

Recognizing Community Contributions for Achieving SDGs in Nepal

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Executive summary

As a least developed country (LDC) country Nepal faces several challenges to implement and achieve the SDGs. Ahead of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2017, the government of Nepal has prepared a Voluntary National Review (VNR), which, from the perspective of community-based natural resource management groups and rural women groups, contains many gaps. This shadow report explores these gaps and provides suggestions to improve the VNR and the process in Nepal. This report has been prepared based on consultations with different local communities and rural women groups who are managing natural resources in a sustainable way to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In the context of Nepal, thousands of local communities have been managing productive resources such as forests, water (drinking and irrigation), wetlands, public land and cultural resources with the full and effective participation and leadership of women. These community-based natural resource management groups have been extensively contributing to achieving the targets of MDGs and SDGs. Rural women groups have also been able to mobilize the resources generated from these systems at community level specifically for the social capital, employment and income generation for the poor and vulnerable sects of the communities. Despite this, the participation and contributions of these groups were excluded during the VNR process. Moreover, due to lack of gender-sensitive and inclusive consultations during the VNR process, the VNR itself has ignored the roles and the contributions of women to achieve the SDGs in Nepal.

The Government of Nepal can achieve the SDGs through meaningful participation and inclusion of these local communities and rural women's groups, including community-based organizations (CBOs). However, the government has not developed effective and participatory mechanisms to take into account these community and rural women's contributions. The National Report on the Implementation of the SDGs in Nepal has undermined and not counted community contributions to achieving the SDGs in Nepal.

Local communities and rural women groups play a critical role now and into the future to achieve the SDGs, therefore their recognition as stakeholders and their perspectives in reporting progress towards achieving SDGs is required, including in the VNR process. We call for a national database and accounting system to be established that allows for meaningful consideration of community contributions, experiences and demands, in order to achieve the SDGs.

1. Introduction

The policies of Nepal's newly enacted constitution in 2015 have given priority to the community-based natural resource management system and equitable benefit-sharing with local communities. These provisions will be instrumental for achieving the SDGs at the community level. The effective enforcement of the new constitution can create many opportunities to achieve the SDGs in Nepal. However, weak governance, inequality, social discrimination, unemployment, the low literacy rate in rural areas, dependency on remittance, weak capacity for disaster risk reduction and unequal distribution of resource are some of the barriers to achieving the SDGs.

Despite some improvement in the representation in political, administrative and elected bodies, there is very limited space for women, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities in the economy and development sector. However, rural women groups and local communities have established an inclusive, participatory and democratic culture at the community level through community-based natural resources management systems such as community forestry, community enterprises, community water management and public land management. The community-based natural resource management groups of local communities and women, specifically groups working on community forestry and drinking water supply, were recognised as widely contributing to achieving the MDG targets in Nepal (UNDP, 2013). These community efforts will also be instrumental in achieving SDGs in the future.

More than 70% of agricultural land has been sustainably irrigating through farmer-managed community irrigation systems for agriculture production in Nepal. More than 30,000 community-based drinking water and sanitation users groups are supplying drinking water in rural and urban areas of the country. Approximately 35% of forest land of the country is under a community-based forest management system and these community forestry groups have been greatly contributing to food security, renewable/alternative energy, community health and education, poverty alleviation and well-being, employment and income generation by mobilising their forest resources and income. These CBOs have also established a democratic system to make at least 33-50% representation of women in the decision-making bodies which will contribute to achieving SDG 5 in the country.

2. Country's progress on SDG commitments

The Government of Nepal is intending to graduate Nepal from the status of an LDC to developing country by 2022, though no substantial progress has been witnessed in that direction so far due to weak implementation of the new constitution for the state restructuring. However, the government has developed some plan and program to achieve the SDGs commitments.

The National Planning Commission (NPC) is a focal institution for the establishment of institutional and operational mechanisms in order to localize the SDGs. The NGO Federation of Nepal has been coordinating to raise the concerns of civil society and stakeholder in the VNR process through *Nepal SDG Forum*.

