well as economic growth, reduction of inequality, and eradication of absolute poverty. Several theories have been put forward to explain the concept of 'development'. They include the modernization, dependency, world systems and globalization theories.

Sustainable Development (SD) has become a ubiquitous development paradigm—the catchphrase for international aid agencies, the jargon of development planners, the theme of conferences and academic papers, as well as the slogan of development and environmental activists (Ukaga et al., 2011). It has become the buzzword in development discourse, having been associated with different definitions, meanings and interpretations. Taken literally, SD would simply mean “development that can be continued either indefinitely or for the given time period (Dernbach, 1998; Lele, 1991; Stoddart, 2011). The concept of SD has also been looked at from various angles, leading to a plethora of definitions of the concept. Although definitions abound with respect to SD, the most often cited definition of the concept is the one proposed by the Brundtland Commission Report (Schaefer & Crane, 2005). The Report defines SD as the development that meets the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In this context, this study aims to evaluate Nepal's performance in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is a major concern in overall development of the nation but the studies made by other authors on achievement progress is found few and does not cover all SDGs in depth. So, this study is focused on all the 17 indicators so that the position of Nepal is acknowledged and envisaged along with the efforts made by the country to achieve the SDGs.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative research based on secondary source of information published by different government and non-governmental agencies. More focus of the study has been put on the information of National Planning Commission of Nepal and UNDP published reports. Data and information have been used from Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics and sites of UNDP. Other related journals and books have also been consulted in the course of this study and textual thematic method has been employed for the data analysis.

Literature Review

The notion of sustainable development served as the cornerstone of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development convened in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This summit marked the inaugural global endeavor to formulate action plans and strategies aimed at transitioning toward a more sustainable model of development. The 1987 Brundtland Commission report, commonly known as “Our Common Future,” posited SD as a viable remedy for issues related to environmental degradation (Dresner, 2008). The report mainly concentrates on the environment and resource issues that are being depleted and has reached to vulnerable state at the economic cost. The report focusses on sustainable use of resources

and protection of environment for the future generation without compromising the need of the present.

The pivotal role of education in attaining SD was acknowledged during the 1992 summit, prompting a concerted effort to advance education strategies aligned with SDGs. Subsequently, numerous countries, including England, Germany, and Finland, have incorporated principles of SD into their curricula. This integration has been facilitated by the establishment of national coordinating bodies dedicated to promoting education for sustainable development (Shallcross et al., 2006).

The SDGs operate in a collaborative and practical manner, emphasizing responsible decision-making to enhance a long-term well-being for the upcoming generations. They offer explicit principles and objectives that every country can embrace, based on their specific needs and the worldwide environmental issues we confront. Serving as a roadmap, the SDGs outline a path toward a superior and more enduring future for everyone. They tackle prevalent global challenges, encompassing issues such as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental decline, and the pursuit of peace and justice (Boar et al., 2020).

During the Millennium Summit in New York in September 2000, global leaders reached a consensus on the Millennium Development Goals. The majority of these goals set 2015 as the target timeframe and utilized 1990 as a baseline for measurement. The effects on the natural environment prompted world leaders to seek remedies aimed at safeguarding the Earth's natural resources, fostering prosperity through equitable opportunities, and diminishing poverty. Various summits, spanning from Stockholm in 1972 to Rio de Janeiro in 2012, emphasized the pursuit of a satisfactory standard of living for all, while ensuring the satisfaction of the needs of generations to come (Drexhage & Murphy, 2010).

The Millennium Development Goals reflect a shift in the conceptualization of the well-being of the world's poor, emphasizing access to opportunities and the absence of insecurity and vulnerability (Adger et al., 2007, p. 194). They serve as a pragmatic manifestation of the equilibrium principle among the economic, social, and environmental pillars of sustainable development. The goals include: (a) reducing by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and those experiencing hunger; (b) attaining universal primary education and promoting gender equality; (c) decreasing child mortality and enhancing maternal health; (d) reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS; (e) integrating sustainable development principles into national policies; and (f) halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water. Regrettably, the world still grapples with "this dangerous blend of indifference and concealment and ultimately needs to rebuild the trust between people, business, and government, crucial for any chance of success in Sustainable Development" (Gorbachev, 2006). SD cannot be overcome by state alone but needs cooperation of all people of all sectors of life if it is to make success to achieve by the year 2030.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in 2002 marked a significant milestone in fostering partnerships among the United Nations,

