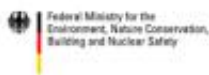


Recognising the Contributions of Women and Local Communities is Required to Achieve the SDGs in Nepal



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Executive Summary

As a least developed country (LDC), Nepal faces several challenges to implement and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs.) Ahead of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2017, the Government of Nepal prepared a Voluntary National Review (VNR), which excluded perspectives from local community-based groups and rural women's collectives focusing on natural resource management. This shadow report has been prepared out of necessity to identify these crucial perspectives and provide recommendations to improve the VNR and the process.

This report has been prepared based on consultations in different local communities and with rural women's groups who are sustainably managing natural resources in ways that need to be recognised in order to achieve SDGs in Nepal. And for the full realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that commits to "leave no-one behind."

In the context of Nepal, thousands of local communities have been managing productive resources for generations. With full and effective participation and leadership from women in the community, these local natural resource management groups have actively contributed to achieving the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and SDGs in the effective management of natural resources such as: forests, watersheds (drinking and irrigation), wetlands, ecosystems, public land and cultural resources.

Rural women's groups have been essential in contributing to the sustainable management of these systems. Furthermore, they have been able to mobilise the resources generated from these systems at the community level, specifically in strengthening capacities of social welfare systems, employment, and

income generation for poor and vulnerable sects of these communities.

Unfortunately, the participation and contributions of these groups were excluded during the VNR process. Moreover, due to lack of a gender-sensitive 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 only achieve the SDGs through the full participation and inclusion of local community and rural women's groups, including community-based organisation (CBOs). However, the government has not developed any effective, 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 excluded community contributions to achieving the SDGs in Nepal.

Local communities and rural women groups play a critical roles, now more than ever, in achieving the SDGs. Their recognition as stakeholders and their perspectives in reporting the progress towards implementing the SDGs and the VNR process is required. We call for a national database and accounting system to be established that will allow meaningful consideration of community contributions, perspectives, experience, and knowledge, in order to realise the SDGs.



Community members are assessing the threats to community conservation during a community assessment. Dil Raj Khanal/FECOFUN

1. Introduction

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

Despite some improvement in political, administrative and elected bodies, there is very little representation of women, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities in the economic and development sectors. However, rural women's groups and local communities have established inclusive, participatory and democratic cultures at the local level through community-based natural resource management systems. These systems include 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 supplies, were recognised as widely contributing to achieving the

MDG targets in Nepal (UNDP, 2013). These community efforts will also be instrumental in achieving SDGs by 2030.

More than 70% of agricultural land in Nepal has been sustainably irrigated through farmer-managed community irrigation systems for agriculture production. More than 30,000 community-based drinking water and sanitation users groups are supplying drinking water in rural and urban areas across the country. Approximately 35% of forest land is under a community-based forest management system and these community forestry groups have greatly contributed to food security, renewable and alternative energy, community health and education, poverty alleviation, and employment and income generation by mobilising their forest resources and

income. These CBOs have also established a democratic system to make decision making bodies where at least 33-50% representatives are women, which will contribute to achieving SDG 5 in the Nepal.

The Government of Nepal can achieve the SDGs through participation and inclusion of these local community and rural women's groups. However, the Government has not developed any effective and participatory mechanisms to take into account these community contributions. There was very low participation from local communities and rural women during the national VNR process. The National Report on the Implementation of the SDGs in Nepal has undermined and not counted community contributions to achieving the SDGs in Nepal.



Members of community forest user groups are managing their community forest in Nawalparasi district. Nawalparasi/FECOFUN

2. Nepal's Progress on SDG Commitments

The Government of Nepal aims 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; primarily due to the weak implementation of the new constitution and state restructuring.

The government has developed some plans and programs 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 localise the SDGs. The NGO Federation of Nepal has been coordinating to raise the concerns of civil society and relevant stakeholders in the VNR process through the Nepal SDG Forum.

The local communities who are the main foundation for community-based natural resource management in the country have widely contributed to achieving the SDGs. However, they have very limited space to share their experiences and concerns at the national level, especially during the VNR process. The VNR has not accounted for community contributions because the consultation events were organised only at the national and sub-national level during the preparation of the VNR report.

Due to a lack of consultation at the 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 instruments that were previously 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. This effort will not be nearly enough to achieve the SDGs.

