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Nepal Public Policy Review (NPPR) Volume 1, 2021

# Nepal Public Policy Review (NPPR)

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## About the Journal

Nepal Public Policy Review (NPPR) is a peer-reviewed journal published by Policy Research Institute (PRI), a policy think-tank of the Government of Nepal. PRI believes that the participation of the public in the policy formulation process enhances public ownership of the resultant policy and makes it effective. As such, it advocates and adopts a democratic process in policy formulation.

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# **Nepal Public Policy Review (NPPR)**

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# Nepal Public Policy Review

*Promoted by Policy Research Institute*

## Editorial

### Stepping into the first public policy research journal

We are pleased to launch the first-ever policy journal – Nepal Public Policy Review (NPPR) – in Nepal. It focuses on a wide spectrum of policy domains but is especially aimed at enhancing an interface between academic research and public policy-making. To this end, it collects research-based evidence as well as ideas and experiences of policy practitioners and policy advocates that can be tapped for policy-making processes.

Launching a journal is challenging, more so an interdisciplinary journal like the NPPR whose scope is both broad and fraught with the danger of being vague. It needs a proper justification and reasoning why a journal is needed in this particular domain. Above all, it needs academic rigour and capacity to attract prospective contributors and deal with their contributions to ensure their quality and standard. All this is not possible without investing a remarkable amount of resources. The journal in your hand is a product of a dialogical process that has involved a series of interactions with authors, reviewers and members of the editorial board over a year.

A number of journals are published in Nepal. However, only a limited of them have a policy focus. The NPPR has been initiated – after a series of brainstorming meetings among policy experts in Nepal and diaspora – as a journal dedicated to public policymaking by adhering to scholarly rigour and bridging the divide that exists between academic researchers and policy practitioners. At the core of the NPPR is the aspiration to be a journal that institutionalizes an academic culture of critical enquiry and scholarly debates that ultimately contribute to policy innovation. Research for policy – and behavioural – change is NPPR's motto, which, we believe, is reflected in the articles and commentaries included in the issue.

The NPPR has adopted an editorial policy of not remunerating authors for research articles (to maintain the highest degree of academic integrity). The journal is committed to the following standards to ensure the quality of every article: (a) academic rigour to establish evidence; (b) appropriateness of research methodologies; (c) quality in

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policy messages and policy recommendations; (d) adherence to research ethics; and, (e) transparency in the management of the review process.

NPPR has been promoted by the Policy Research Institute, a think-tank of the Government of Nepal. It is an open-access journal. It does not charge any fee to process articles. The journal is open to everyone willing to contribute to Nepal's policy innovation by generating evidence through the data from Nepal – or relevant to Nepal. It also invites policy practitioners to write for the journal based on their practical knowledge and experiences, aware that practitioners may not have the rigour of the academics, but the insights practitioners may bring to a policy debate may not be generated from the academic inquiry. The invited articles from practitioners have been presented as 'policy commentaries' following a usual quality control processes and category-specific review.

For this issue, we received twenty-eight full-length research articles. After an initial screening, all of them were sent for peer review, and nine of them, included in the journal, passed through a double-blind review process. Expert reviewers in our network were engaged in the reviews. Expert-reviewed articles were further reviewed by internal reviewers. All the comments from the reviewers were sent to the authors to respond to. Articles that failed to incorporate comments by reviewers until the third round were considered unsuccessful. In the case of invited submissions, we received eight. We could however include only six of them in this issue.

We are thankful to all the contributors and reviewers. We look forward to their continuous support in the future to continue with the journey.

Editor-In-Chief

Bishnu Raj Upreti, PhD

September 26, 2021



Volume 1 2021

# Nepal Public Policy Review

Research Article

## Challenges to Diplomatic Efforts in Resolving Nepal-India Border Problems in the Himalayas: A Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA)

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### Abstract

The Constitutional Provision on Nepal's Foreign Policy has emphasized securing Nepal's international borders. Nepal's Foreign Policy-2077 also demands Nepal's border to be kept intact by protecting international border points and resolving boundary issues via the means of peaceful diplomatic negotiations and dialogues, based on historic documents, treaties, agreements, facts and evidence. Despite the constitutional provision and foreign policy directives, Nepal's border problems with its Southern neighbour remain unresolved. Despite having friendly bilateral relations, and cross-border civilizational linkages, Nepal-India relations are not free from border problems. Even during the pandemic, when both countries closed their borders to contain the spread of the coronavirus, they resorted to border confrontations taking the bilateral relations into the low ebb. This study examines the border problems between Nepal and India during the time of COVID-19 with a focus on Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura. Largely concentrated on identifying assorted challenges in resolving Nepal-India border problems, when Nepal faced India with its new map against the latter's new route to Mansarovar, Nepal's self-help that is limited to diplomatic talks with India has been elaborated along with Indian and Chinese responses to Nepal's new map and India's opening of a new route to Mansarovar, respectively. By using Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) as a tool, this article discusses why diplomatic negotiations haven't found a headway in the Nepal-India context, despite Nepal's repeated calls. It is a qualitative study that uses data from both primary and secondary sources that include government reports, historical documents, archives, statistics, and treaties. Media sources have also been reviewed to understand various issues of Nepal's border problems with India. After the coding and familiarisation of the data, analysis and interpretation were done. Highlighting the interconnectedness of the Himalayan geopolitics and India's securitization of the Himalayan frontier, the article concludes that Nepal's diplomatic initiative on resolving the border problem has been impacted by power condensation in the Himalaya region and India's lack of interest.

**Keywords:** Nepal, India, border problems, new map, Mansarovar route

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## 1. Introduction

Nepal-India border is distinctively unique, not only because it is open. The historical and cultural linkages established by cross-border ties have also played a part to make the borderlands special. Nepal-India border length is about 1880 km, and people of both countries can cross it from different points (Shrestha, 2020). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, only a few border entry points were patrolled by the security forces of either country (Shrestha, 2020 & Kansakar, 2001). During the pandemic, however, the number of armed police personnel patrolling the borderlands increased to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus and prevent the entry of unwanted elements infiltrating the porous borders (Shrestha, 2020). Notwithstanding the securitization of borderlands during the pandemic, Nepal-India borderlands symbolize deep-rooted socio-cultural, emotional and economic inter-linkages among the people of the two sides that have been strengthened by cross-border mobility. As a long tradition of the free movement of people across the borders, Nepali and Indian citizens have unrestricted access to the opportunities available in both countries as per Article 7 of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1950. Under the Treaty, both the governments are bound to reciprocally “grant to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature.”<sup>1</sup>

Nepal shares not only open borders but also strong ties with the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bihar, West Bengal, Uttarakhand and Sikkim (Bhattarai, 2016). Unlike India’s borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh, which are extremely and moderately militarised respectively, Nepal-India borderland is an interdependent borderland (Gellner, 2013). Despite having such a cordial and intimate relationship, quite often Nepal-India relations enter into uncharted terrain. Border problems existing between the two countries top the list in impacting the ambience of affinity triggered by cross-border ties (The Kathmandu Post, 2020a).

