



Mid-term Rapid Assessment

# HALFWAY THROUGH THE GLOBAL GOALS IN NEPAL

August 2024



# Executive Summary

The overall progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nepal by 2023 is mixed, reflecting both positive developments and ongoing challenges. While Nepal has made significant strides in reducing poverty, improving health and education outcomes, and enhancing infrastructure and energy access, there remain significant challenges, particularly concerning income and consumption inequality, SDG localization and data, and the impact of COVID-19. These challenges are particularly pronounced for minority and marginalized groups, who often face additional barriers to accessing the benefits of development.

## **POVERTY REDUCTION**

Nepal has made significant progress in reducing poverty, with the incidence of poverty decreasing to 16.7% as of 2021. This achievement is attributed to periodic plans that focus on promoting growth, employment, infrastructure, human development, and resiliency. However, the benefits of these plans have not been evenly distributed, with minority and marginalized groups often experiencing socio-political exclusion, resulting in an uneven distribution of development gains.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENERGY**

Significant strides have been made in enhancing infrastructure and energy access, with over 88% of the population having access to electricity. This improvement has enhanced the overall quality of life and enabled economic growth. However, minority communities in remote areas may still lack adequate access to these essential services, highlighting the need for targeted interventions.

## **HEALTH AND EDUCATION**

Nepal has also made progress in improving health and education outcomes, with reductions in infant, maternal, and child mortality rates and improved gross enrolments in basic and secondary education. These achievements are critical for equipping Nepal's population with the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute to the country's development. Nonetheless, minority groups often face barriers to accessing quality health and education services due to geographical, cultural, and linguistic challenges.

**Thus, despite the achievements, several areas require improvement to enhance Nepal's ability to realize global goals, particularly for minority groups:**

### **INEQUALITY:**

Income and consumption inequality remain major concerns, with the wealthiest 20% of the population holding over 40% of the country's income.<sup>1</sup> Addressing these disparities is crucial for ensuring that minority and marginalized groups can equally benefit from economic growth and development.

### **PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE TO PANDEMIC:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted Nepal's ability to achieve the SDGs, causing socio-economic disruptions that have disproportionately affected minority and marginalized communities. These groups often have less access to healthcare and economic support, exacerbating their vulnerabilities.

### **DEFICIENCY IN LOCALIZATION PLANNING:**

Although Nepal has endorsed a policy and program to localize the SDGs, more clarity, institutional integrity, resource allocation, and political will are needed to effectively implement these plans. Localization efforts must include minority voices and address their specific needs to ensure equitable development outcomes.

For Nepal to remain fully committed to attaining the SDGs, it is essential to decentralize planning, resource allocation, and execution, sharing these responsibilities with subnational entities throughout the SDG realization process. Recognizing and facilitating the roles of non-traditional state and non-state actors, including minority representatives, is vital for filling resource gaps, building wider ownership, and institutionalizing change beyond mere outputs. Meaningful partnerships and the incorporation of the needs and aspirations of excluded groups and regions in decision-making processes will undoubtedly accelerate the pace of SDG realization in Nepal, ensuring a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

# Key achievements and challenges towards SDGs in Nepal

Nepal has made significant strides towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) despite the devastating 2015 earthquake, the COVID-19 pandemic, and various socio-political challenges, including resource constraints. However, the progress has not been uniformly distributed, particularly affecting minority and marginalized groups. More specifically,

## 1

### POVERTY REDUCTION:

The incidence of poverty has been reduced to 16.7% as of 2021, meeting the target of reducing poverty to less than 20% by 2023.<sup>i</sup> This success is attributed to targeted rural development and social protection programs, which have improved livelihoods and provided financial support to vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities, senior citizens, and single women.<sup>ii</sup> However, minority groups often face socio-political exclusion, leading to an uneven distribution of development gains and exacerbating poverty and inequality among these populations.<sup>iii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> The claim that “the incidence of poverty has been reduced to 16.7% as of 2021, meeting the target of reducing poverty to less than 20% by 2023” is not fully supported by the latest evidence:

1. According to the Nepal Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021, 17.4% of Nepalis were considered multidimensionally poor as of 2019. This figure reflects the percentage of the population experiencing multiple deprivations in areas such as education, health, and living standards.

