

Sustainable Development Goal 1 (No Poverty): Current Status and Challenges in Achieving It by 2030 in Nepal

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Abstract

This study analyzes Nepal's progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 1 (No Poverty) and the challenges hindering progress toward achieving it by 2030. Nepal has made significant reductions in monetary poverty over recent decades, yet multidimensional deprivation persists, particularly among Dalit settlements, female-headed households, and ecologically vulnerable regions, which reflect structural, gendered, and intersectional inequalities. Persistent disparities, limited provincial control over development budgets, political instability, underutilized resources, and dependence on remittances exacerbate vulnerabilities, while climate-related shocks, youth unemployment, and global crises further strain poverty reduction efforts. Despite extensive national-level data, research gaps remain in localized, sub-national, and caste-disaggregated information, limiting evidence-based policymaking. Employing a qualitative-descriptive methodology, this study draws on secondary data from government reports, international agencies, and academic literature to examine poverty trends, multidimensional deprivation, and institutional effectiveness. Findings show steady progress at the national level but highlight gaps between policy targets and outcomes, uneven regional improvements, and vulnerability to economic and environmental shocks. The study concludes that achieving SDG 1 by 2030 requires targeted, context-specific policies, strengthened local governance, climate-adaptive interventions, and sustainable livelihood programs. The findings underscore the need for inclusive, resilient, and equitable strategies, improved data systems, and coordinated reforms to address structural and intersectional inequalities, ensuring sustainable poverty eradication across Nepal.

Keywords: SDGs, MPI, Remittance, Poverty, Development, Nepal

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1. Introduction

Following Nepal's progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations Development Programme has operationalized the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2015–2030 as a framework for development, highlighting the country's progress and ongoing challenges (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2020). SDGs represent a tension between development and structural constraints, where advancement of health and poverty reduction is countered by climate threats and governance deficiencies. Attainment of the 2030 Agenda needs inclusive policies, adaptive systems, and resource-balanced allocation to transform vulnerabilities into sustainable development (see Sainz Caparroso & ISDO International Sustainable Development Observatory, 2025).

There are many examples of SDG achievements across different countries. In Eastern and Southern Africa, poverty slightly declined from 44.5% in 2020 to 43.2% in 2024. Limited movement indicates structural poverty and resilience weakness in the region (see Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024). In Sub-Saharan Africa, poverty was 44.2% in 2020 and decreases moderately to 36.5% in 2024. The region still has the highest proportion of extreme poverty in the world, albeit smaller. In western & Central Africa, Poverty declines from 37.9% in 2020 to 26.5% in 2024. An improvement but remains high (see World Bank, 2024)

In South Asia, poverty declines sharply from 28.3% in 2020 to 8.5% in 2024. The sharp decline is an indicator of effective poverty-reducing policies, demonstrating a resilient recovery from COVID-19 losses (see United Nations Development Programme & Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2024; World Bank Group, 2020). Nepal, as part of South Asia, shows progress but with severe internal disparities.

Nepal also became a signatory to the SDGs 2015 to 2030.

Nepal's integration of the SDGs in 2015 came after its shift to federalism as constitutionally provided in the 2015 Constitution, devolving government to 7 provinces and 753 local governments (Government of Nepal, 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), embraced by the United Nations in 2015, are a global call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure a better quality of life for all individuals by 2030 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2025). Out of the 17 SDGs, Goal 1, No Poverty, is one of the foremost elements of Nepal's development strategy, given the socio-economic vulnerability and geographical disadvantage of the nation. Despite its impressive progress in poverty reduction, Nepal

still lags behind in achieving these goals by the target deadline (National Planning Commission, 2020). With Nepal approaching the 2030 deadline, momentum is required to bring policy efforts into focus, raise financing, and mobilize multi-stakeholder support.