The practice of keeping the borders with Nepal open was a British legacy (Dahal, 1978). During the time of British colonialism in South Asia, the East India Company kept the Nepal-India border open with three objectives: to maintain unrestricted migration of the Nepali hill people to India and to procure them for recruitment in the Indian army; to have easy and free access of British and Indian manufactured goods into Nepal as well as to Tibet wherein Nepal was the only easy and accessible route from India before the discovery of Chumbi valley route from Sikkim; to have a secure and easy supply of raw materials from Nepal into India such as timber and forest produce, herbs and medicinal plants, hides and skins etc. (Kansakar, 2001). Today, while an open border with India offers Nepal both a challenge and opportunity to Nepal’s security, Kathmandu needs to effectively manage and regulate its border with India. But, while taking measures for border security to prevent unwarranted infiltration, the free flow of people and goods shouldn’t be impacted. Amidst such complexities characterising Nepal-India borderlands, the Himalayan country faces border problems with India at many places. Border issues of Kalapani, as well as Susta, often rivet Nepal-India relations (The Kathmandu Post, 2020b). Kalapani is a territorial issue, which developed due to the differences over Limpiyadhura, which Nepal claims to be the source of the Kali River that serves as the border between India and Nepal. India, however, reckons that the source is a pond by Lipulekh. Kalapani is the territory between these two places.

1 The Treaty is available at: <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6295>

This study, however, focuses only on the border problems that surfaced during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, when both the countries should have rather effectively cooperated in containing the spread of the novel Corona Virus, owing to the presence of the porous populated borderlands between them. In 2019, when India unveiled its new map including Nepali territory, Kathmandu sought a diplomatic resolution, but New Delhi paid no attention to Nepal's diplomatic note over the same. Instead, in May 2020, when Nepal had closed its land borders with both of its neighbours, India and China to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, India unilaterally constructed its Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage via the Lipulekh pass, which according to the Sugauli Treaty of 1816 between Nepal and British India territorially belongs to the Himalayan country.

Upon the same evidence, Nepal also unveiled a new map on May 20, 2020, incorporating its territory up to Limpiyadhura, against which India has reservations. For New Delhi, Nepal's new map is 'unacceptable' and artificial'. Since then Nepal has been taking diplomatic initiations to resolve the problems between the two neighbouring countries, but to no avail. Thus, it is quite important to discover answers to the few pertaining questions: Why do Nepal's border problems with its Southern neighbour remain unresolved despite the constitutional provision and foreign policy directives to keep Nepal's border intact by protecting international border points and resolving boundary issues via means of peaceful diplomatic negotiations? Is it because of the way India sees China connection in Nepal's new map or it is more because of New Delhi's lack of interest to resolve the border problems owing to its Himalayan frontier theory? By taking the help of the FPA, this article discusses why diplomatic negotiations haven't found a headway in resolving Nepal- India border problems in the Himalayas, despite Nepal's repeated calls. Using data from both primary and secondary sources, this qualitative research aims to discover how Nepal's diplomatic dealings with India are not gaining momentum in the face of geopolitical challenges, resulting in India's reluctance. Thus, government reports, historical documents, archives, statistics, treaties and media reports have been reviewed to understand how Nepal's new map is based on the historical shreds of evidence including treaties, agreements, maps and letters of exchange, and thus there is no valid connection between Nepal's new map and China and doesn't justify India's needless reluctance in resolving the border problems. The issues that emerged from the reviews were thematically ordered and analysed. The thematic analysis focused on the challenges in terms of Nepal's diplomatic efforts in resolving Nepal-India border problems in the Himalayas using the FPA as an analytical tool.

As soon as the interconnected themes of Himalayan geopolitics and India's securitization of the Himalayan frontier are highlighted, it eventually reinforces the major argument on how Nepal's diplomatic initiative on resolving border problem has been impacted by power condensation in the Himalaya region and India's lack of interest. The themes that emerged from the review of data have been separately discussed. For instance, while reviewing the data related to India's response to Nepal's new map, we see the emergence of the theme of the continuity of Himalayan frontier theory in New Delhi's foreign policy. Similarly, while studying the data on Nepal's response to India's Mansarovar route, diplomacy as Nepal's self-help is thematically presented. In the same way, while examining the data on China's response to India's Mansarovar Route, the falsity in exploring China connection in Nepal's new map is thematically discussed. All these themes are interconnected by shedding light on different

actors and factors influencing the foreign policy of a country, which is systematically devised by the countries to achieve their goals in relation to the external environment.

Foreign policy has observable artefacts, which is known as foreign policy behaviour and is explained with the help of the FPA (Smith et. al., 2012, p. 14), which examines how foreign policy decisions are made and implemented. FPA helps to look below the nation-state level of analysis, build actor-specific theory, pursue multi-causal explanations traversing multiple levels of analysis, and utilize theory and results from across the gamut of social science (Smith et. al., 2012, p. 14). While making the FPA of Nepal-India border problems in the Himalayas, we see how government organizations, private media, security experts and public opinion influenced the foreign policy decision-making in both countries. But, when we try to understand why Nepal and India have not been able to resolve their border problems, despite having unique cross-border relations, it is realised that geopolitical contestation between China and India in the Himalayan region has severely influenced the foreign policy behaviour, resulting into securitization of their foreign policies towards Nepal. India's Mansarovar route itself echoes the geographical determinism in India's Himalayan frontier theory. But, to make the FPA of India's Mansarovar route and Nepal's new map, it is best to start by shedding light on the foundational works on FPA and how they can be applied in understanding why the two neighbouring countries haven't been able to resolve their border problems diplomatically.

Three important works form the foundation of the FPA: "Pre-theories and Theories of Foreign Policy" by James N. Rosenau, "Decision-Making as an Approach to the Study of International Politics", a monograph by Richard C. Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin and "Man-Milieu Relationship Hypotheses in the Context of International Politics" by Harold and Margaret Sprout. As Rosenau's study has contributed to the development of the actor-specific theory (Rosenau, 1966), it helps us to explain the behaviour of specific actors allowing for a richer explanation and prediction of the foreign policy behaviour of Nepal, India and China. Similarly, the emphasis of Synder, Bruck and Sapin on the decision-making process of foreign policy itself, not as foreign policy outputs, but as part of the explanation (Synder et. al., 2002), is appropriate to evaluate the process of foreign policymaking in Kathmandu, New Delhi and Beijing. Similarly, as Harold and Sprouts believed that foreign policy can only be explained concerning the social, political, situational and psychological contexts of the individuals involved in the decision-making (Sprout & Sprout, 1956), it helps us to understand how public opinion and private media influenced the foreign policy of India and Nepal. Thus, the FPA of India's Mansarovar route, Nepal's new map, China's response over Nepal-India border problems during the COVID-19 pandemic not only helps us to understand why diplomatic negotiations haven't yielded results towards resolving the border problem, but also offers scope in pursuing evidence-based policymaking in dealing with the issue of border security.