2. The Fourth Nepal Living Standards Survey 2022-23 reported that the poverty rate was just over 20% in 2023, suggesting that the target of reducing poverty to less than 20% by 2023 was not met.

Therefore, while there has been progress in reducing poverty, the specific claim of reducing it to 16.7% by 2021 does not align with the data from these sources.

## 2

### ECONOMIC GROWTH:

Nepal has achieved an annual economic growth rate of 6.8%, which is expected to continue supporting the country’s development goals. Yet, minority groups often have limited access to economic opportunities, hindering their ability to benefit equally from this growth.

## 3

### IMPROVED HEALTH:

The decreasing maternal mortality rate indicates progress towards SDG 3, particularly for women in marginalized communities. This improvement is due to increased access to skilled birth attendants through targeted outreach programs in remote areas. However, general healthcare access remains unequal,<sup>iv</sup> with minority groups often facing barriers due to geographical and cultural factors.

## 4

### IMPROVED SCHOOL ENROLMENT:

Significant progress has been made in girls’ education, with enrolment rates rising at all levels. This contributes to SDG 4 (quality education) and empowers girls to participate more actively in society. Nonetheless, minority groups may still encounter barriers to accessing quality education<sup>v</sup> due to cultural and linguistic differences.

The achievements are also a result of strategic factors such as (a) the international spillover index, which is greater among East and South Asia,<sup>vi</sup> (b) the formulation of institutional, legal, and policy frameworks, including the integration of SDGs into the 5-year periodic plan and (c) SDG coding into the national budgetary system.

These achievements demonstrate Nepal's progress in achieving the SDGs in the mid-way, i.e. by 2023. However, challenges remain, including reducing income and consumption inequality and achieving targets in areas like infrastructure and industry. Goals such as 6, 12, and 13 are on track or maintaining SDG achievements, while goals like 7, 11, 15, and 16 have stagnating trends.<sup>vii</sup> More specifically:

# 1

## **POVERTY REDUCTION:**

Nepal needs to accelerate the pace and scale of implementation efforts to reduce poverty among minority and indigenous groups. The exclusion of minority and marginalized groups from decision-making processes results in an uneven distribution of development benefits. This exclusion exacerbates poverty and inequality, particularly in rural and minority-dominated regions.

# 2

## **RESOURCE MOBILIZATION:**

Nepal faces a resource crunch, which hinders the effective implementation of SDGs, particularly in areas like infrastructure and industry.<sup>viii</sup> The country's ambition to graduate from the least developed country (LDC) status by 2026 may weaken its position to seek flexible funds and leverage resources, which could disproportionately affect minority communities.

# 3

## **DATA MANAGEMENT:**

The lack of quality and reliable data, including disaggregated data, hinders monitoring and evaluation of progress towards SDGs, making it difficult to identify areas where focused interventions are needed. The lack of data in areas such as Goal 1, 10 and 16 further complicates the existing challenges of directing the efforts toward facilitating the meaningful participation of minority and marginalized groups and regions in the SDG-focused decision-making and benefit-sharing efforts.

# 4

## COORDINATION AND MONITORING:

Coordination and monitoring of SDG implementation across different government levels are crucial but challenging, especially in a federal setup. The lack of sustained efforts to mainstream the SDGs at subnational levels limits the roles of provincial and local leaders, affecting minority representation and participation.

# 5

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURAL DISASTERS:

Climate change and natural disasters pose significant threats to Nepal's development gains, particularly in communities that are vulnerable to higher-than-average temperature rises. This directly affects minority, marginalized groups and further increases their vulnerability, and exacerbates existing inequalities.