Nepal has made progress in poverty reduction since adopting the SDGs in 2015, yet subnational disparities remain high. Rural areas face higher poverty, food insecurity, and limited health access. Pasa and Bishwokarma (2020) developed 5Es (i.e., envisioning, educating, empowering, ensuring, and encouraging) alternative model for empowering Dalits for combating against poverty. However, structural, governance, and climate challenges continue to hinder inclusive development. Achieving SDG 1 by 2030 requires targeted policies, resilience-building, and innovative interventions. Based on this context, this research aims to explore Sustainable Development Goal 1 (No Poverty), investigating Nepal's current status and challenges in achieving it by 2030.

This research article discusses the status, trend, and emerging issues in achieving SDG 1 in Nepal, and suggests actionable strategies towards sustainable and inclusive development. By reducing structural differences, building resilience, and using innovation, Nepal can get closer to realizing these significant goals and enhancing the well-being of its citizens (National Planning Commission, 2024). Development discourse is the narratives, conventions, and institutional structures in which meaning and practice of development are built. Empirical data confirms that, despite overall improvement, inequality remains entrenched at the subnational level. For instance about 20.3% of Nepal's population lives below the poverty line, with 18.3% in urban areas and 24.7% in rural areas (National Planning Commission, 2024). A significant portion of the population in Karnali Province faces acute food insecurity. This scenario can be well understood through Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (Kuhumba, 2022).

2. Research Gaps and Objectives

Despite overall progress in poverty reduction, Nepal faces significant challenges in achieving SDG 1 by 2030 due to pronounced subnational disparities. Sharp disparities persist, with rural areas (especially Karnali and Sudurpashchim provinces), and marginalized populations such as Dalits and female-headed households experiencing disproportionately higher poverty and food insecurity (National Statistics Office, 2024). Access to essential services, including healthcare and education, remains limited for many, and social protection programs are unevenly implemented (Ministry of Health and Population, 2022; NPC, 2024). Governance and fiscal constraints, particularly limited provincial control over budgets, hinder locally tailored interventions.

Additionally, climate-related shocks, inflation, and overreliance on remittances exacerbate household vulnerabilities, while gaps in subnational and caste-disaggregated data restrict evidence-based policy-making (Kuhumba, 2022; World Bank, 2023). These gaps highlight both a critical need and an opportunity for research focused on multidimensional poverty, policy implementation effectiveness, and innovative, context-specific strategies to strengthen resilience and promote inclusive, sustainable poverty reduction in Nepal. In doing so, the study tried to assess Nepal's current poverty status, trends, and multidimensional deprivation among marginalized groups, tried to analyze structural, governance, economic, and climate-related barriers affecting poverty reduction and also tried to identify policy gaps and opportunities for achieving SDG 1 (No Poverty) by 2030.

3. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative-descriptive method along with secondary data analysis (Colorafi & Evans, 2016) to analyze Nepal's achievement of SDG 1 No Poverty. Secondary data sources employed in the research are official government reports, international agency reports, policy briefs, and pertinent academic articles from 2015 to 2025. The study draws on a range of secondary data sources, including government reports, international publications, and relevant academic literature.

The research is framed in three key evaluation dimensions: Poverty Status in Nepal; SDG index and performance, Multidimensional Poverty and Intersectional Vulnerabilities; and Nepal in the global poverty landscape.

4. Findings

4.1 Poverty Status of Nepal

The proportion of the population living below the national poverty line (absolute poverty) stands at 20.3 percent in fiscal year 2022/23. The national target is to reduce this figure to 12.0 percent by fiscal year 2028/29, reflecting a significant policy commitment to poverty reduction and inclusive economic development (National Planning Commission, 2024). Nepal's poverty line is defined using the Cost of Basic Needs (CBN) approach, with the current threshold set at NPR 72,908 (National Statistics Office, 2024). This reflects sustainable progress, yet also reflects recent vulnerabilities or setbacks perhaps due to COVID-19, inflation, or climate shocks (Adhikari et al., 2025).