Most of the literature available today on Nepal-India borders have been written either from the perspective of national security or human security. Literature endorsing the discourse of national security has touched upon the issues of border security, encroachment, the problem of the riverine border, the disappearance of border pillars, among others, while literature embracing the human security approach has discussed the issues of cross-border migration, livelihood strategies in the borderlands, mobility, work and identity. But, the literature that analyses borderlands from the perspective of foreign policy are not sufficiently available. Not

only from the perspective of knowledge but also in the policies, a gap exists that needs to be bridged. Constitutional provisions on Nepal's national interest and the Government's Foreign Policy-2020 have recommended specific policies on border security and resolving the border problems respectively. But, how far have the actors and factors been impacting the effective implementation of such policies been studied? Hence, this study aims to fulfil the same knowledge and policy gaps. The use of FPA as a tool to analyse Nepal- India border problems can be justified in three ways: firstly, as the provisions of the constitution of Nepal on national Interest and foreign Policy (Article 5.1) has emphasised that border security is a basic element of Nepal's national interest, FPA helps to assess how far the constitutional directives on taking help of diplomacy in resolving border problems have been implemented. Secondly, Nepal's Foreign Policy-2020 requires that Nepal's border be kept intact by protecting international border points. Article 8.1 of Nepal's Foreign Policy-2020 has stated that boundary issues should be resolved via means of peaceful diplomatic negotiations and dialogues, based on historic documents, treaties, agreements, facts and evidence. Hence, FPA provides ways to evaluate whether historical documents, treaties, agreements help Nepal in resolving its border problems with India. Thirdly, while Nepal shares a long border with China and India, the recurrent episodes of standoffs, skirmishes and clashes in the Himalayan borders between the two nuclear powers have already multiplied security threats for Kathmandu. When New Delhi tried to explore China connection in Nepal's new map, the geopolitical complications riling Nepal-India border problems was visible. In such a situation, the FPA of Nepal-India border problems in the Himalayas offers an evidence-based approach in understanding and accepting challenges to Nepal's efforts in resolving border problems and signals ways to strengthen its self-help by persistently finding refuge in diplomatic efforts and taking decisions accordingly, to reduce the threats emanating from the geopolitical contestations in the Himalaya

### **1.1 Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) of Nepal-India Border Problems**

To resolve the border rows between Nepal and India, as per the policy directives and constitutional provisions, it is best to start by identifying the problems through the perspective of FPA, which includes small-group decision making (refers to the structure and process of groups in foreign policy decision making), organizational process (the influence of the respective organisation on foreign policy decision making), comparative foreign policy (comparing the foreign policy behaviour), and the psycho-societal milieu (role of individual characteristics and societal context). In the context of Nepal-India border problems, the role of various committees and task forces including Eminent Persons Group (EPG), which have been constituted to resolve the boundary issues, can be interpreted from the perspective of group decision making, while the role of administrative structures of the government including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Survey, security bodies, among others are discussed from the perspective of bureaucratic politics. Also, the foreign policy behaviours of Nepal and India towards the disputed territories, and China's foreign policy behaviour towards the bilateral disputes in the different periods are compared. In the same way, understanding the psychology of the foreign policy decision-maker is very important when it comes to resolving border problems. Thus, the social and psychological contexts behind foreign policy decision-making need to be explored. For instance, it is apt to make a socio-psychological interpretation of Nepal's Prime Minister K.P. Oli's reference to India's national Ashoka Chakra emblem as "Singham Jayate" rather than "Satyamev Jayate," saying the lions represented India's

“hegemonic” designs. Prime Minister Oli’s allegory needs to be understood in the context of India’s neighbourhood policy towards Nepal and how India’s involvement and interests in the Himalayan state are perceived by Nepali folks. In addition, it is also important to examine how history, geography, economics, culture, political institutions have determined the foreign policy decision making in the context of Nepal-India border problems.

The concept of groupthink owes much to the scholarly contribution of Irving Janis. Today, there has been a resurgence of interest in the study of the process, structures of groups (Hermann & Hermann, 1982), and leadership (Hermann et.al, 2001), group conflict and rivalry (Vertzberger, 1990) influencing foreign policy decision making. In the context of Nepal-India border problems, the role of groupthink is often constrained by bureaucratic politics in the same way as the role of Eminent Persons Group (EPG) is confined to offering recommendations to the leadership. Other groupthink mechanisms also share the same fate of restrains. The Boundary Working Group, Joint Field Survey Teams and Survey Officials’ Committee—the three teams formed by India and Nepal in 2014 to complete the boundary work, are mandated to work on the bordering areas, except Susta and Kalapani, which are to be resolved at the foreign secretary-level. Thus, the constraint of such groupthink lies in awaiting the foreign-secretary level meeting. Although the third meeting of the Nepal-India Joint Commission in Kathmandu in 2014 had agreed to resolve the disputes, with the involvement of the foreign secretaries of both countries and the Boundary Working Group was tasked with providing inputs to the foreign secretary-level mechanism, to resolve the border issues, but there has been no major development. Instead, the new map published by India in November 2019 placed the disputed territory of Kalapani within its territory, worsening the problem further.

Officially introduced in 2016, the EPG was mandated not only to evaluate the state of bilateral relations but to come up with key recommendations on the open border and the 1950 treaty (Xavier, 2020). Although the Eminent Persons Group on Nepal-India Relations proposed a ‘smart and regulated’ borderlands (Baral, 2019), India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi hasn’t received the report yet, generating a suspicion that the Modi administration does not agree with the joint report’s recommendations floated by the experts of both the countries. In such a situation, the fate of Nepal-India borderlands remains in limbo: regulated or porous, free and open. Except for the blockades of major transit points by India in 1970, 1989 and 2015 (The Kathmandu Post, 2015), Nepal-India borderlands have always remained open for both countries. But, in 2020, the Nepal-India border remained closed for over five months, from March to August, amidst the fear of Covid-19 spread. But, the entry of people through porous border points didn’t stop, exposing the risk of the spread of the virus. Also, border security was severely affected by such porous routes, as people entered each other’s territory through proxy routes. And, as the migrant returnees didn’t know properly about the quarantine facilities, the risk of an outbreak of coronavirus got higher in the villages adjoining border areas (CESLAM, 2020). Most surprising was No Man’s Land being used as the temporary quarantine facilities (Gahatraj & Sharma, 2020) invoking unprecedented challenges to the border management amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Fearful of the spread of COVID-19, Nepal deployed 6000 Armed Police Force (APF) personnel to stop the flow of people entering Nepal from India in April 2020 (Republica, 2020). Because, the 1880 km long borders are fence-free and porous, the security forces, except the check posts, do not patrol the entire border. Thus, border management became a crucial issue for both countries. Even the EPG report has not

recommended any specific measures regarding which border points should be regulated and which should be kept open (The Kathmandu Post, 2018) for effective border management, although in the period of two years, during their nine meetings held in New Delhi and Kathmandu, experts from Nepal and India intensely pushed for regulated borderlands and urged the governments to determine the number of entry and exit points. But, the EPG's proposal on regulated borderland was reprimanded by the foreign policy experts for ignoring the social reality (The Kathmandu Post, 2018) as the report was prepared without taking feedback from the people living in the interdependent borderlands.