The local communities who are the main foundation for community-based natural resource management in the country have been widely contributing to achieving the

SDGs, however, they have very limited space to share their experience and concerns at the national level during the VNR process. The VNR has not accounted the community contributions to achieving SDGs because the consultation events were organized only at the national and sub-national level during the preparation of VNR report. Due to a lack of consultation at local community level, the VNR has covered and highlighted only the efforts made by government agencies, UN agencies, donors, and I/NGOs. The VNR has given strong emphasis on the national level policy and strategy instruments that were prepared without considering the SDGs and now the government is trying to link the targets of these previous national policies/strategy with the targets of SDGs, which will not be enough to achieve the SDGs.

SDGs	Country progress
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty reduction target - to reduce the population of below poverty line from 21 to 17% during SDG period. Allocation of annual budget for social protection and social security for elderly people, single women, and socially marginalized people. Securing women's right to property and land in the constitution, Fundamental rights to environmental justice, priority to the local community to the natural resources, Formulation of Adaptation plans to address climate change vulnerability.
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Securing right to food as fundamental rights in the constitution, Preparation Zero Hunger Challenge National Action Plan in 2016 and Agricultural Development Strategy (2014-2034)
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target set to reduce child and infant mortality rate and maternal mortality ratio.
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The constitutional rights of women - Land and property rights, sexual and reproduction rights, Special reservation for women in civil service law, Target sets to end all form of violence and discrimination.
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop different policy and legal instruments for resilient infrastructure considering earthquakes and other natural disasters under the guidance of National Reconstruction Authority. Post disaster Recovery Framework (PDRF) developed.

3. Community contributions for achieving the SDGs

In the context of Nepal, the local communities who have been collectively managing the environment and natural resources are widely contributing to achieving SDGs. Their major contributions from local communities for SDGs are as follows:

SDGs	Contribution from local communities to achieve SDGs in Nepal
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wellbeing ranking and identification of poor and allocation of community benefits for poverty alleviation. Allocation of annual budget for social protection and social security for elderly people, single women, and socially marginalized people. Implementation of adaptation plans to address climate change vulnerability.
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investment of community income for securing right to food for the poor Distribution and investment of community income to reduce hunger.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocation of community income to improve health service at the community level.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocation of income from community forestry to community schools and poor students.
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Securing 50% women representation in the leadership and decision-making bodies of local communities. Gender-responsive allocation and investment of community fund generated from natural resources including community forestry and community drinking water.
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drinking water supply by the community-based drinking water and sanitation users associations in almost all rural and urban areas.
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial and other local resources allocation from community forestry groups to establish renewable/alternative energy at household level (specifically to poor households)
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocation of community land and resources to poor households for the income and employment generation.
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocation of time and resources from local communities for the disaster risk reduction at the community level.
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocation of financial resources from community forest fund to build safe houses for poor families.
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development and implementation of management plans from local communities for the appropriate use of natural resources.
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Almost all local communities related to community forestry, community drinking water, community irrigation, community electricity have developed community adaptation plan of action (CAPA). Community forestry groups have developed plans for emission reduction from deforestation and forest degradation.
15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About 40% forest land is under community-based forest management. The biodiversity is conserved through community conservation and the local communities have developed equitable sharing of benefits arising from forest and biodiversity. 19,000 community forestry groups have their own management plans for the sustainable management of forests and to halt deforestation, forest degradation, loss of biodiversity and to conserve ecosystem as well as prevent invasive alien species. Community forest groups have established and mobilized anti-poaching/trafficking groups. All types of the ecosystems are sustainably managed by the local communities, however the ecosystem services are being utilized by the public and private sector without paying anything to local communities.

16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each of the community-based natural resource (forests, water, energy) management groups have committed to establishing and operationalizing inclusive, democratic and gender-balanced community institutions at community level, which are basis for the peaceful and inclusive societies and local democracy. • Community mediation is one of the integral parts of these local communities to maintain justice at the local level.
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The achievements of the local communities are significant. Unfortunately, there is the lack of a national database and accounting system to consider the community contributions to achieving the SDGs. Therefore, one of the major gaps in the VNR of Nepal is that it has neglected these community contributions and ignored consultation and data from local communities.