governments, businesses, and NGOs to mobilize resources for addressing global challenges related to the environment, health, and poverty. Some authors view the summit as “progress in moving the concept of sustainable development toward a more productive exploration of the relationship between economic development and environmental quality” (Asefa, 2005). Environment concern is the major aspect of sustainable development and it should not be deteriorated at the cost of economy.

The WSSD “fills some gaps in the Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals addresses some newly emerging issues, including to halve the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation by 2015; to use and produce chemicals by 2020 in ways that do not lead to significant adverse effects on human health and the environment; to maintain or restore depleted fish stocks to levels that can produce the maximum sustainable yield on an urgent basis and where possible by 2015; and to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biological diversity” (Nelson, 2007). The conservation of biological diversity saves people and whole planet by reducing the ozone layer and minimizes the carbon emission produced by the large industrial nations.

The Johannesburg Conference affirmed a shift that had been emerging since the 1992 Conference, indicating the increasing significance of the socioeconomic aspects of SD. Unlike the previous UN conferences, where the environmental agenda was largely sustained by peaks in the public ‘attention cycle’ of major developed countries, the WSSD integrated the concept of SD throughout its discussions and was initially referred to as “the implementation summit.” Inevitably, there were “demands for additional financial resources and technology transfer, but much of the debate had already been pre-empted by the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000” (Vogler, 2007). Sustainable development as the logical sequence to millennium development goals needs more resources and technology to increase productivity with less cost on environment.

The SDGs are firmly integrated into a policy framework, having undergone a political process during their development. The Zero Draft emerged from extensive political negotiations. Nevertheless, defining both the targets and, in particular, the indicators has raised numerous questions and sparked considerable debate (Ritschelova et al., 2011). Regarding SDG “No hunger,” a study examining the progress, linkages, and disconnects of India in relation to food security and nutrition was conducted by Das, Sharma, and Babu in 2018. The findings revealed that southern states outperformed their counterparts in terms of food security and nutrition. The study concluded by recommending reforms in coordination and approach to better align with the 2030 targets for food security and nutrition.

Pattberg and Widerberg (2016) have highlighted a crucial aspect of SD known as ‘stringent goal setting’ across various actors. In this context, the SDGs have the potential to stimulate innovation not only on a global scale but also at various other levels. For instance, certain business groups within the Global Compact Network in Japan and other regions envision the SDGs evolving into a Common Standard for corporate social responsibility. This collection of goals serves as a legitimate Common Standard that could be universally

applied and integrated into certification schemes, establishing connections between the private sector, policies, and consumers.

SD relates to the principle of meeting human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend (Cerin, 2006). While the concept of SD has been relevant since time immemorial, it can be argued that the relevance deepens with the dawn of every day because the population keeps increasing but the natural resources available to humankind do not. Conscious of this phenomenon, global concerns have always been expressed for judicious use of the available resources. Top of Form

SD emerged as a proposed solution to address the issues of environmental degradation, as outlined in the 1987 report "Our Common Future" by the Brundtland Commission. This commission defined SD as a form of development that satisfies the present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Subsequently, the agenda for it gained significant attention, leading to the ratification of Agenda 21 during the Rio Conference by nations worldwide.