Generally, decision making is characterised by choice behaviour and is necessarily information-dependent (Kirkpatrick et.al, 1976). Hence, it is important to obtain the required information to reduce the group's uncertainty (Robertson, 1980). In the context of EPG's proposal over Nepal-India borderlands, PM Modi not receiving the report has aggravated the climate of uncertainty, paralyzing the policy choice over borderlands. The only information available to the group is that Modi has not received the report "owing to his busy schedule (Baral, 2019)" which has raised doubts over India's commitment to implementing recommendations forwarded by the EPG (Republica, 2018). Nepal even sought ways to submit the report to Modi during the BIMSTEC summit in the August of 2018 in Kathmandu but India refused to discuss any bilateral agenda in a multilateral forum. While the small group dynamic of EPG is confined to making recommendations, it is up to the two governments to further review and implement the recommendations. Most importantly, the recommendations are not binding. On January 16 of 2021, when Nepal and India held the sixth meeting of the Nepal-India Joint Commission in New Delhi discussing a gamut of bilateral issues, Nepal's Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali was reported to have raised the issue of the border dispute and early submission of the Eminent Persons Group's report to the Prime Minister of India, but India was reluctant to discuss them saying that the Joint Commission and boundary talks are separate mechanisms (Neupane & Giri, 2021). Thus, it indicates how the groupthink mechanism like EPG is incapacitated by the bureaucratic politics in the context of Nepal-India border problems.

The bureaucratic politics approach doesn't view the state as a unitary actor, as the rational actor model does, rather shows how the rational model of decision making is insufficient in explaining a foreign policy behaviour. Rather, the bureaucratic politics model analyses how foreign policy decisions have to undergo through the competing entities within a particular country, and foreign policy outcome is the result of bargaining among the governmental institutions and actors with various abilities and preferences (Halperin et. al., 2006). Graham Allison (1969) is accredited for introducing the bureaucratic models in the foreign policy decision-making through his 1969 article "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis" published in *The American Political Science Review*. In the article, Allison presented the bureaucratic politics model as a tool to interpret how actors often pursue the policies that are advantageous to the organizations they represent rather than the collective interests (Allison, 1969).

In the context of Nepal's response over India's Mansarovar route, we can see the differences in the approaches adopted by different independent organizations, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Armed Police Force, legislative-parliament, parliamentary committees, Supreme Court and the Central Bureau of Statistics. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal

sought to resolve the dispute diplomatically by handing over a diplomatic note to Indian Ambassador to Nepal Vinay Mohan Kwatra (The Kathmandu Post, 2020c), while Armed Police Force set up a new border post to monitor Indian activities in the disputed territories (Paudel, 2020). The State Affairs and Good Governance Committee of the House of Representatives, however, directed the government of Nepal to internationalize the issue (The Himalayan Times, 2020a). Amidst the availability of different alternatives, Nepal's parliament issued a new map in June 2020, showing Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh as Nepali territories (The Kathmandu Post, 2020e), which India's Ministry of External Affairs perceived as an artificial enlargement of territorial claims. In the January of 2020, the Supreme Court of Nepal also directed the government of Nepal to submit the original map of Nepal exchanged with India during the signing of the Sugauli Treaty in 1816, in response to the public interest litigation demanding political and diplomatic attempts to shield Nepali territories (Pradhan, 2020). While both governments are yet to resolve the border disputes diplomatically, the Central Bureau of Statistics, which is responsible for conducting the census, has shown its intention of covering the Kalapani area, but, for many years, Indian authorities have prohibited Nepali folks from entering the Kalapani area (The Kathmandu Post, 2021). The last census that Nepal had conducted in Lipulekh was six decades ago, but after the Sino-Indian war of 1962, the area has been under Indian control. Although all the aforementioned institutions and organizations are oriented to an understanding that the dispute should be resolved through the political and diplomatic means, the diverse approaches that have been pursued need to adhere to the directives issued by the new Foreign Policy-2020 that peaceful diplomatic negotiations and dialogues prompted by the historic documents, treaties, agreements, facts and evidence, are to be used in resolving the border problems.

While the Bureaucratic model examines different actors, factors and conditions influencing a country's foreign policies, the Comparative Foreign Policy (CFP) which is rooted in the discipline of comparative politics, applies comparative methods to the study of foreign policy. Equipped with the legacy of behaviouralism in the genealogy of the FPA, the CFP allows events to be compared along a behavioural dimension (Smith et. al., 2012, p. 21), for instance, whether the impact of foreign policy behaviour was positive or negative, or what kinds of the instruments of statecraft (military, economic, diplomatic, among others) were used (Caporaso et. al., 1987). In the context of Nepal-India border problems, the press statement of India's Ministry of External Affairs over Nepal's new map and Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs over India's Mansarovar route could be compared. Being agent-centric, the CFP examines the influence of both, the international system and domestic political contexts on foreign policy decision making. The objective material conditions and subjective understandings are acknowledged as important factors influencing the policymakers. In the context of Nepal-India border problems, the CFP helps us to understand how geopolitical contestation in the Himalayan region has aggravated Nepal's border problems with India. While Nepal protested India's Mansarovar route, Indian army chief General MM Naravane remarked that Nepal was acting at "the behest of someone else" (Source), an indirect reference to China. Nepali security experts and foreign policy analysts not only perceptively condemned Naravane's remarks but also reiterated that it would be unfitting to perceive that Nepal was acting at the behest of China. Precisely, by making a Comparative FPA of India's Mansarovar route, we come to understand how India's foreign policy towards Nepal is driven by an act of securitization and frontier theory, while Nepal's self-help is limited in diplomatically balancing India and China.

To shed light on the same, it's best to begin by identifying challenges faced by Nepal-India borderlands.

While the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic pervaded a grave crisis in human, national and international security, the porous border was exploited as an ideal point for the border crossing at night, eventually impacting the border security, as most of the bordering areas are covered by agricultural fields, forests and rivers and streams. Already, Nepal and India were facing problems related to border demarcation. Equally, outlaws and political terrorists have been misusing territory on the opposite side of the border as a sanctuary. Besides, smuggling of goods from Nepal into India and vice-versa seems to be a perpetual problem (Gaige, 1975). The unrestricted border has resulted in criminal, anti-social and illegal activities such as robbery, theft, murder, and smuggling of goods evading customs duties, narcotic drugs trafficking, arms smuggling, poaching etc. (Shukla, 2006). Encroachment has become a major challenge to border management. Even no man's lands have been encroached. The territorial dispute between Nepal and India in Susta of Nawalparasi district is triggered by the change of the course by the Narayani River (Baral, 2018) which is called Gandak in India. The river has been changing its route because of floods and cutting. Besides the natural cutting of the river leading into territorial dispute, encroachment of fertile land and forest in Susta is another problem.

Another unresolved territorial dispute that Nepal has with India is at Kalapani and Lipulekh, both of which lie on the northwest edge of Nepal. The border problem over the same resurfaced when India published its new political map in the November of 2019, including Nepali territory--Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura—within Indian borders ( Press Information Bureau, 2019). Although both the countries had previously agreed to discuss the ways to resolve the disputes through the foreign secretary-level mechanism, New Delhi not only procrastinated talks with Nepal but also announced a new route to Mansarovar, which lies in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China, via the same Nepali territories that India included in its new map. Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated the new route to Mansarovar, without informing Nepal when both the countries were under strict lockdown to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. It took Nepal-India relations to a low ebb. Still, Nepal's diplomatic effort was limited in revitalizing its bilateral relations with India, rather than making joint strategies to combat the impact of COVID-19 on their porous and populated borderlands (KC & Bhattarai, 2020). As India hasn't paid attention to Nepal's diplomatic call to resolve the border disputes through diplomatic talks and negotiations, it is best to make the FPA of the entire gamut of problems so that appropriate strategies could be devised through the systematic understanding of the events and chain of activities.