According to the Sixteenth Periodic plan of Nepal (National Planning Commission, 2024) there has been encouraging change during the past two decades through increased education and health services, remittance flow increase, rural microfinance, and infrastructure construction. However, the persistent difference between intent and performance indicates failure to implement policies, deliver the budget, monitor data, and cover social protection. The slowly increasing poverty during the 16th Plan reflects economic susceptibility (i.e., inflation, unemployment, recovery from crises), unbalanced development, especially of the rural or provincial areas, and a lack of inclusive, shock-resistant, and resilient programs. Nepal's vision of reducing poverty to zero by 2030 is consistent with SDG 1 No Poverty. But speed-up and strategic targeting seem to be crucial based on available trends. More local government, budgetary federalism, climate adaptation, and social welfare targeting would be required in a bid to close the gap.

4.2 SDG Index and performance

By 2024, Nepal has attained mixed results in achieving the SDG goals (National Planning Commission, 2024). Nepal attained a score of 67.1 out of 100 on the composite SDG Index in 2024. It reflects the aggregate performance across all 17 SDGs and signifies moderate progress towards the 2030 Agenda. A score above 60 generally suggests that the building blocks are in place but enhanced and concerted efforts must be made to achieve the targets. Compared to the rest of the world, this score places Nepal in the mid-range of countries implementing the SDG agenda. This score reflects noteworthy progress being achieved in poverty alleviation (SDG 1), education (SDG 4), and climate action (SDG 13), but areas of strength in gender equality (SDG 5), infrastructure (SDG 9), and decent work (SDG8) (see Sachs et al., 2025).

Table 1 SDG 1 (No Poverty) of Nepal (Adapted from Sachs et al., 2025)

SDG1 – No Poverty	Value	Year	Rating	Trend
Poverty headcount ratio at \$2.15/day (%)	1.0	2025	●	↑
Poverty headcount ratio at \$3.65/day (%)	6.3	2025	●	↑

Table 1 shows that under SDG 1 (No Poverty), Nepal shows relatively low levels of extreme poverty. In 2025, only 1.0 percent of the population lives below \$2.15 per day, while 6.3 percent live below \$3.65 per day. This indicates notable progress in poverty reduction, though continued efforts are needed to support vulnerable groups. The global ranking as mentioned in the 2025 Sustainable Development Report by Sachs et al.

(2025) indicates the relative standing of the country compared to all United Nations member nations. While it indicates development in implementation, Nepal is still lagging behind many countries, especially in South and Southeast Asia (e.g., Sri Lanka, Vietnam). The ranking highlights that although there are absolute improvements, relative performance remains moderate, which calls for greater institutional efficiency, data-driven planning, and coordination between sectors. Nepal scored 95.3 points on the International Spillovers Score, which quantifies the degree to which a country's actions affect other countries' ability to achieve the SDGs. Low scores indicate high negative and/or positive transboundary effects such as low environment pollution exports, low exploitation related to trade, low tax evasion or contribution to global inequality. Nepal's high ranking is probably because it has a low industrial presence, few carbon emissions, and low trade volume, implying that it is a low-impact country in the world.

Figure 1 (adapted from Sachs et al., 2024, 2025) illustrate that Nepal's regional SDG Index value of 66.53 places it just below the South Asian average, which equates with Bangladesh and Pakistan, but behind Sri Lanka and India in a handful of measures. The value reflects Nepal remaining in line with regional performance but a long way to go to be at the forefront in localized implementation and subnational monitoring of progress, particularly through its federal architecture. Nepal ranks 35 in global spillover effects, which reiterates its benign contribution to the world at large in development agendas of SDGs. This suggests that Nepal is not causing much damage to other nations' development through their consumption, trading, or environmental activities.

