

Original Article

Role of Civil Society in SDG Localization in Nepal

¹Rajendra Sharma

¹MPhil-led PhD Student, Central Department of Rural Development, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

Received Date: 20 March 2024

Revised Date: 30 March 2024

Accepted Date: 10 April 2024

Published Date: 25 April 2024

Abstract: This study aims to thoroughly examine the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at both the global and national levels, shedding light on the process of SDG localization and the crucial role played by Civil Society in this endeavor. Drawing on a comprehensive range of reliable secondary sources, articles, and references, this research delves into the current status of SDG localization and offers valuable recommendations for its successful implementation. Furthermore, the study focuses on the challenges faced at the global and national levels in achieving the targets set by the SDGs for 2030. The findings of this research hold significant relevance for policymakers and researchers, providing them with valuable insights to inform their decision-making processes. SDG is a global term. We simply need it at the local level, and we have to rearrange the indicator and rewrite it based on local government. SDG is a global term. We simply need it at the local level, and we have to rearrange the indicator and rewrite it based on local government. It is also needed to localize the SDG from a local perspective. Mainly, SDG localization promotes ownership, participation, and targeted approaches, ultimately leading to more sustainable and inclusive development outcomes.

Keywords: Sustainable, Development, Policy, Localization, Civil Society.

I. INTRODUCTION

The term sustainability was first used about forest management in Europe in the eighteenth century. However, it was only in the late 1980s that the ideas of sustainability and development were connected. According to the Brundtland Commission, sustainable development is “development which meets the requirements of now’s generation while safeguarding the capacity of generations to come to meet their own needs” (Banks et al., 2015). There have been numerous definitions, academic commentaries, and policy initiatives, particularly since the first United Nations (UN) conference on environment and development in Rio in 1992. (Daly et al., 2019). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was agreed by world leaders at a UN Summit in September 2015, became effective on January 1, 2016. As part of a new sustainable growth strategy, one hundred and ninety-three countries established a set of 17 goals to end poverty, safeguard the environment, and achieve universal prosperity. Each goal includes specific criteria that must be met over a fifteen-year period ending in 2030.

The SDGs are unique in that they call on all countries (poor, affluent, and middle-income) to foster prosperity. They realize that eradicating poverty requires methods that promote economic growth and meet a variety of social needs such as health, welfare, schooling, and job opportunities, all while combating disparities to ensure that no one falls behind. The SDGs are essentially grouped into four groups: social, environmental, economic, and law and governance pillars, as shown below (UN, 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals, or Global Goals, are a set of seventeen interconnected objectives intended to serve as a “shared blueprint for harmony and prosperity for people and the planet, now and in the future.” The SDGs are no poverty; zero hunger; good well-being and health; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and growth in the economy; industry, innovation, and structures; decreased disparities; sustainable cities and communities; ethical buying and manufacturing; climate action; life beneath water and life on land; peace, justice, and strong institutions; and goal-oriented partnerships. The SDGs stress the interwoven environmental, social, and economic dimensions of equitable growth by focusing on sustainability. The global development agenda, centered around the shared commitment of the international community, aims to achieve prosperity in people’s lives and establish peace in society by staying within the limits of the Earth’s capacity to sustainably provide resources. There are five pillars of sustainable development goals:

- (a) Earth: Conservation of natural resource sources and preservation of the environment for future generations.
- (b) Humanity: Eradicating all forms of poverty and hunger, ensuring dignity, equality, and justice.
- (c) Prosperity: Promoting harmony with nature to ensure a prosperous and sustainable life.
- (d) Peace: Building peaceful, inclusive, and just societies.
- (e) Partnership: Implementing the agenda of sustainable development through strong global partnerships.



A) Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

- To examine and understand the concept of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and SDG localization.
- To explore and analyze the significant role played by government and civil society in the localization of SDGs.
- To assess and evaluate the efforts made by Nepal in the localization of SDGs.