SDGs Country Progress

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

3. Community Contributions to Achieve the SDGs

In the context of Nepal, local communities and rural women's groups that collectively manage environmental and natural resources are making major contributions to realising the SDGs. The following table outlines these contributions:

Contributions from local communities to achieving the SDGs in Nepal

- | | | | |
|---|---|----|--|
| 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Well-being 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 marginalised people.• Implementation of adaptation plans to address climate change vulnerability. | 11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allocation of financial resources from community forest funds to build safe houses for poor families. |
| 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Investment of community income for securing right to food for poor.• Distribution and investment of community income to reduce hunger. | 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Development and implementation of management plans from local communities for the wise use of natural resources. |
| 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allocation of community income to improve health services at the community level. | 13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Almost all local communities related to community forestry, community drinking water, community irrigation, and community electricity. They have developed a community adaptation plan of action (CAPA).• Community forestry groups have developed plans for emission reduction from deforestation and forest degradation. |
| 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allocation of income from community forestry projects to community schools and poor students. | 15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• About 40% of forest land in Nepal is under community-based forest management, biodiversity is conserved through community conservation and the local communities have developed equitable sharing of benefits arising from forests and biodiversity.• Each of the 19,000 community forestry groups have their own management plan for the sustainable management of forests and to halt deforestation, forest degradation, loss of biodiversity and to conserve ecosystems as well as prevent invasive alien species.• Community forest groups have established and mobilised anti-poaching/trafficking groups, which are highly successful.• All types of ecosystems are being sustainably managed by local communities, however, ecosystem services are being utilised by the public and private sector without compensation for local communities. |
| 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Securing 50% women representation in the leadership and decision-making bodies of local communities.• Gender-sensitive allocation and investment of community funds that have been generated from natural resources including community forestry and community drinking water. | 16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community mediation is integral to local communities in order to maintain justice at the local level. |
| 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drinking water supplied 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 income and employment generation. | | |
| 9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allocation of time and resources from local communities for disaster risk reduction at the community level. | | |

The achievements of the local communities are significant. Unfortunately, there is no national database or accounting system to consider the community contributions in 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 community organisations.

4. Women's Priorities

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



Women members of community forests are collecting Niguro (*Dryopteris sp*) in kanepokhari of Morang district. **FECOFUN Morang**

The women's groups of Nepal who are managing community-based natural resources, community-based organisations, and cooperatives in rural and urban areas want to include the following actions and processes 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 policy to improve maternal health. Nepal's VNR has not identified the causes of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere. In reality, due

to social-economic and cultural causes, Nepal witnesses various forms of discrimination against women and girls, both in society and in 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. CBOs managing community-based natural resources have been empowering and educating to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, though such efforts are not counted in the VNR.

2. Eliminate all forms of violence:

The VNR has also realised that violence against women and girls still exists in many different spheres, but the VNR has not analysed the cause of such situations and has also failed to propose any measures to eliminate all forms of violence. Studies and reports of the National Human Rights Commission assert that the 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 organisations of local communities are successfully eliminating such violence in many parts of the country, though the VNR has ignored to highlight such success stories.

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 mobilisation even without support from Government

agencies. The VNR neither identified the causes or challenges related to harmful practices, nor explored the future commitment or mechanism to eliminate all harmful practices.

4. Recognise and value of unpaid care and domestic work: The constitution of Nepal has committed to developing a mechanism to recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work. However, the Government has not developed any policy or programme for the recognition and value of unpaid care and domestic work of women so far. The VNR is also silent on this goal, though women are continuously demanding appropriate policy and programmes for this purpose. Nepal has enacted some legislative provisions to increase women's ownership over houses, land and livestock. But there is limited legal awareness about land tenure rights and only about 20% of women have ownership over their land and houses. The VNR of Nepal has aimed to increase this up to 40% by 2030, but that contradicts the target of the Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS) of Nepal (2015-2030) which has targeted to increase the number up to 50% by 2030. The industrial enterprise law of Nepal has made specific provisions to increase women's ownership over

enterprises, though the Government has been reluctant to develop a supportive program to implement this legislation.

5. Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities: The constitution and other sectorial legislation have made different provisions to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal

Community-based natural resource management groups, cooperatives, and organisations have been able to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in economic life. More than 50% of leadership positions are held by women these community organisations. The VNR has not counted these community contributions.



Asha Lopchan, member of auditing committee of Chaturmukhi Community Forest Users Group and Barandabhar protected Forest Council, Chitwan district. Dil Raj Khanal/FECOFUN

6. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR): Nepal has made some progress to address these important rights, though the maternal mortality rate is still unacceptably high. The VNR has not highlighted the progress and gaps relevant to protecting SRHR. Due to the low levels of awareness about these universal rights within and among men and women, the majority of rural women are not able to exercise these rights effectively.

The VNR of Nepal has emphasised women's education to achieve this goal. However, the VNR has not identified essential requirements for the effective implementation of the SDGs and allocation of resources for the implementation of constitutional and legal rights of women.

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 social-cultural and patriarchal power relationships between men and women.