The FPA not only offers us to look below the nation-state level of analysis, but also helps us to decipher the effects of an individual leader's personality on foreign policy decision making, in understanding his/her preference for issues, choice of advisors, and preference for a certain group. It is the Social-psychological approach of Harold and Sprout which helps us analyse the social, political, and psychological contexts of the individuals involved in the foreign policy decision-making over Nepal-India border problems. For instance, while analysing Indian Prime Minister Modi's interpretation of Nepal-India borderlands as of "roti-beti" relations (a bond of family and kinship) during his first visit to Nepal in 2014, the political and psychological contexts should be taken into consideration. As the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Nepal

in 17 years (PTI, 2014) Modi was psychologically aware to present his priorities differently than his predecessors, as he shouldered a political responsibility to effectively implement India's neighbourhood policy. With his visits to major Hindu pilgrimage sites in Nepal, the prime minister of the largest democracy also displayed his religious fascination towards the Hindu religion. To him, the Nepal-India border is an 'interdependent borderlands (Martínez, 1994)' "in which the societies on both sides of the border are linked symbolically, leading to a considerable flow of economic and human resources across the border" (Hausner & Sharma, 2013). It is a big source of opportunities, even during the time of political crisis, which the policymakers in both countries should acknowledge while taking any kinds of policy decisions on the borders. But, India's blockade on Nepal in 2015 ignored the spirit of interdependent borderlands as the landlocked country suffered a humanitarian crisis amidst of shortage of essential goods that enter Nepal through Indian borders. While the blockade had already sullied the image of Modi's administration in Nepal, the inauguration of the Mansarovar route further tarnished it. Responding to the same route Nepal's Prime Minister Oli questioned whether India was embracing "simhameva jayate" (lion shall prevail) instead of 'Satyameva Jayate (truth alone prevails) as inscribed in India's national emblem, which should be understood by examining the social, political and psychological contexts. While the Oli administration was facing immense public pressure to unveil a new map and resolve the border problems with India diplomatically, he was concurrently confronting pressure from his opponents inside the ruling party to step down, citing the government's failure in managing the COVID-19 pandemic.

While India's Mansarovar route had already aroused anti-Indian sentiments in the Nepali public, Naravane's remarks on Nepal's protest against the Indian route at 'the behest of other' further aggravated the crisis along with Indian media's sensationalism, overstatement and paranoia over Nepal's displeasure against India's Mansarovar route. In such a political context, Oli questioned Indian leadership on whether lions in the Ashoka Chakra emblem represented India's "hegemonic" designs (Haidar, 2020). At the same time, while open and unregulated borders with India was being perceived as the major source for the spread of the COVID-19 virus in Nepal, Oli had said that the Indian virus was more lethal than the Chinese virus, provoking infuriation and resentment among the Indian public. It took Nepal-India relations to a low ebb until Prime Minister Oli held a telephonic conversation with India's Prime Minister Modi on the occasion of India's Independence Day on 15th August 2020 (MoFA, 2020b). Also, on 17th September 2020, Oli called Modi to extend greetings on the latter's 70th birthday and proposed to work closely "together towards strengthening bilateral relations" (Bhattacharjee, 2020). It was possible because of the good rapport existing between Prime Minister Oli and his Indian counterpart (The Hindustan Times, 2018) which not only paved the way for the visit of General Naravane and Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla to Nepal in November of 2020 but also helped Nepal-India relations move towards a thaw. However, despite the eagerness of both the countries to resolve the contentious issues between them, India still seems reluctant in resolving the border problems with Nepal. To identify the reason for India's disinclination, it's best to draw the theoretical inputs from Rosenau, Synder, Bruck and Sapin. Because the FPA approach forwarded by Rosenau helps us to examine the behaviour of specific actors influencing the foreign policies, while the emphasis on the decision-making process by Synder, Bruck and Sapin helps us to understand the process of foreign policymaking in Kathmandu and New Delhi. To get a clear glimpse of the actors and factors influencing

foreign policies and comprehend the policymaking process, it is apt to discuss the three interconnected issues. Firstly, India's Mansarovar route helps us to make sense of how India's foreign policy of securitization towards Nepal vis-à-vis China has aggravated Nepal-India border problems. Secondly, the self-help available to Nepal makes the Himalayan state realise that diplomacy is the last resort for the small powers located between two geopolitical rivals. And thirdly, the responses of India and China offer a clear understanding of geopolitical contestation in the Himalayan region. As a result, we will be in a position to identify various actors and factors influencing the process of foreign policymaking in Kathmandu and New Delhi over Nepal-India border problems.

## **1.2 India's Mansarovar Route**

While the FPA guides us to make sense of how the situation is framed and represented, (Smith et. al., 2012, p. 14), it has been understood that India's Mansarovar route is more strategic than what appears to be a connectivity project or pilgrimage route through the Nepali territory to Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). Thus, it is understandable how India has securitised its foreign policy towards Nepal when it comes to the Himalayan borderlands. In the quest for sanctuary in the colonial doctrine of the Himalayan frontier, Indian strategic interest in Nepal goes back to 1950, when Indian leadership perceived the Himalayas as the source of defence. It was on the 6th of December 1950, inside the Indian Parliament, Prime Minister Nehru stated, "From time immemorial, the Himalayas have provided us with a magnificent frontier... we cannot allow that barrier to be penetrated because it is also the principal barrier to India" (Nehru, 1961). Construction of the road linking Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh with Kailash Mansarovar via the Lipulekh, echoes the same geographical determinism of India's security interests in the Himalayas, although the route is labelled by India as a pilgrimage route, "Kailash Mansarovar Yatra" (Tribune News Service, 2020). The road construction had started much before, without giving any information to Nepal (Gyanwali, 2020). And, it is not a mere coincidence that India decided to announce the inaugurated new road in the middle of the lockdown, when no pilgrimage can take place to Kailash Mansarovar, at least in the foreseeable future.

With India's announcement of the new route for Kailash Mansarovar on May 8, 2020, which lies in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China, most of the people in Nepal eagerly waited for China's response over the same. And, only after two weeks of the announcement of the new route, the Chinese foreign ministry diplomatically stated that no unilateral action should be done at Lipulekh, the trilateral junction (Lijian, 2020). Nepal claims that Lipulekh is not a trilateral junction. Rather, Limpiyadhura, the north-western corner of Nepal, is a trilateral junction and Lipulekh, territorially belongs to Nepal under the 1816 treaty with the British East India Company. Based on the same evidence, Nepal also published a new map on May 20, 2020, including its territory up to Limpiyadhura, against which India has reservations. Unlike China's response over India's construction of the road during the pandemic; in 2015, when Nepal was hectically engaged in post-earthquake relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, New Delhi and Beijing, without Kathmandu's consent, had decided to use Lipulekh as a trading point. Before China's response over India's new road, Nepali folks were frantically assuming India's new route via Lipulekh, as the upshot of the 2015 Joint Communiqué issued by India and China. In 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping and the Indian Prime Minister

Narendra Modi agreed to use the Lipulekh corridor for their bilateral trade, without Nepal's consent. It not only stirred controversy in Nepal but also raised questions about the intention of its two immediate neighbours. The 41-point Joint Communiqué signed on May 15th, 2015 between China and India called for “enhancing border areas cooperation through border trade, pilgrimage...and expanding border trade at Nathu La and Qiangla/Lipu-Lekh Pass and Shipka La”. Besides fueling anti-Indian sentiments, the public in Nepal wondered how Beijing agreed with New Delhi to use this route given that China's image has always been friendly and welcoming in Nepal (Bhattarai, 2020a).