B) Methodology

The research method was purely qualitative; it is mainly based on secondary data, different articles and authentic sources were used to identify the problem of the research, and the cites are cited and proven in the references. The term paper is based on descriptive and analytical methods for collecting secondary data of information.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Localization refers to how the SDGs can serve as a framework for local development strategy, as well as how local and regional governments can help accomplish the SDGs through grassroots action. While the SDGs are global in scope, their achievement will be determined by our ability to make them a reality in our cities and communities. All of the SDGs include targets that are closely tied to the obligations of local and regional governments, especially their role in providing basic services. This is why governments at all levels must be central to the 2030 Agenda. The actualization of the SDGs began internationally in 2016. This method is also known as Localizing the SDGs. In 2019, António Guterres (secretary-general of the United Nations) announced a worldwide appeal for a Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. (Martin. "Decade of Action". *United Nations Sustainable Development*. Retrieved 27 September 2022.)

This decade will run from 2020 until 2030. The UN secretary general plans to hold a yearly platform to drive the Decade of Action. The SDGs are implemented by two types of players: state and non-state actors. National governments and sub-national agencies are examples of state players, whereas businesses and civil society organizations (CSOs) are non-state actors. Creating new partnerships is beneficial. However, the SDGs are not legally enforceable and were purposely designed to provide actors a lot of latitude. As a result, they can interpret the goals in different ways, frequently based on their personal interests. Localization is a method by which various parts of the local community become involved, participate, and contribute to social, economic, and political debates and decision-making processes in order to reach global goals. Localization encourages the definition, implementation, process ownership, and monitoring of goals for development at the level of the community. It entails integrating locally assessed and set goals and priorities into local and national development plans, as well as mobilizing every stakeholder, such as organizations from civil society, to play key roles in promoting understanding and advocacy, preparation and execution, expertise and knowledge sharing, and assessment and monitoring.

Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals and rallying people to participate in their implementation, as well as monitoring implementation to ensure important public or corporate actors are held accountable for meeting the goals. According to the company's scope and purpose, these positions can be played at all stages of execution (global, national, sub-national, or local) and across all sectors. The literature on civil society, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals, demonstrates a two-way relationship: on the one hand, studies highlight civil society contributions to goal execution and surveillance; on the other, they record the possibilities as well as obstacles that the execution of this structure offers to civil society. Furthermore, studies show that civil society is not coherent nor homogeneous but rather a heterogeneous set of individuals and interests with competing perspectives and positions (Delabre, Alexander, and Rodrigues 2019). Studies by van Haren and colleagues (2019), Bowen and colleagues (2017), and Bridgewater, Régnier, and Cruz García (2015) emphasize the importance of civil society organizations in mobilizing people's participation and bringing the voices of those on the frontlines of poverty, inequality, and vulnerability into 2030 Agenda processes. This helps achieve the agenda's overall desire to 'leave no one behind' (Sénit 2020). Some studies highlight the relational challenges of partnerships and civil society participation in the 2030 Agenda. One issue is a shortage of diversity in the types of civil society groups involved (Banks et al., 2015). Aid-oriented organizations, which are often urban, transnational, or headquartered in donor nations, have an advantage (Hossain et al., 2019). Other civil society organizations' opportunities to contribute are erratic, unforeseeable, and restricted in breadth and impact.

Lastly, as big data becomes more widely utilized to establish indicators and track progress, civil society is going to confront new issues, such as data protection, as well as the technical sophistication and complexities associated with monitoring. Civil society organizations play a crucial role in transformative governance in various areas, including food systems (Siegel and Bastos Lima 2020), education (Daly et al. 2020; McCormick 2016), water (Hussein, Menga and Greco 2018; van Leeuwen et al. 2019), planning for cities (Pemán-Gavín 2019), housing (Wakely 2020), and medical care (Mondal and Van Belle 2018). The Sustainable Development Goals, in their present state, are not transformational on their own. Rather, as a basic blueprint of objectives and targets, sometimes lacking an unambiguous explanation of what transformation ought to look like, the 2030 Agenda and global goals are frequently used for reporting reasons at best. They seldom offer a substantial