The SDGs constitute a comprehensive framework of 17 global objectives, 232 indicators and 169 targets established by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 2015. These goals serve as a universal call to action with the aim of eradicating poverty, safeguarding the planet, and ensuring universal well-being and prosperity for all by the year 2030. The SDGs represent a continuation of the earlier Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were in effect from 2000 to 2015. This article will delve into the Sustainable Development Goals, examining the progress achieved in their pursuit since their adoption in 2015. Additionally, it will address the challenges inherent in implementing the SDGs and elucidate the measures being undertaken to surmount these challenges. Top of Form

Nepal Panning Commission (2020) states that Nepal, as a member of the United Nations, has embraced the principles of sustainable development since its endorsement in the UN declaration of 2015 and the country has made significant strides in its economic advancement with strong positive growth rates. The progress of Nepal indicates a considerable decline in poverty levels, which has helped to enhance macroeconomic stability domestically. Aligned with its overarching vision, Nepal aims to achieve a state of 'Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali,' with a focus on promoting social justice. This vision encompasses ambitious objectives such as graduating from the status of least developed country by 2022 and meeting the SDGs by 2030.

The present 15th Plan of Nepal, covering the period from 2019/20 to 2023/24, demonstrates complete alignment with the SDGs and serves as a comprehensive roadmap toward achieving prosperity. Various development instruments, including annual budgets, sectoral strategies, and the medium-term expenditure framework have been integrated with the SDGs. This alignment is consistently maintained through the adherence to planning, monitoring, and evaluation guidelines. The implementation of the SDGs is overseen by the

SDGs steering committee, chaired by the Right Honorable Prime Minister. This committee plays a crucial role in steering and guiding the implementation of SDGs, fostering collaboration among the public, private, and cooperative sectors, as well as civil societies, to ensure the integration of SDGs in all developmental endeavors.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unparalleled challenges to Nepal's socio-economic landscape, posing a threat to the achievements of the SDGs. In response, Nepal is actively exploring strategies to mitigate the multifaceted impacts of the pandemic by aligning recovery efforts with the principles of the SDGs. The effectiveness of such measures relies on a robust government and a well-established statistical system capable of measuring and incentivizing progress across the various SDGs. Donors are urged to sustain their current contributions to statistical initiatives.

The commitment to the SDGs is underscored by the country's ownership, evident in the institutional framework of the High-level Steering Committee, chaired by the vice-chair of the National Planning Commission (NPC). This committee reflects Nepal's dedication to steering the SDGs' implementation, ensuring that they resonate with the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution of Nepal. Furthermore, the SDGs align with the nation's trajectory, aiming for a swift transition to an equitable middle-income status.

Nepal has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to achieving the SDGs from an early stage as evidenced by its inclusion in significant policy documents like the current 15th Development Plan and the 25 Year Long-Term Vision 2100. These documents have incorporated the SDGs, integrating their objectives into national agendas. The adoption of SDG codes for all national development programs through the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework further underscores Nepal's dedication to these global goals. Additionally, Nepal has devised the SDG Status and Roadmap, aimed at localizing SDG indicators by establishing baselines and targets for 2030. Supporting this effort are essential documents such as the SDGs Needs Assessment, a Costing and Financing Strategy, and supplementary SDGs Localization Guidelines. Furthermore, Nepal has undertaken a Development Finance Assessment (DFA) to assess the landscape of development finance flows, institutions, and policies, with the aim of aligning financial resources with the country's development priorities.

Nepal has implemented an Integrated Evaluation Action Plan for the period 2016-2022, involving government agencies, Voluntary Organizations of Professional Evaluators (VOPEs), and UN agencies under the leadership of NPC. This plan, focused on equity and gender responsiveness, seeks to generate, share, and utilize evaluation-based evidence in policymaking. It also aims to enhance the capacity of evaluation commissioners, evaluators, and evaluation users. These efforts go beyond SDG tracking; they institutionalize the use of evaluation for SDGs (EVALSDGs).

NPC is undergoing a transition from narrowly monitoring processes to adopting a results-based monitoring and evaluation approach. The commission's pivotal role involves institutionalizing the culture of evidence utilization in SDG-friendly planning

and policymaking. It is set to conduct systematic monitoring and evaluation of SDGs in collaboration with various partners, contributing to the production of evidence-based evaluations. Top of Form

The National Development Action Committee (NDAC) serves as the highest-level entity for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) within the government of Nepal. Functioning as the apex body, NDAC is designed to alleviate coordination bottlenecks and address issues that surpass the ministerial level. Chaired by the Prime Minister, the committee includes ministers, the Vice Chairman and members of the NPC, and the Chief Secretary of the government as its members. The Secretary of the NPC Secretariat serves as the member-secretary. This high-level committee plays a crucial role in overseeing and coordinating M&E efforts, ensuring effective collaboration and resolution of challenges at the national level.