# 6

## PERSISTENT GENDER AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES:

Nepal continues to face deep-rooted gender and social inequalities and discrimination across various spheres like education, healthcare, economic participation, and political representation.<sup>x x</sup> While Nepal has made progress, there is a need to strengthen the legal and policy environment to comprehensively address gender equality and social inclusion in line with the SDGs.<sup>xi xii</sup> Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive, disaggregated data on the situation of different groups of women and men hinders evidence-based policymaking and monitoring of progress on gender equality under the SDGs.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive, intersectional, and collaborative approach to ensure that minority rights are upheld and that all groups benefit from the progress towards the SDGs. By focusing on inclusive policies and targeted interventions, Nepal can make significant strides in promoting minority rights and achieving the SDGs by 2030.

# Opportunities for promoting gender and social inclusion in SDGs

To integrate a minority rights perspective into the opportunities for promoting gender and social inclusion in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nepal, it is important to emphasize how these opportunities can specifically benefit minority and marginalized groups. Despite various constraints, Nepal has promising opportunities to advance gender equality and social inclusion within the framework of the SDGs. These opportunities are particularly significant for minority and marginalized groups. More specifically:





1

**STRENGTHENING LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS:** Nepal has made substantial progress in developing comprehensive laws and policies related to gender equality and social inclusion, such as the Gender Equality Policy (2077 BS) and the Social Inclusion Policy (2077 BS). Additionally, the formation of several constitutional commissions targeting specific minority and indigenous groups provides a strong foundation for further progress. These frameworks should be leveraged to ensure that minority rights are protected and promoted, addressing historical injustices and discrimination.<sup>xiii</sup>

2

**INCREASING PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP:** Constitutional and political negotiations have led to improved representation of women and minority and indigenous groups in decision-making positions at federal, provincial, and local levels. While challenges remain in cultivating these presences, these affirmative measures can be further developed to ensure meaningful participation and leadership of minority groups, empowering them to influence policies that affect their communities.<sup>xiv</sup>

3

**IMPROVING ACCESS TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC SERVICES:** Efforts to increase access to quality education and healthcare services for women and marginalized groups can be further strengthened to enhance their capabilities and well-being. Promoting financial inclusion and increasing the participation of women and marginalized groups in economic activities is crucial for their empowerment.<sup>xv</sup> Additionally, the increasing representation of these groups in the labour force provides opportunities to further support their social and economic empowerment, reducing disparities and promoting equality.

4

**ENHANCING DATA COLLECTION AND MONITORING:** Recognizing the need for comprehensive, disaggregated data collection and participatory monitoring can lead to improved evidence-based policymaking and tracking of progress on gender equality and social inclusion. This approach is essential for identifying and addressing the specific needs of minority groups, ensuring that interventions are targeted and effective.

5

**FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION:** Strengthening partnerships and collaboration among the government, civil society, private sector, and development partners can promote a coordinated and inclusive approach to sustainable development.<sup>xvi</sup> Nepal's newly endorsed 5-year periodic plan recognizes the roles of non-state actors, including civil society organizations and international development communities, in technology and skill transfer, resource leveraging, and partnering to meet national development priorities such as the SDGs. These collaborations should prioritize the inclusion of minority voices and perspectives, ensuring that development efforts are equitable and inclusive.

By focusing on these opportunities, Nepal can make significant strides in promoting minority rights and achieving the SDGs, ensuring that all groups benefit from sustainable development efforts.

# Conclusion

Nepal is at a crossroads, facing a choice between two paths. One path involves ignoring the harsh realities of inequality and exclusion faced by a significant number of groups and regions, thereby advancing primarily those who are organized and well-positioned to benefit from the national ambition of economic growth. The other path is to adopt a blended approach that ensures a more inclusive journey, where everyone progresses together towards a shared future. If Nepal chooses the latter, the following measures will facilitate achieving inclusive goals, particularly for minority and marginalized communities:

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## **TARGETED INTERVENTIONS:**

Design programs that cater specifically to the needs of disadvantaged groups, addressing issues such as geographical remoteness, cultural barriers, and limited access to education. These programs should directly target and benefit women and marginalized groups, including minorities, through initiatives focused on financial literacy, vocational training, and addressing cultural barriers to education and healthcare. Customized interventions should be developed to ensure that minority communities receive equitable opportunities and resources.