motivation to push the necessary fundamental adjustments and systematic transformations (Independent Group of Scientists designated by the Secretary-General 2019; Sachs et al. 2019). To guarantee effective civil society involvement in the execution process, participation should not be purely informal. Civil society should play formal responsibilities, such as official consultations on government implementation plans and actions, representation on institutions that oversee implementation efforts, and formal routes for involvement in accountability processes. (Dattler, 2016). The role of civil society starts from awareness-raising, followed by planning and monitoring, partnership and collaboration, and advocacy and accountability. Although the government has policy provisions for the SDGs, subnational-level implementation aspects have challenges. A strengthened, effective, and accelerated mechanism for the localization of the SDGs is essential. It is required to strengthen the partnership at various levels. The collaboration within the country, as well as at regional and global levels by the government institutions and the non-governmental sector, must be further strengthened.

A) SDG Localization in Global:

Localization, founded on the principles of multilevel governance and multistakeholder engagement, is acknowledged as a critical strategy for collectively propelling us toward greater inclusivity and sustainability. Local and regional governments play an important role in this process because 65% of the SDG targets are relevant to their activity and mandates. As the branch of government nearest to the local population, they are critical for reacting to the disintegration of the social compact and defending our societies in the midst of intersecting global crises. Since 2018, the Voluntary Local Review global movement has created an unparalleled push for localization. More than 200 Voluntary Local Reviews have been conducted to date, shedding light and raising the profile of local activity in comparison to national and international processes.

Furthermore, VLRs have helped to accelerate progress in all aspects of SDG localization, including data innovation, planning and policy coherence, project creation, and finance. Nonetheless, local and regional governments' financial, human, and technical resources around the world remain restricted, impeding their ability to provide fundamental amenities and drive regional growth. SDG localization in a global setting refers to nations' and global organizations' collaborative efforts to implement and adapt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to their individual conditions and problems. While the SDGs were designed as global goals, effective execution requires localization to guarantee significance, efficiency, and inclusiveness at the national and local levels around the world.

B) Global SDG localization efforts involve several key aspects

- Awareness and Advocacy: International organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), play a vital role in raising awareness about the SDGs and advocating for their localization. They promote dialogue, knowledge sharing, and capacity building among countries to facilitate effective localization processes.
- Policy Alignment: Countries align their national development plans, policies, and strategies with the SDGs to integrate and mainstream them into their governance structures. This alignment helps ensure that the goals are not seen as separate entities but are embedded within existing national frameworks, guiding decision-making and resource allocation.
- Cooperation and Partnerships: Global cooperation and partnerships are essential for supporting SDG localization. Collaborative efforts between countries, international organizations, civil society, academia, and the private sector are crucial in sharing best practices, innovative approaches, and resources to address common challenges and accelerate progress towards the goals.
- Data and Monitoring: Global efforts focus on developing robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms to track progress and ensure accountability. This includes developing common indicators, methodologies, and data collection systems that allow for cross-country comparisons while respecting national contexts. It also involves strengthening statistical capacities in countries to generate accurate and timely data for monitoring and evaluation.
- Financing and Resource Mobilization: Global initiatives aim to mobilize financial resources to support SDG localization efforts in developing countries. This involves diverse funding mechanisms, including Official Development Assistance (ODA), private sector investments, and innovative financing solutions. It also emphasizes the importance of aligning financial flows with sustainable development priorities and ensuring their effective and transparent use at the national level.
- Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building: Global platforms facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and lessons learned in SDG localization. They provide opportunities for countries to learn from one another, share successful practices, and build capacities in areas such as policy development, implementation strategies, and monitoring frameworks.

C) SDG Localization in Nepal

In 2015, the United Nations approved a comprehensive global development agenda to be achieved by the year 2030, which consists of 17 goals and 169 targets. Nepal's National Planning Commission has further added 247 indicators, including

the country-specific realities, and determined a total of 479 indicators. The concept of sustainable development encompasses not only economic and social development but also environmental conservation as an integrated approach. The commitment to implementing sustainable development goals is shared not only by Nepal but also by other nations worldwide. The 17 goals of sustainable development should be implemented in the respective country's medium and annual plans, and Nepal has expressed its commitment to this. Since the 17 goals of sustainable development are interrelated and closely linked, they should be viewed as an integrated set of objectives.