With the increasing Chinese presence in South Asia through investment and aids, India's claim over its traditional sphere of influence has shrunk. But, the trade volume between India and China has significantly increased, and they are eyeing an all-weather trading route to further expand their bilateral trade via land. Although the two countries sharing a 3,488km land border chiefly utilise marine the trade route, the Nathula Pass is the only functioning land trade route between them, which is not a year-round route. The pass was closed since the 1962 India-China war before it was reopened only in 2006. Hence, Lipulekh is considered as the best alternative to the Nathula pass to increase their trade and connectivity via land. It's also notable that the year 2015 wasn't the first time when both Asian giants agreed upon the Lipulekh route. Here, the ‘historical amnesia’ of Nepal draws flaks. In 1954, India and China had agreed to permit Indian Mansarovar pilgrims to use the Lipulekh Pass for the first time. Several high-level visits between India and China discussed the issue of using the Lipulekh route for trade and pilgrimage. It indicates that India and China do not have divergent views on Nepal's claim to Lipulekh. But, it made Nepali folks wonder why then China is preparing to extend the Qinghai-Tibet railway to Nepal's border with India, as New Delhi and Beijing have jointly decided to use the Lipulekh pass as a trade corridor between them (Bhattarai, 2020a). All the agreements between India and China over Lipulekh in absence of Nepal grimly outline the position of Nepal. It not only adulterates Nepal's claim over Lipulekh but also exposes the limitation of a small state severely, inquiring about the self-help available to Nepal.

### **1.3 Nepal's Self-Help**

While existing scholarship on FPA explores relations between the levels of the FPA analysis and combines that with a search for new methodologies that are more suitable for actor-specific theoretical investigation and multi-causal explanations (Smith et. al., 2012, p. 14), Nepal's self-help against India's Mansarovar route could be a better example. Given Nepal's concerns over the 2015 joint communiqué between India and China, although the two Asian giants had assured Nepal in the same year that the matter will be resolved through mutual consultation and understanding, until now, there has been no diplomatic settlement of the problem. While Nepal had proposed dates for holding the meeting of the foreign secretaries, it couldn't take place. Particularly, after the Indian government published a political map in November 2019, showing Nepali territory in the far northwest—including Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura—within Indian borders, Nepal started to discuss all kinds of self-help available, to eventually bring back the territories that India has included in its new map.

Settlement through adjudication was one of the self-help efforts that cloaked the interactions among the Nepali public intellectuals after India published its new map (Malla, 2020). For the settlement of disputes in the international courts, the availability of valid boundary treaties,

along with authentic historical documents, is a must. Notably, such treaties already exist and are accepted by both India and Nepal. According to the Sugauli Treaty of 1816, Nepal's territory lies up to Limpiyadhura, the source of the Kali River. More precisely, Article 5 of the Sugauli Treaty says "The Rajah of Nipaul renounces for himself, his heirs and successors all claims to or connections with the countries lying to the west of the river Kali and engages never to have any concern with those countries of the inhabitants thereof". Article 2 of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, signed in 1923, after 108 years of the Sugauli treaty, has also validated the provisions in the Sugauli treaty. Drafted on 2 December 1815, the Sugauli treaty made Nepal lose to the British the whole plain land from the Koshi River to the Kali River. But, from 8 to 11 December of 1816, with the letters of exchange between Nepal and the British East Indian Company, the British regime returned the eastern Tarai plains to Nepal from the Koshi River to the Rapti River. Similarly, on 1 November 1860, Nepal and British India signed an agreement in Kathmandu, whereby the British returned the territory of the plain areas from the Kali River to the Rapti River after Nepal helped the East India Company to curb Sepoy mutiny in India under Jung Bahadur Rana, the prime minister of Nepal from 1846-1877. But, none of the aforementioned treaties, letters of exchanges and agreements indicate Nepal's northwestern border – the Kali River – being modified. They rather delimit Nepal's borders up to Limpiyadhura, which is also a tri-junction between Nepal, India and China today.

Actually, until 1963, Limpiyadhura wasn't a disputed territory as people from Byas Garkha—lying on the west of the river Kali – had voted to elect the member of the parliament in the first general elections of 1959 (Dhungel, et al. 2020). They had even voted in the 1963 Village Panchayat elections. In 1954 and 1961, the Nepal government had conducted a census in the villages including Gunji, Nabi, Kutu, Tinker and Charung without any disputes (Risal, 2020). But, in 2019, India included these areas in its new map. In Nepal, not only the record about the elections and census is safe and available, but also the people involved in collecting data in the 50s and 60s, are alive and are valid evidence (Risal, 2020). Also, Nepal has secured evidence of residents from these villages paying land revenue to Nepal (Shara, 2020). Records mentioning the residents of the Byas area paying revenue to the Baitadi office after the Sugauli Treaty are also available. At the time when the Sugauli treaty was signed, Nepal had no official map of its own. But all the maps published by the British East Indian Company from 1816 to 1856 have identified the river Kali originating from Limpiyadhura as the boundary river (Bhusal, 2020). British geographer and cartographer Aaron Arrowsmith's 'Improved Map of India' published on 2 January of 1816 also mentions the river originating from Limpiyadhura as 'river Kali or western branch of Gogra or Sarju'. The map created by Captain W. J. Webb. "Sketch of Kumaon" (Survey of India) identifies the river originating from Limpiyadhura as the river Kali. Equally, the map "Gurhwal and Kumaon" prepared in 1827 by James Horsburgh, Hydrographer to East India as per the Act of Parliament, has introduced the river originating from Limpiyadhura as river Kali.

But, over time, realizing the strategic importance of the tri-junction, the source of the Kali river was falsified as Lipu Khola, a small stream flowing from the Lipu range. The "District Almora" published with the help of surveys conducted from 1865-69 and 1871-77 by the Survey of India, for the first time named the Kali river originating from Limpiyadhura as 'Kutu Yangti'. Maps published until 1850 used the details included in the Sugauli treaty. The Atlas of