4. Women's priorities

Women are creating strong spaces at the community level through community-based natural resource management groups and different cooperative organizations at the local level. Many such groups have been exclusively managed by women or under the leadership of women. Therefore, women's groups want to see their contributions in the VNR report through an meaningful consultation process. However, in the case of Nepal, due to lack of consultation at local level particularly with women groups, their contribution, concerns, and agendas have not been reflected in the VNR report of the country.

The women groups of Nepal who are managing community-based natural resources, community-based organizations and cooperatives in rural and urban areas want to explore the following progress and challenges, which are ignored in the VNR:

1. End all forms of discrimination: The VNR has only highlighted the constitutional rights of women, empowerment for education, and government policies to improve maternal health. Nepal's VNR has not identified the causes of discrimination against all women and girls. In reality, due to social-economic and cultural factors, every day we have been witnessing various forms of discrimination against women and girls, both in society and the public and private sectors. Additionally, as a result of weak enforcement and compliance of national laws and international instruments, different forms of discrimination still exist in all sectors. Community-based organizations (CBOs) have been empowering and educating to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, though such efforts and achievements of CBOs are not counted in the VNR.

2 Eliminate all forms of violence: The VNR has also realized that violence against women and girls still exists in many different spheres, but the VNR has not analysed the causes and has also failed to propose any measures to eliminate all forms of violence. Many reports of the National Human Rights Commission has explored that the main causes of violence against women and girls are the weak enforcement of the law, immunity from the state agencies and protection from political parties to violators. The strong organizations of local communities are successfully eliminating such violence in many parts of the country, though the VNR has ignored to highlight such success story.

3 Eliminate all harmful practices: The constitution of Nepal and other national legal instruments have banned child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Due to the low literacy rate of women and lack of legal awareness, the harmful practices still exist even in urban areas. In practice, many women's groups at the community level are addressing child, early and forced marriage through social mobilization even without support from government agencies. The VNR neither identified the causes or challenges related to harmful practices nor explored the future commitment or mechanisms to eliminate all harmful practices.

4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work: The Constitution of Nepal has committed to developing a mechanism to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work. However, the Government has not developed any policy or program for the recognition and value of unpaid care and domestic work of women so far. The VNR is also silent towards this goal, though women are continuously demanding appropriate policy and programmes for this purpose.

5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities: The constitutional and legal provisions of the country are enough for this purpose. The constitution and other sectoral legislations have made different provisions to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities, particularly in political and public life. However, such legal measures are not effective particularly in the economic life of women, due to weak enforcement of law and unequal social-cultural power relationship between men and women. Since the last few years the community-based natural resource management groups, cooperatives, and community-based organizations are being able to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in economic life because more than 50% of the groups have women in the leadership. The VNR has not counted these community contributions.

6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights: Nepal has made some progress to achieving this goal, though the maternal mortality ratio is still high. The VNR has not highlighted the achievement and gaps to achieve this goal. Due to the low level of awareness about these universal rights within and among men and women, the majority of rural women are not being able to exercise these rights effectively.

The VNR of Nepal has given emphasis to women's education to achieve goal 5, however, it has not recognised the other important gaps for the effective implementation of the SDGs and allocation of resources for the implementation of constitutional rights of women.

5. Common ground analysis

The Constitution of Nepal guaranteed that both spouses shall have equal rights in property, family affairs and inheritance. Due to unequal power relations between women and men in society, land and other productive resources are under ownership and control of men. Women have been playing an active role in agriculture and food production in the family and society. Generally, the income from agriculture and other household sources are controlled by the male as a head of the family. Women are under stress of poverty, due to weak ownership and control over the production and income at household level. Unequal property

rights in practice is one of the important gaps to reduce poverty in Nepal. Therefore, without securing women's property rights over the land and other productive sources, the household level poverty and hunger remains an important challenge for achieving the SDGs. The VNR has not adequately analysed the link between property rights and end poverty and hunger.