The government, private sector, cooperatives, and community play crucial roles in achieving the goals of sustainable development, so a comprehensive government-led approach involving the private sector and community is essential to achieve these goals. From fiscal year 2074/75 onwards, the construction of the budgetary framework, including the achievement of sustainable development goals, has been prioritized by providing support to programs and events aimed at achieving these goals. Indicators have been developed and programs/events have been prioritized for their implementation through the construction of budgets, policies, and programs. The World Development Agenda 2030 has presented a comprehensive view of Nepal's state and roadmap for achieving sustainable development goals. This roadmap envisions Nepal as a just and prosperous nation by the year 2030. The status and roadmap of the sustainable development goals, as well as the estimation of financial requirements, have been prepared. The implementation of the sustainable development goals requires an average of NPR 2024.8 billion annually, with 54.8% coming from the public sector, 36.5% from the private sector, 4.4% from households, and 4.3% from cooperatives and non-governmental sectors. This amount falls short by about NPR 585 billion, with NPR 218 billion to be contributed by the government and NPR 366 billion by the private sector. To make the implementation of the sustainable development goals effective and organized, plans at the provincial and local levels have been translated into action through the translation of guidelines and demonstration (sample) plans. National and regional monitoring and evaluation have been carried out to identify indicators of the sustainable development goals and to facilitate their implementation at the regional level. The successful implementation and achievement of the goals of sustainable development can only be realized through the active participation of all levels of government. The responsibility for achieving the sustainable development goals lies with all levels of government, including the federal, provincial, and local governments, which need to coordinate implementation, monitoring, and evaluation in a collaborative manner. The government's efforts alone are not sufficient to achieve the sustainable development goals. The involvement of the private and non-governmental sectors, civil society, communities, and other development stakeholders is essential for a shared partnership among all stakeholders.

Localization of the ambitious development goals at the local level:

The determination of responsibility for the implementation of the development goals in all three levels of government is defined by the constitution and laws. Therefore, the national level alone is not responsible for all the subjects of the agenda for 2030. Activities such as service delivery, good governance, and local infrastructure development fall under the jurisdiction of the local level. Both the provincial and local levels are equally capable of achieving the ambitious development goals. Therefore, the reasons for localizing the development goals are as follows:

- a) Transfer of significant responsibilities of public services to the local level
- b) Centralization of resource mobilization
- c) Prioritization of development goals according to the local context
- d) Increase in the quality and productivity of local expenditure
- e) Promotion of citizen participation
- f) Ensuring inclusivity
- g) Coordination among different levels of government's plans
- h) Reduction of duplication of resources.

D) Nepal's Institutional Arrangement for SDG Localization

Nepal prepared its SDG country Status Report in 2015, detailing and taking stock of its development context and establishing the baseline for the SDGs. This became Nepal the first country in the globe to release its SDG Country Report, demonstrating Nepal's commitment and preparedness to carry out the SDGs. The National Planning Commission is the Government of Nepal's authorized focal agency for SDG localization. The NPC has been trying to connect its periodic plans with the SDGs and their aims, particularly the national monitoring and evaluation system. The internalization of SDGs began with the 14th periodic plan (2016/17-2018/19). The current 15th plan (2019/20-2023/24) is likewise completely consistent with the SDGs.

Furthermore, various sectoral plans, strategies, and ambitions are consistent with the SDGs. Specific SDG codes are issued to all national programs in the budget. (*Sustainable Development Goals Status and Roadmap: 2016 - 2030*, n.d.)