India-1846 has mentioned that Nepal's western border with India is the river Kali that originates from Limpiyadhura. Besides the treaty and maps, the letter written to British Resident Edward Gardner in Kathmandu by Acting Chief Secretary of the Government of British India, J Adams, on February 4, 1817, stated that the territories east of the river Kali belong to Nepal and also expressed the Secretary's readiness to instruct the Kumaon Commissioner to return the territories to Nepal. On March 22, 1817, Kumaon Commissioner, GW Trail's letter clearly stated that Nepal has the right to all the territories situated eastwards of the Kali. Nepal claims that all of these historical maps and documents are enough to falsify any kind of cartographic manipulation over the areas to the east of river Kali. Even though the Boundary Working Group, the joint agency constituted by both the governments in 2014 to conduct activities in the fields of construction, repair and restoration of boundary pillars, is not mandated to look into Susta and Kalapani, Nepal proposed the meeting in the last week of August 2020. But, only a foreign ministry level mechanism is tasked with resolving the disputes concerning Susta and Kalapani (Giri, 2020a). But, even during Nepal's foreign minister Pradip Gyanwali's visit to Delhi in January 2021, boundary issues weren't discussed in the joint commission meeting chaired by Nepali and Indian foreign ministers (The Wire, 2021). Even in such unfavourable circumstances, taking refuge in international law may not be an easy task, as bilateral relations with a powerful country often overpower the provision of international law. Not being in a position to resort to force, even adjudication is costlier for them due to the limited financial and human resources available to the small states (Bashyal & Bhattarai, 2020). Thus, the only self-help available to Nepal is the diplomatic negotiations with India. But, India has not been paying attention to Nepal's concerns. Firstly, India published the new map unilaterally incorporating Nepali territory. Secondly, India gave no response to Nepal's diplomatic note over the same. Thirdly, instead of responding to Nepal's diplomatic note, India constructed and inaugurated a road through Nepali territory. Fourth, the Indian army chief gave agitated remarks over Nepal's protest. Fifth, repeated calls from Nepal were unheeded. Consequently, the Nepal government not only issued a full-fledged map incorporating its territory up to Limpiyadhura but also got it approved by the parliament. Since then, Nepal had to wait until August 15, 2020, India's 74th Independence Day, to hold a conversation with India. Although Prime Minister Oli's telephonic conversation with Modi was not related to the resolution of border disputes, but to express Nepal's greetings on the occasion of Independence Day (Indianexpress, 2020), Kathmandu-based foreign policy experts believed that Nepal could materialize the conversation to start holding talks with India (Simkhada, 2020). But, Delhi-based Nepal experts believed that border problems couldn't be resolved with a telephonic conversation. For that, the two countries need to sit for talks and let the historical facts and maps speak (Muni, 2020).

Nepali border experts have underlined the importance of diplomatic negotiations on resolving Nepal-India border issues. Former Director General at the Survey Department of the Government of Nepal, Toya Nath Baral, in his article "Border Disputes and Its Impact on Bilateral Relation: A Case of Nepal India International Border Management," has analysed the impacts of border disputes on the bilateral relations between Nepal and India, and demands the willingness and dedication from both the sides to resolve the dispute through diplomatic efforts and negotiations (Baral, 2018). In the same way, Buddhi Narayan Shrestha, in his article, "Diplomacy in the Perspective of Boundaries" has emphasized border demarcation diplomacy to resolve the border dispute between Nepal and India. While suggesting ways for border

management diplomacy, he recommends meticulous negotiations and identifies possible strategies for border management through diplomatic efforts (Shrestha, 2021). But, Nepal's diplomatic efforts in resolving border issues haven't been taken seriously by India as New Delhi expressed its reluctance for a long time citing the unprecedented crisis brought by COVID-19. But, deeming diplomatic negotiation as the only self-help available, Kathmandu has been digging archives, consulting senior geographers, hydrologists, foreign policy experts, so that Nepal could come up with appropriate knowledge on the nature of border problems with India, its causes and consequences, and the established procedures for international border management. But, will that make any sense unless India shows any sign of holding talks with Nepal? To get a clear glimpse of why India has been procrastinating talks with Nepal, it is important to understand India's response to Nepal's objection to New Delhi's construction of the new route, and over Kathmandu's new map. Although the Chinese response to India's opening of the new route to Mansarovar doesn't justify New Delhi's China connection in Nepal's new map, it has procrastinated the probability of bilateral talks between the two countries, permeating a geopolitical challenge.

#### **1.4 Foreign Policy Analysis of India's Response:**

The primary level of analysis in FPA is influenced by cognitive processes, small-group decision making, organizational process and bureaucratic politics, domestic political contestation, societal milieu and psychological attributes (Kaarbo, 2015). Apprehending the same, New Delhi's response to Nepal's protest against India's Mansarovar route is variously influenced. Under the cognitive processes, Indian media were swayed away by the heuristic fallacies and emotion, following the publication of a new map by Nepal. Groupthink like EPG appeared helpless in front of the bureaucratic politics, which was further complicated by evoking Himalayan geopolitics. The domestic political contestation was not much visible as New Delhi's policy towards the small countries in the vicinity doesn't change with a change of guard, because India bureaucracy is perceived as a permanent government and plays a predominant role in foreign policymaking. The societal milieu in India's response was invoked with the help of cross-border ties, or in the words of Prime Minister Modi, 'roti-beti' relations existing among the inhabitants of Nepal-India borderlands. Although India tried its best to present the Mansarovar road as a pilgrimage route expecting to attract Hindus from Nepal, the inauguration done by the Indian defence minister contradicted the manifested religious goal with a latent strategic objective. While the FPA also provides insights in understanding the mind of the foreign policy decision-maker because under some circumstances it is unavoidable to comprehend individual psychological attributes in understanding how decisions are made (Smith et. al., 2012, p. 14), India's defence minister inaugurating the Mansarovar route indicates at India's policy towards the securitization of the Himalayan region, which is largely influenced by the frontier theory that perceives China as a perpetual threat. The same perception is circulated to the groupthink, organizational process, and social milieu. On May 8, 2020, when India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated a road linking Dharchula in Uttarakhand of India to Lipulekh of Nepal via a video conference (Per, 2020), the 80 km road originating from Ghatiabagarh and ending at Lipulekh Pass (Subramanina, 2020), created an uproar in Nepal as the road passes through Nepali territory, and Kathmandu wasn't consulted by New Delhi while inaugurating the road (Panda, 2020). Although the new route is anticipated to reduce the travel time to Kailash-Mansarovar – a pilgrimage sacred to religious groups such

as the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains – to a week, down from the two to three weeks if they travelled through Sikkim or Nepal (Press Information Bureau, 2020), the inauguration during a global pandemic is perceived by Nepali folks as of strategic value over the manifested religious interest.

Nepal asked India to refrain from carrying out any activity, including the road construction “through Nepali territory” (MoFA, 2020a), New Delhi rejected Nepal's protest with the following response:

*India and Nepal have established mechanisms to deal with all boundary matters. The boundary delineation exercise with Nepal is ongoing. India is committed to resolving outstanding boundary issues through diplomatic dialogue and in the spirit of our close and friendly bilateral relations with Nepal. Both sides are also in the process of scheduling Foreign Secretary-level talks which will be held once the dates are finalised between the two sides after the two societies and governments have successfully dealt with the challenge of COVID-19 emergency (MEA, 2020).*

Objecting to India's move of opening the new route, Nepal also handed over a diplomatic note to Indian Ambassador to Nepal Vinay Mohan Kwatra, and Nepal's foreign minister Pradeep Gyanwali even made it clear that Nepal cannot wait for the Covid-19 crisis to be over to hold talks with India (The Kathmandu Post, 2020c). Gyanwali had handed over the diplomatic note to the Indian Ambassador Kwatra. Since November, when India included Nepali territory in its new political map, Nepal had already sought dates with India for talks to resolve the boundary issues, twice, but to no avail. Rather Delhi said that the road section to Lipulekh lies within the Indian territory. Responding to Nepal's press release of May 9, 2020, protesting India's move, India's Ministry of External Affairs stated that the construction “follows the pre-existing route used by the pilgrims of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra” to make the same route “pliable for the ease and convenience of pilgrims, locals and traders” (MEA, 2020).