5. Common Ground Analysis

The VNR has not adequately analysed the link between property rights and ending poverty and hunger. The Constitution of Nepal guarantees that both spouses shall have equal rights in property, family affairs and inheritance. Due to unequal power relations between women and men in Nepal, society, land, and other productive resources are largely under the 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, livestock and other household sources is controlled by the male as the head of the family. Women are under the stress of poverty, due to weak ownership and control over the production and income at the household level. Unequal property rights, in practice, is one of the most important gaps to reduce poverty in Nepal. Therefore, without securing women's property rights over the land and other productive sources, household level poverty and hunger will remain an important challenge for achieving the SDGs.

Nepal has also developed gender-sensitive policy frameworks in

different sectors, namely health and education, environment, agriculture, forests, water, enterprise and other productive sectors. The cooperative sector has also empowered women through mobilisation of small-scale financial resources in rural areas. Women's groups at the local level have benefited from the opportunities created by local community cooperatives. However, the financial policy and laws are less supportive for the mobilisation 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 claims 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 give high emphasis on the prosperity of the people. Local communities have established well-defined community-based natural resource management systems particularly in the forest, water, and renewable energy sectors. These systems have created space for women to secure their rights over natural resources and benefits generated from sustainable management of forests, water, and ecosystems. Women's priorities such as ownership over productive resources and full and effective participation in leadership and the decision-making process are partially fulfilled through community-based natural resource management systems in Nepal. But

these opportunities are not recognised in the VNR report.



Members of a community forest organisation are discussing the threats to women-led, small-scale forest enterprises in Kavre district. **Dil Raj Khanal/FECOFUN**

6. Means of Implementation

After the earthquake in 2015, Nepal invested significant financial resources into reconstruction. But these efforts fell short of what was and is needed for sustainable reconstruction. As an LDC, Nepal depends on further financial resources and even the current level of the ODA is not sufficient to implement the SDGs in Nepal.

Local Governments will be the main responsible agencies for the effective implementation of the SDGs at the ground level in Nepal. The constitution has allocated responsibilities to local Government that is directly related to the SDG targets.

However, these newly elected local Governments have very limited resources and experience, which presents a major challenge. The VNR realised that local

governments will need to play a crucial role to achieve the SDGs. The VNR needs to analyse the financial capacity and gaps in the local government in order to implement the SDGs. Without support from central government and development partners, the local governments of Nepal will not be able to implement SDGs.

Additionally, the VNR lacks analysis on the coordination mechanisms within and between these partners and Government agencies that are responsible for the implementation of the SDGs. The VNR has not



A community forest managed by community forest user groups in the Dolakha district of Nepal. Dil Raj Khanal/FECOFUN

counted local communities as partners for the implementation of the SDGs even though many productive resources such as forests, biodiversity, water, wetland, and small-scale renewable energy have been sustainably managed by community groups in Nepal. Therefore, the Government needs to recognise and count community contributions and consult communities in order to achieve the SDGs.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Government of Nepal has taken the initiative for the implementation and voluntary review of progress on the SDGs through the National Planning Commission. Some consultation events have been organised at national and province/state/sub-national levels to generate awareness of the SDGs and the collection of information is in progress. Some government agencies, development partners, and NGOs are aware of the SDGs, and they are striving to mainstream the SDGs in their development activities.

However, local communities, the general public, and poor households are less aware, if aware at all of the SDGs and their importance, and the process of achieving these goals. It is essential to integrate the SDGs process at the domestic and local levels. Thus far the VNR has excluded women's and community contributions to achieving the SDGs.

Nepal has made some progress towards the SDG targets. The constitution of Nepal has created an enabling environment to implement SDGs at 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 Government policy instruments. There were no consultations with the poor and vulnerable, women and youth. The way forward that is outlined in the VNR is concentrated only on the efforts of central level Government agencies, which will not be enough to implement and achieve the SDGs at the local and community level.

The Government has yet to localise the SDGs, and implement the constitutional and legal rights of local governments and communities. Therefore, particularly in the context of local communities,

the following aspects should be considered in the future for the effective implementation of the SDGs in Nepal:

- Local communities have been contributing to achieving the SDGs and they will be strong partners of the Government in the future. Therefore, community contributions must be recognised in the VNR process. The localisation of SDGs is urgent
- to create ownership over them, and the VNR process should include the participation of poor, vulnerable, Indigenous Peoples, women, youth and local communities. There is a lack of harmony
- between sector policies/strategies, constitutional policies and the SDGs. Therefore, the Government needs to review and reform all relevant policies to harmonise. Local communities and women's groups have been playing a significant role towards achieving the SDGs, although often they are not aware of the SDGs and/or VNR processes. Therefore, a participatory and inclusive as well as gender-focused process is urgently needed in order to involve them fully.



Members of Community Forest User Groups are assessing gender mainstreaming in community conservation. Dil Raj Khanal/FECOFUN

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