The SDGs are also consistent with Nepal's long-term vision of 'Prosperous Nepal: Happy Nepali', which is set to be realized by 2043. The 15th plan is based on the objective of graduating from least developed nation status, eliminating multidimensional poverty, achieving the SDGs, becoming a nation with a middle-income level by 2030, and achieving overall prosperity and happiness by 2043. Prosperity consists of four goals: accessible modern infrastructure, full exploitation of human capital potential, high and sustainable output and productivity, and high and equitable national income. Similarly, Happiness has six goals: happiness and an adequate existence; a safe, sophisticated, and just society; a balanced environment; good governance; stronger democracy and national unity; and stability and respect. To help execute the SDGs, three high-level groups have been established emerged: a Steering Committee chaired through the Rt Hon Prime Minister; a Coordination and Implementation Committee chaired by the Vice Chairman of the NPC; and seven theme committees led by NPC members. Nepal is one of the countries that has agreed to provide a Voluntary National Review of its progress toward the SDGs, and it has previously presented two such reports at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), which is hosted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

Furthermore, it is putting SDGs into action through national policies and initiatives in accordance with its SDG Status and Road Map (2016-2030). The strategy has identified 494 indicators under 169 goals, ranging throughout all sectors. The roadmap is supplemented by another milestone paperwork, the SDG Needs Assessment, Costing, and Financing Strategy 2018. Nepal has identified an average annual investment demand of Nepalese rupees 2024.8 billion (about US\$ 20 billion) to fulfill the SDGs, with a 29% finance shortfall.

In Nepal NGO Federation of Nepal (NFN), through the "Nepal SDGs Forum", is continuously coordinating and organizing various formal and informal meetings with the respective civil society organizations regarding SDG Localization.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In word wide, initial attempts after the SDGs went into effect yielded some encouraging results. Extreme poverty and child mortality rates have continued to decline. HIV and hepatitis were among the disorders targeted. Some gender equality targets yielded positive outcomes. The poorest countries' access to electricity was expanding, as was the amount of renewables in the energy mix. Globally, unemployment had returned to levels not seen since before the 2008 financial crisis. Marine protected areas now comprise over fifty percent of all waters under national authority. However, it is now evident that most of this progress was fragile, and the majority of it was too sluggish. The COVID-19 outbreak, the war in Ukraine, and climate-related tragedies have all hampered already slow progress over the last three years. There were ongoing challenges in achieving SDGs, such as mainstreaming at the subnational level, resource mobilization, data management, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation before COVID-19 emerged. These challenges are not only further piled up with an outbreak of COVID-19 in Nepal but have also shaken the country's entire health system, education system and economy. The pandemic has increased inequalities between and within countries, which has many negative implications for vulnerable and marginalized groups and pushes huge masses at risk of being further left behind. It has given rise to new problems and challenges, which have been the immediate priorities. Digital needs increased during the pandemic but simultaneously worsened the digital divide. Efforts and resources are being diverted to the emergency needs health system, COVID-19 has also demonstrated the critical role of the local governments, which recommends effective bottom-up policies and decision-making processes and strengthening SDG localization. A necessary revision of the SDGs roadmap is required while considering the adverse impact of COVID-19 and planning to accelerate the government's effort to achieve SDGs in Nepal. It is also essential to bring the SDGs implementation plan to the same momentum as before the COVID-19 era, adapting to the new reality and building back better. International investment and backing are required to ensure creative technical growth, fair trade, and access to markets, particularly in emerging nations such as Nepal. Nepal is the least developed country and is scheduled to upgrade to a developing country by 2026. Accelerating efforts during the transition phase is essential, and support from the global community is vital in this journey. There are challenges in localizing SDGs at the subnational level; a strengthened, effective and accelerated mechanism for localization of the SDGs is essential to achieve SDGs and minimize the disparity among people.

IV. CONCLUSION

Despite the commitment to reaching the SDGs and introducing various structures and systems, implementation followed by effective monitoring is a consistent challenge. Localization and mainstreaming of the national SDGs at the provincial and local levels is challenging; there is a problem related to data availability and quality. Lack of data, paucity of appropriately disaggregated relevant data, or lack of up-to-date data impose SDG tracking and monitoring limitations. After spending one-third of the SDGs time frame, Nepal has preliminary baseline reports for two provinces by July 2020. Citizen Generated Data (CGD) is being used by various CSO actors in different forms; such data are helpful for the Nepal Civil Society Perspective on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A revision of the SDG road map for Nepal is required to consider a new context. Such modification must concentrate on the practical strategy of reaching 'leave no one behind'. Civil Society as Stakeholders CSOs can take on a variety of functions in implementing the SDGs; they can spur government action through

persistent advocacy and autonomous monitoring. CSOs have a strong background in working with and for marginalized groups; therefore, they can direct support in the implementation of the SDGs.