Nepal has also developed gender-sensitive policy frameworks namely in sectors such as health and education, environment, agriculture, forests, water and other productive sectors. The cooperative sector has also empowered women through saving and mobilization of small-scale financial resources in rural areas. Women's groups at the local level have been benefiting from the opportunities created by the local communities and cooperatives. However, the financial policy and banking laws are less supportive for the mobilization of sufficient resources to women. These gaps are not identified in the VNR and it has only analysed the sources of funding for the SDGs implementation in Nepal through government agencies.

The VNR has claimed that the SDGs are mainstreamed in relevant policy and strategic instruments. However, it is not clear how all these policy instruments will work together in an integrated way. Several sector policy instruments have also placed high emphasis on the prosperity of the people. The local communities have established well-defined community-based natural resource management systems particularly in the forest, water, and renewable energy sector. These systems have created space for women to secure their rights over natural resources and benefits generated from sustainable management of forest, water, and ecosystem. Women's priorities such as ownership over productive resources and full and effective participation in leadership and decision-making process are partially fulfilled through community-based natural resource management system in the country, though these opportunities are not recognized in the VNR report.

6. Means of Implementation

After the earthquake in 2015, Nepal is investing a large amount of financial resources for the reconstruction and still, there is a gap in investment for the reconstruction. As an LDC, Nepal depends on further financial resources and even the current level of ODA is not sufficient to implement SDGs in the country.

The local governments will also be the main responsible agencies for the effective implementation of SDGs at the ground level in Nepal because the constitution has given them responsibilities that are directly related to the targets of SDGs. However, these newly elected local governments have very limited resources and experience, which is one of the major challenges in Nepal in achieving the SDG targets. The VNR has identified that there will be a crucial role for local governments to achieve SDGs at the local level, though it has not analysed the financial capacity and gaps in the local government structure for implementing the SDGs. Without support from central government and development partners, the local governments of Nepal will not be able to implement SDGs at the local level. However, the VNR has less analysis on the coordination mechanisms within and between these partners and government agencies who are responsible for the SDGs implementation. The VNR has not counted local communities as partners for the implementation of SDGs. Many productive resources such as forest, water, wetland, and small-scale renewable energy

are being sustainably managed by community groups in Nepal. However, the government needs to recognize and consider the community contributions for achieving the SDGs.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The government of Nepal has taken the initiative for the implementation and voluntary review of the progress of the SDGs through the National Planning Commission. Some consultation events have been organized at national and province/state/sub-national level to generate awareness on SDGs and collection of information is in progress. Some government agencies, development partners, and NGOs are aware of the SDGs and they are striving for mainstreaming SDGs in their development activities. However, the local communities, the general public, and poor households are less aware of the SDGs and its process. The SDGs and review process at the local level is less inclusive and the VNR has overlooked community contributions to achieve the SDGs.

The Constitution of Nepal has created an enabling environment to implement SDGs at the different levels based on the constitutional power sharing between the central, state and local governments. Nepal has identified an unfinished agenda in the VNR but this is defined only based on the review of policy instruments without consultations with the poor and vulnerable, women and youth. The way forward seems to be concentrated only on the efforts of central level government agencies, which will not be enough to implement and achieve the SDGs at local and community level.

The SDGs implementation and VNR process so far has ignored the roles and responsibilities of local communities and rural women groups who have widely contributed to realizing the SDGs at local community level. The government has yet to localize the SDGs considering the constitutional and legal rights of local government and local communities. Therefore, particularly in the context of local communities, the following aspects should be considered in the future for the effective implementation of SDGs in Nepal:

- Local communities have been contributing to realizing the SDGs and they will be strong partners of the government for the future, therefore, community contributions must be counted in the VNR process.
- The localization of SDGs is urgent to create ownership over them; the VNR process should include participation of women, the poor, Indigenous Peoples, youth and local communities.
- There is a lack of harmonization between sector policies/strategies, constitutional policies and SDGs, therefore, the government needs to review and reform all relevant policies to harmonize this.
- Local communities and women groups have been playing a huge role to achieve the SDGs, although often times they are not aware of the SDGs and/or VNR process, therefore, a participatory, inclusive and gender-focused process is urgently needed to involve them in these processes.

References

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