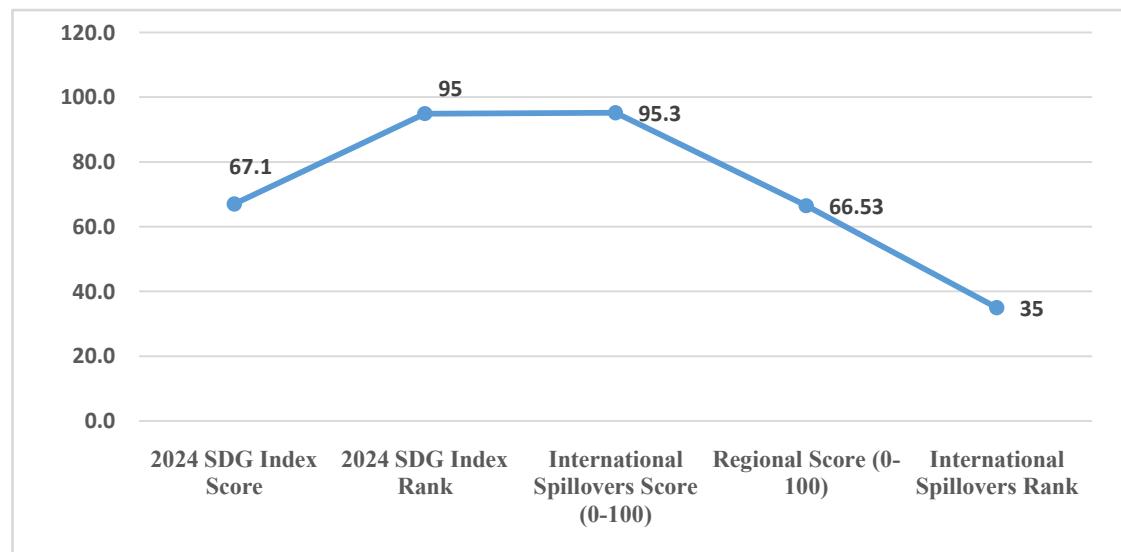
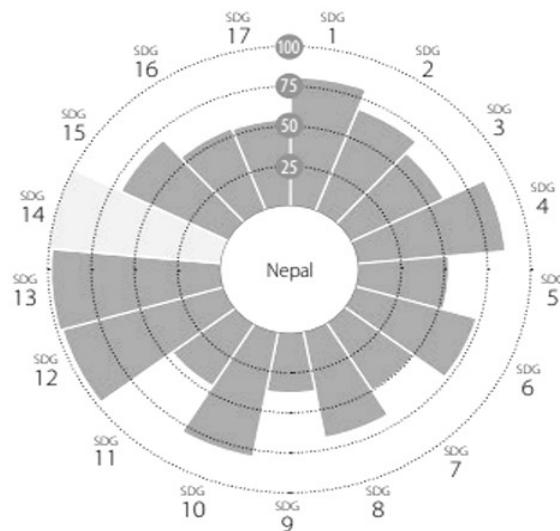


Figure 1 SDG Scores based on Sachs et al. (2024, 2025)

The graph reflects that while Nepal is progressing moderately on the SDGs (67.1 score), its global ranking (95) suggests the need to put more efforts into institutional coordination, inclusive economic development, and urban sustainability. But Nepal is best in suppressing its international negative externalities (score: 95.3; rank: 35), which means its growth is environmentally and socially conscious all over the world.

4.3 Multidimensional Poverty and Intersectional Vulnerabilities

About 17.4% of Nepalis are multidimensionally poor, about five million people, says the National Planning Commission (2021). This is down from 30.1% in 2014, with 3.1 million escaping poverty. The report states that only 12.3% of urban residents are MPI-poor, compared to 28% of rural residents. MPI-poor is highest in the Karnali Province with 39.5%, then 25.3% in Sudurpashchim Province, 24.2% in Province 2, 9.6% in Gandaki Province, and lowest at 7% in Bagmati Province. Overall, the highest percentage of individuals are deprived in housing material, clean cooking fuel, years of schooling, assets, and nutrition.



Note: Adapted from Sach et al. (2023)

Figure 2: SDG Performed by Nepal

Despite the impact of the pandemic, extreme poverty across upper-middle- and high-income countries declined between 2015 and 2022 as a result of swift fiscal support to the poor. Central and Southern Asia reduced working poverty by 6.9 percentage points from 2015 to 2023. The cost of remittances fell significantly over the past decade, declining from 7.4% in 2016 to 6.2% in 2023, which nevertheless continues to pose

economic challenges for remittance-dependent nations (see United Nations, 2024). This study offers a critical triangulation of Nepal's anti-poverty trajectory along three windows of analysis: comparative regional performance, multidimensional deprivation mapping, and institutional effectiveness in policy implementation. The findings capture both Nepal's exceptional capacity to resist poverty as well as its underlying vulnerabilities that threaten 2030 aspirations. The SDGs performed by Nepal has been represented by Figure 2 (Sachs et al., 2023). 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'.