The NDAC plays a crucial role in reviewing the implementation of programs and projects while fostering inter-ministerial coordination on development-related issues within the government of Nepal. Preceding the NDAC, there is Ministerial Development Action Committees (MDAC) established in each line ministry. These committees are chaired by the respective Minister and include relevant members from the National Planning Commission (NPC), the secretary of the concerned ministry, and representatives from the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of General Administration (NPC, 2020).

Discussions and Results

The SDGs in continuation to Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were declared by United Nations in 2015 which proposed 17 goals with 169 targets and 232 indicators to be achieved by 2030. The Planning commission of Nepal has determined total 479 indicators by adding more 247 indicators in the process of localizing SDGs in the context of Nepal. Nepal's efforts and achievements are high and seem positive after the pandemic period and rapidly progressing towards achievement within time frame in order to achieve long- term vision of the country "Prosperous Nepal and Happy Nepali." (NPC, 2023). The achievement of SDGs by Nepal has been categorized by symbols. With the aspiration of national goal, Nepal is striving to achieve the SDG Goals with its limited resource to some extent. However, the country is facing challenges of post COVID-19, natural disaster and political commitment, has made remarkable progress in few goals and some are on track of progress (Sharma, 2023).

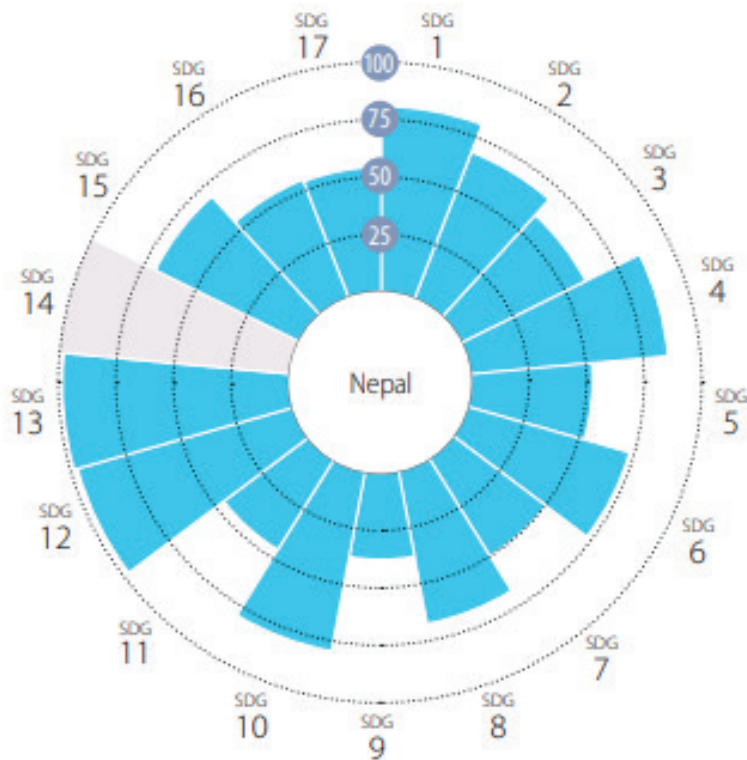
While building on the MDGs, the SDGs expand both the scope and comprehensiveness of the goals and targets. The SDGs define 17 goals and 169 targets to attain those goals, and 232 indicators to measure the achievement of targets. The SDGs seek to address not just the manifestations but also the complex and entrenched roots of the economic, social and environmental problems of the contemporary world. In that sense, the SDGs represent the most ambitious compact ever undertaken among nations and societies. The ambition of the SDGs is to leave no one behind globally and in each country, region and community.