## **DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS:**

Invest in collecting disaggregated data to effectively track progress for different segments of the population, including minority groups. This data will help identify gaps and tailor interventions to address the specific needs of these communities, ensuring that no group is left behind in the pursuit of SDGs.

## **DECENTRALIZING DECISION-MAKING:**

Subnational governments, which bear the responsibility for many indicators, must be recognized, empowered, and resourced to adapt national frameworks to local realities. This approach should include facilitating multi-stakeholder collaboration among state and non-state actors, including minority representatives, to strengthen decentralization and accelerate progress towards the inclusive realization of the SDGs in Nepal.

## **EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES:**

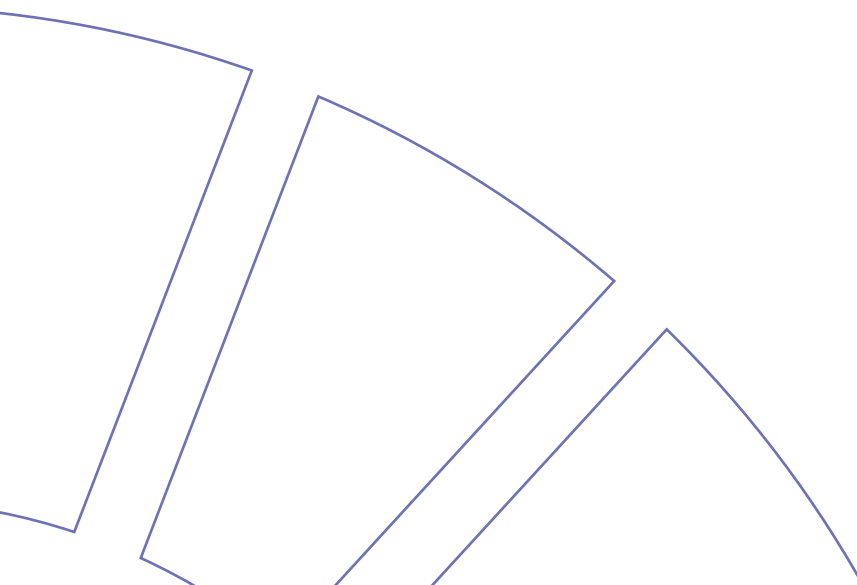
Engage local communities, including minority groups, in planning and implementing SDG-aligned programs to ensure they are culturally appropriate and address local needs. Recognizing the heterogeneity of Nepalese society, group-specific localization efforts should be based on local terms to ensure the benefits reach the most marginalized. This will promote horizontal sharing of opportunities and resources, fostering a more equitable society.

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By focusing on these measures, Nepal can ensure that minority rights are upheld and that all groups benefit from sustainable development efforts, moving towards a future where inclusivity and equality are at the forefront of national progress.

# Endnotes

- i [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379715836\\_Nepal%27s\\_Performance\\_in\\_Achieving\\_Sustainable\\_Development\\_Goals\\_A\\_Critical\\_Evaluation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379715836_Nepal%27s_Performance_in_Achieving_Sustainable_Development_Goals_A_Critical_Evaluation)
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- iv <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9411965/>
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- vii <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/nepal>
- viii [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378537214\\_Challenges\\_to\\_Leave\\_No\\_One\\_Behind\\_in\\_Nepal\\_for\\_Achieving\\_Sustainable\\_Development\\_Goals](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378537214_Challenges_to_Leave_No_One_Behind_in_Nepal_for_Achieving_Sustainable_Development_Goals)
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- x [https://un.org.np/sites/default/files/doc\\_publication/2021-10/GE%20in%20numbers-final%20-16-09-24-%20for%20web.pdf](https://un.org.np/sites/default/files/doc_publication/2021-10/GE%20in%20numbers-final%20-16-09-24-%20for%20web.pdf)
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