While monetary poverty declined, Nepal's Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) at 17.4 percent (NPC, 2021) reveals entrenched deprivation circuits. These are due to the limited agenda of federalism-provincial governments only control 15 percent of the total development budget, significantly limiting their capacity to implement localized and context-specific interventions (World Bank, 2023). Dalit settlements experience a multidimensional poverty incidence of 34.1 percent, which is nearly double the national average of 17.4 percent. Female-headed households experience a poverty incidence of 28.3 percent, pointing to structural gender-based economic exclusion. Households in ecologically vulnerable areas, such as the Far-Western region, have experienced income shocks due to extreme weather events in 72 percent of instances. This reflects the idea that multiple social and environmental factors can combine to intensify vulnerability and deprivation.

4.4 Nepal in the Global Poverty Landscape

Globally, the rate of working poverty increased slightly from 6.9 percent in 2019 to 7.7 percent in 2020, before returning to 6.9 percent by 2023 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2024). In Nepal, multidimensional poverty declined significantly from 30.1 percent in 2014 to 17.4 percent in 2019 (NPC, 2021). However, the 16th Plan's target of reducing poverty to 20.3 percent (NPC, 2024) highlights the country's vulnerability, given its high dependency on remittances, which account for one-fourth of GDP (Adhikari & Khatri, 2024), and the risk of empty homes during periods of repatriation, as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Inflation in Nepal peaked at 21% in 1991 due to currency devaluation, with smaller spikes in 1997/98 (11.3%) and 2008/09 (12.6%). In recent years (2017–2019), it has remained low and stable around 4–4.5% (Karki et al., 2020). Building on these national challenges, the global zero-percent

poverty target, implemented without adequate shock-absorbing measures, highlights the difficulty of realizing such ambitious goals.

5. Discussions

5.1 Nepal's Current Poverty Status, Trends, and Multidimensional Deprivation

Dalit settlements experience a multidimensional poverty incidence of 34.1 percent, which is nearly double the national average of 17.4 percent (NPC, 2021). Female-headed households experience a poverty incidence of 28.3 percent, pointing to structural gender-based economic exclusion. Regularly Nepal has made different plan and budget for eradicate the poverty from Nepal. Despite progress in poverty reduction, Nepal faces interconnected structural, economic, and governance barriers that threaten its ability to achieve SDG 1 (No Poverty) by 2030 (NPC, 2024). Likewise, poverty increased from 18.7 percent (15th Plan) to 20.3 percent (16th Plan) (NPC, 2024), exposing vulnerabilities to shocks. On the other hand, only 15 percent of development budgets are provincially controlled (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023). Chronic underutilized budgets, donor dependency, and from time-to-time Nepal has formulated different plan and budget to eradicate the poverty of Nepal. Although there has been improvement in the reduction of poverty, Nepal also contains interlinked structural, economic, and governance challenges threatening its achievement of SDG 1 (No Poverty) by 2030 (NPC, 2024).

5.2 Structural, Governance, Economic, and Climate-Related Barriers

Households in ecologically vulnerable areas, such as the Far-Western region, have experienced income shocks due to extreme weather events in 72 percent of instances (NPC, 2021). Although approximately 80% of the population is engaged in farming, agriculture in Nepal remains largely subsistence-based, under-resourced, and vulnerable to climate change and market volatility (Bista et al., 2021). The majority of people experienced and strongly perceived changes in climatic factors and events (Khatri & Pasa, 2023). Climate Shocks Accelerate Poverty which causes 4.3 percent annual GDP loss by 2030 (Ministry of Forests and Environment [MoFE], 2023) from floods/droughts. 70 percent of Far-Western households face climate income shocks yet 43 percent of adaptation funds go unused (MoFE, 2023). Climate shocks are intensifying poverty, with floods and droughts projected to cause an annual GDP loss of 4.3% by 2030 (MoFE, 2023). In the Far-Western region, 70% of households experience income losses due to climate events, yet 43% of allocated adaptation funds remain unused (MoFE, 2023).