Nepal's efforts and its achievements are high and seem positive after the pandemic period and progressing rapidly in recent years. The sustainable development goals include 169 targets and 232 indicators but in Nepalese context. The Planning Commission of Nepal has added more 247 indicators and has determined total 479 indicators of sustainable development goals. The goals being related at each other, has been taken them as integrated program. The efforts and achievements made by Nepal in each goal have been presented and discussed in the following ways:

Sustainable Goals and Performance of Nepal

The SDGs performed by Nepal has been represented by the below shown figure. Nepal's performance on the SDGs seems satisfactory in few goals and some have become challenges to overcome. However, the country is doing its best effort to achieve those goals within the timeframe for the country's long- term vision of 'Prosperous Nepal and Happy Nepali.'

Figure 1: The Average performance of Nepal by SDGs

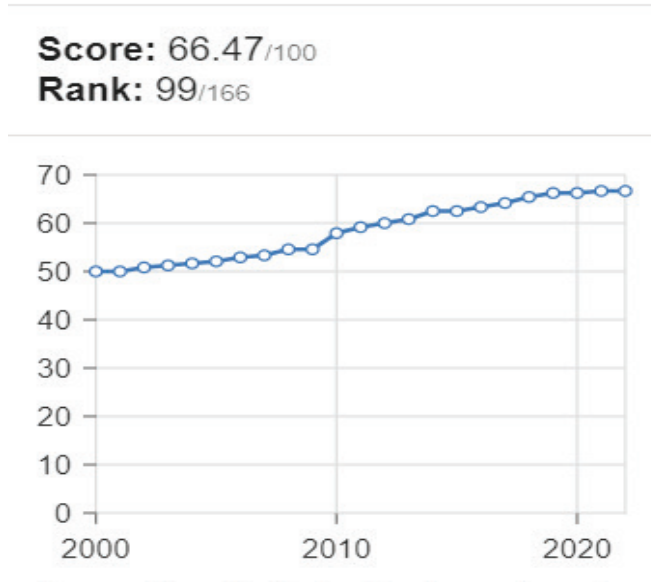


Note: Adapted from Sach et al. (2023)

Figure 1 represents average SDG performance by Nepal. The figure presented above is the combination of SDGs which represents average SDG performance made by Nepal by the year 2022. The figure shows that the highest performance is found in SDG goals 12

and 13 are on track and 1, 4 and 10 have crossed 75 percent performance level in order to achieve the SDG goals. In the above mentioned goals, Nepal's performance has been found more than 75%. Lowest performance has been found in SDG goals 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure) and 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) respectively. Goal 14 (Life below Water) has not been localized in the case of Nepal due to not having seas or marine land.

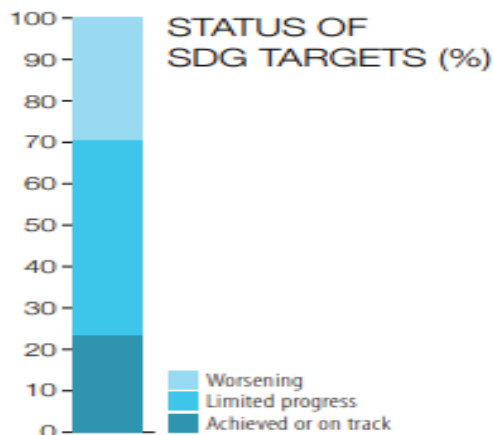
Figure 2 : Overall Score in SDG Goals



Note: Adapted from Sach et al. (2023)

Figure 2 represents SDG score as well as country's rank on achieving sustainable development goals. The performances on different indicators determine to achieve SDGs. The country with its limited resources has been performing to achieve SDG goals to some extent. The above figure indicates that Nepal with its limited resource is performing better to achieve the goals. In 2000, the country's score out of 100 was 50 percent and it is performing well and now it has reached to 66.47 percent score level by 2022 and has achieved 99th rank out of 166 countries. The country has crossed 50 percent score level which is positive symptom towards the goals.

Nepal has obtained satisfactory scores on the achievement of SDGs. It stands at 99th position out of 166 nations. In some, goals of Nepal are high towards the achievement of SDGs. Due to economic stagnant during Covid-19 Pandemic, the country's progress on achieving the SDGs were slowed. After the year 2021, during the pandemic period, the country could revitalize its economy and has been making progress in achieving the SDGs. The country needs to work in full- fledged effort to attain the goals with its limited resource by improving the efficiency of governance system and coordination with other state and non-state actors as well as the international partners.