The practical implementation of SDGs requires collaborating with different actors and stakeholders, including CSOs. Awareness, mobilization of the actors and their resources, participation and ownership create synergy and effective ways of promoting LNOB. Streamlining activities from national to local levels necessitates localization and incorporation into development goals, as well as rigorous monitoring, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms. This system will help to promote goal ownership and accountability among all actors in sustainable growth, as the government cannot meet SDG targets on its own. It is critical for a culturally, economically, and geographically diversified emerging nation like Nepal to involve different communities in economic, social, and political processes and growth.

Macroeconomic policies must be reviewed to ensure that they are consistent with the financial requirements of the SDGs. The collaboration within the country, as well as at regional and global levels by the government institutions and the non-governmental sector, must be further strengthened. The challenges of localizing SDGs at the sub-national level need special attention and a robust monitoring framework.

- Integration and alignment of the SDGs in the national and subnational plans, programs, and budgets is essential in order to achieve the SDGs.
- Local governments have an important role to play in delivering service, development and change at the community level. Therefore, unless the local governments prioritize and align the SDGs in their programs and resource allocation, it is not possible to make progress and achieve the SDGs.
- National Planning Commission, Province Planning Commissions, and other agencies have made attempts to integrate and localize the SDGs, but the progress so far is not sufficient to achieve the SDGs.
- Awareness, capacity, alignment and integration of the SDG indicators, resource allocation, and monitoring and reporting mechanisms are the areas where the actions are insufficient and need additional focus.
- NFN, Nepal SDGs Forum and CSOs in Nepal have aligned their initiatives with SDGs. Their contributions have mainly been focused on building awareness, service delivery, advocacy and accountability. Major concerns are over realizing that progress is inclusive and that 'leave no one behind' is achieved.
- Some of the actions and initiatives of the NFN / Nepal SDGs Forum include facilitation and mobilization of the Nepal SDGs Forum, organizing multi-stakeholder dialogues and discussions at different levels, documentation of the civil society concerns on SDGs, handover of the recommendations to concerned stakeholders,
- Capacity building, review and reflection meetings are organized with local governments, particularly environment and nature based solutions, SDG 6 - water and sanitation, SDG localization, etc.
- Recently, a voluntary local review toolkit has been developed through a consultative process,
- VLR has been piloted in two local governments so far and needs to plan to facilitate more local governments to review and reflect on their efforts.
- Capacity building of CSOs and local government and Further development of SDG indicators with disaggregated data

V. REFERENCES

- [1] Banks, N., Hulme, D., & Edwards, M. (2015b). NGOs, states, and donors revisited: still too close for comfort? *World Development*, 66, 707–718. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2014.09.028>
- [2] Daly, A., Parker, S., Sherpa, S., & Regmi, U. (2019b). Federalization and education in Nepal: contemporary reflections on working through change. *Education 3-13*, 48(2), 163–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2019.1599408>
- [3] NGO Federation of Nepal (National Secretariat of Nepal SDGs Forum). (2019). *State of National Implementation of SDGs in Nepal: Accelerating Localization of SDG 16 Human Rights Perspective on SDGs, September 2019.
- [4] NGO Federation of Nepal (National Secretariat of Nepal SDGs Forum). (2022). Nepal Civil Society Perspective on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- [5] Sustainable Development Goals Status and Roadmap: 2016 - 2030. (n.d.). UNDP. <https://www.undp.org/nepal/publications/sustainable-development-goals-status-and-roadmap-2016-2030>
- [6] Sustainable Development Goals, Progress Assessment Report 2016–2019 Nepal. (2020). National Planning Commission.
- [7] The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022. (2022). UN.
- [8] Voluntary Local Reviews, from data analysis to citizen engagement when monitoring the SDGs. (2020). Authors: Andrea Ciambra and Ricardo Martinez.