5.3 Policy Gaps and Opportunities for Achieving SDG 1 by 2030

Compounding these issues is the widespread problem of youth unemployment. A significant portion of the younger population is unable to find adequate employment opportunities within the country, prompting thousands of Nepalis to migrate abroad daily in search of work (Khatiwada, 2023). Consequently, Nepal's economy has become heavily reliant on remittances, which not only finance household consumption but also support national economic stability (Adhikari & Khatri, 2023). This overdependence on foreign employment and remittance inflows underscores the urgent need for structural reforms and sustainable livelihood generation within the country to ensure long-term poverty eradication and economic resilience. Due to various causes, zero hunger is challenging for achieving 2030. Despite the fact that nearly 80% of the people are engaged in agriculture, Nepalese agriculture remains largely subsistence-type, under-capitalized, and much vulnerable to climate change and market risks. Over these are added the chronic problems of unemployment among youth. A vast portion of the youth population cannot attain suitable job opportunities in the country, for which thousands of Nepalis migrate to other countries each day in search of employment.

Therefore, the economy of Nepal today is highly reliant on remittances, which not only finance personal household consumption but national economic stability as well. Such heavy overdependence on international employment and remittance inflows emphasizes the need for structural adjustments and livelihood creation in the country to ensure long-term poverty eradication and economic resilience. Compound pressures exacerbated by global crises including COVID-19, inflation, and low aid flows require shock-responsive policy (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020). USAID budget cuts under the Trump administration broke crucial anti-poverty initiatives, i.e., health, education, and livelihoods (European Training Foundation, 2025; Mbah et al., 2025). The post-pandemic period worsened the economic recession after 2020. Nepal needs to leverage innovation in its development practices to achieve the global development goals (Dhakal et al., 2025).

In summary, Nepal's progress toward SDG 1 (No Poverty) faces multiple, interconnected challenges. Structural and governance weaknesses, including underutilized budgets, political instability, and limited provincial control, hinder effective poverty reduction, especially for vulnerable groups such as Dalits, female-headed households, and marginalized regions. Climate change and environmental shocks increasingly threaten household incomes, while subsistence agriculture, widespread youth unemployment, and heavy reliance on remittances expose the

population to economic risks and global crises. Without coordinated reforms, climate adaptation, and sustainable livelihood strategies, Nepal is unlikely to achieve the goal of eradicating poverty by 2030.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals that Nepal has made notable progress in reducing poverty over the past decades, with monetary poverty declining significantly, although recent data show a slight increase, highlighting persistent vulnerabilities. Multidimensional poverty remains entrenched, particularly among Dalit settlements and female-headed households, reflecting structural, gendered, and intersectional deprivation. Structural and governance challenges, including underutilized budgets, political instability, and limited provincial control, continue to hinder effective poverty reduction. Households in ecologically vulnerable areas experience frequent climate-related income shocks, while widespread youth unemployment and heavy reliance on remittances exacerbate economic fragility. Global crises, including pandemics, inflation, and natural disasters, further compound these pressures.

In conclusion, while Nepal has achieved measurable improvements in poverty reduction, the country faces complex, interconnected structural, economic, and environmental barriers that must be addressed to realize the goal of eradicating poverty by 2030. It should be noted, however, that this study is limited to secondary data analysis, which may not capture the most recent localized poverty dynamics or informal livelihoods, and the lack of detailed subnational and caste-disaggregated data. Therefore, future research could prioritize on primary data collection in marginalized communities, longitudinal monitoring of poverty trends, and evaluation of localized poverty alleviation programs. Furthermore, comparative studies with other South Asian countries may also provide insights into best practices for reducing multidimensional poverty. Finally, the implications suggest that overcoming Nepal's poverty challenge to meet its SDG goal requires coordinated policy reforms, strengthened local governance, targeted social protection, and climate-adaptive interventions. Sustainable poverty eradication will depend on inclusive, resilient, and equitable strategies that address structural inequalities and intersectional vulnerabilities across the country.

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