Figure 3: Status of SDG targets

Note: Adapted from Sach et al. (2023)

The above figure 3 represents Nepal's different levels of SDG targets aimed to achieve by 2030. It is recognized that more than 20 percent goals have been achieved and are on track, more than 45 percent achievements are in limited progress, and about 30 percent progress is still in worsening position.

SDG Progress Assessment of Nepal

The report highlights a period of macroeconomic stability characterized by approximately 6.8 percent annual economic growth, contributing to a reduction in income poverty to 16.7 percent. This success is attributed to the implementation of periodic plans that prioritize the promotion of growth, employment, infrastructure, human development, and resiliency. The 15th Plan (2019/20-2023/24) is fully aligned with the SDGs, presenting a clear roadmap for prosperity over the next 25 years. This roadmap outlines objectives such as graduating from the least developed country status by 2022 and achieving the SDGs by 2030, aligning with Nepal's long-term vision of a 'Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali' (UNDP, 2021).

Overviewing the Nepal's budget allocation, highest allocation 11 percent has been made in SDG 4 (Quality Education) followed by 10 percent in SDG 1 (No poverty) and lowest less than 1 percent in SDG 5 (Gender equality) and no allocation has been found in SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production) (UNICEF, 2023).

Institutional Set-Up in Nepal for SDGs

The National Development Action Committee (NDAC) assumes the critical responsibility of reviewing program and project implementation, as well as fostering inter-ministerial coordination on development-related matters within the government of Nepal. Preceding the NDAC, Ministerial Development Action Committees (MDAC) is established

in each line ministry. These MDACs, chaired by the respective Minister, include relevant members from the National Planning Commission (NPC), the secretary of the concerned ministry, and representatives from the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of General Administration.

These committees convene meetings every trimester to comprehensively assess the status of program and project implementation. By organizing regular sessions, these committees facilitate ongoing reviews, discussions, and coordination at the ministry level, contributing to the effective oversight and management of development initiatives and policies. Before the establishment of provincial administrations under the new constitution, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities were conducted at the regional level through regional directorates and regional administration offices. Regional directorates reported directly to their respective line ministries, while regional administration offices reported to the Office of the Prime Minister. With the advent of the new constitution, the previous M&E systems at the regional and district levels are undergoing restructuring to form appropriate mechanisms at the sub-national levels. This restructuring aims to facilitate the tracking of local progress in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and addressing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2021).

Conclusion

Nepal has become successful in achieving some SDGs. So far as sustainable development is concerned, it has made progress in SDGs 13 and 12. Satisfactory progresses have been achieved in quality education, no poverty and reduced inequalities, which comprises SDGs 4, 1 and 10 respectively. The country faces high challenges to achieve SDGs 9 and 11 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure and Sustainable cities and communities), and are still in the worsening position. The status of SDG 4 (Education and Health) has also been improved in the recent years. The position of SDG 10 (inequalities and growth) has also been found quite improved with the creation of job opportunities in inclusive manner. Other goals are also in the process of improvement and on track. SDGs' achievement score 66.47 out of 100 is found to be satisfactory for the country like Nepal which stands 99th rank out of 166 nations, by the year 2022.

The SDGs declared by UN conference is ambitious to achieve within the short period, for the country like Nepal. It has burdened the poor nation's economy as ruined by ten years internal conflict and the pandemic. The major drawbacks of Nepal to achieve those goals comprise the lack of good governance, ten years' internal armed conflict, earthquake, corrupt economy, inefficient government staffs, political instability as well as political commitments, lack of coordination between federal and provincial government, lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanism. It seems impossible to achieve those long and ambitious goals for the poor nation like Nepal within the declared time-frame of 2030. To accomplish this objective, the government must implement policies that foster inclusive economic growth, ensuring that the benefits of growth are equitably shared among

all segments of the population. This inclusive approach is vital for addressing regional disparities and promoting holistic development at the sub-national levels.

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