Nepal's protest against India's construction of the road coincided with the cross-border clash during a face-off between Indian and Chinese soldiers at a remote crossing point near Tibet. It made Nepali folks further wonder about Sino-Indian relations, which have the elements of conflict, cooperation and competition. Despite their burgeoning economic cooperation, India and China have been competing for global governance and regional supremacy, while their conflict is more geopolitical. Nepal, which has the strategic advantage of being located between India and China, is being impacted by the same geopolitical rivalry. As India believes in sustaining its sphere of influence in Nepal, China too struggles to engage more in Nepal. Using a similar geopolitical lens in interpreting the proximity between China and India, Chief of Indian Army Gen Manoj Mukund Naravane remarked that Nepal's objection to India's opening of road link via Lipulekh is “at the behest of someone else” (The Kathmandu Post, 2020d). Without naming any country, Naravane stated during an interaction in Delhi that the Nepali people's agitation against the road construction was “at the behest of someone else” and the area east of the Kali river, where the road was being built, belonged to India (Singh, 2020).

While the private Indian media cynically portrayed Nepal-China relations echoing Naravane's concerns, and as India paid no heed to Nepal's repeated calls to sit for talks in resolving border disputes, in Nepal, the public pressure on the Oli administration mounted to issue a new map.

The Nepali cabinet expressed serious reservations over General Naravane's statement (Pradhan & Giri, 2020) and endorsed the updated map of Nepal proposed by the Ministry of Land Management. Six months after India unveiled its new political map, Nepal also unveiled its new map showing Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh as Nepali territories (The Kathmandu Post, 2020e). India, however, expressed its displeasure over the new map of Nepal. Reacting to the release of the new map by Nepal, India's Ministry of External Affairs stated:

*This unilateral act is not based on historical facts and evidence. It is contrary to the bilateral understanding to resolve the outstanding boundary issues through diplomatic dialogue. Such artificial enlargement of territorial claims will not be accepted by India. Nepal is well aware of India's consistent position on this matter and we urge the Government of Nepal to refrain from such unjustified cartographic assertion and respect India's sovereignty and territorial integrity (MEA, 2020).*

After the map dispute has surfaced, Nepal is making all the endeavours possible to hold talks with India. But, New Delhi hasn't been responding. Few attempts have been made by the Nepali diaspora to internationalize the issue (The Himalayan Times, 2020a), but to no avail. Senior lawyers were even heard of taking the issue to the international court for adjudication (Sangroula, 2020). India's Nepal experts, however, call for a cautious approach in not letting mix Nepal-India intimate relations into a geopolitical trap. While responding to Karan Thapar's interview questions, seasoned Nepal expert Shivshankar Menon, who was also a National Security Advisor to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh stated, "Nepal and India share friendly relations and intimate ties in different spheres (Menon, 2020). Owing to the same, India needs to deal with the border problems with Nepal accordingly without complicating it by infusing a geopolitical twist into it (Thapar, 2020). Similarly, Anand Swaroop Verma, Nepal expert and Indian Marxist intellectual even went on clarifying that Lipulekh and Kalapani belong to Nepal, which New Delhi had borrowed from Nepal to establish an army camp during the 1962 border war between Nepal and India (Indo-Nepal News 2020). Verma's statement not only provides evidence to India's policy of securitization of the Himalayan region but also offers Nepali diplomats an opportunity to strengthen their claims and evidence while resolving the border problems through dialogue and negotiations.

### **1.5 Foreign Policy Analysis of China's Response:**

Current FPA scholarship calls for a social-psychological analysis of world politics that employs a general system theory 'to unify the understanding of actors, actions and relations that constitute foreign policy and international relations'. Thus, China's response to India-Nepal border relations needs to be understood by taking into consideration how China's perception was constructed within a socio-political context of India's blockade on Nepal, which necessitated Kathmandu to look beyond the Indo-centric viewpoint and diversify its trade and transit relations via China.

Most importantly, Beijing is aware of the fact that China's public image in Nepal has been always positive and favourable. Upon the same realization, China responded to India's Mansarovar route by stating that New Delhi should refrain from taking any unilateral action that may complicate the situation in the disputed territory. But, New Delhi perceived it differently and tried to explore China connection in Nepal's new map. Interestingly, Nepal's border problems with India coincided with a tweet by the official Chinese news site CGTN

stating Mt Everest or Qomolangma located in China's TAR, which created an uproar among the Nepali public. Apprehending the same, in a Brookings webinar of July 29, 2020, Lisa Curtis, senior director for South Central Asia, US National Security Council stated that "Chinese state-run media claimed that Mt. Everest, which is a symbol of Nepali sovereignty, actually belongs to China " (Curtis, 2020). Curtis's remarks came at a time when the relations between China and the U.S. had reached a low point. But, the incident that Curtis referred to, was of early May, when Nepal was already bearing the brunt of Delhi's new road to Lipulekh. On the same day, when the Indian defence minister inaugurated it, a week-old tweet by CGTN claiming Mt Everest or Chomolungma located in China's Tibetan Autonomous Region, created a state of commotion in Nepal. Anxious of losing its favourable image in Nepal, CGTN quickly revised the tweet (Mulmi, 2020). It was not the first time that the official Chinese claim on the peak had surfaced. During the border discussion with Nepal in the 1960s, Chairman Mao had told former Nepali Prime Minister B.P Koirala that Nepal doesn't even have a vernacular name for it as Mount Everest is a colonial name given by George Everest who was a British surveyor-general in India from 1830-1843. As Koirala mentions in his autobiography when he told Mao that Nepali call it Sagarmatha and China doesn't have a name for it as Chomolungma is a Tibetan name, the communist leader replied, 'Tibet is in China'. The border between Nepal and China was resolved politically, unlike the watershed principles. For a long time, Nepal's Department of Survey had its own measurement of the peak, while China had its own measurement having installed a 5G station at the base camp, the height of the peak also differed. Nepal claimed 8848 meters as the precise height, while the Chinese survey claimed 8844.43m as the exact height until December 8, 2020, when the Survey Department of Nepal and Chinese authorities jointly announced that the new height of Mt Everest is 8,848.86 metres (Wilkinson, 2021).

While India's unilateral action to open link road to Lipulekh had already created a furore among Nepali folks, Chinese media's report on Mt Everest location, created further confusion (The Himalayan Times, 2020b). Finally, almost after two weeks, Beijing's response over India's opening of a road came. It mentioned that the issue is between Nepal and India. Beijing's response came as a sigh of relief for Kathmandu as the Nepali folks were assuming that India's opening of the new route to Mansarovar was the upshot of the 2015 joint communique between India and China, to use the Lipulekh corridor in boosting up the bilateral trade between India and China. With Beijing's response, Nepal's preliminary speculation over China's intent diluted. Chinese Foreign Ministry stated that the issue of Kalapani was between Nepal and India, and hoped the two countries would be able to resolve the differences through friendly consultations and without resorting to any further unilateral action (The Kathmandu Post, 2020f). Although there was no palpable connection for India-China border disputes being coincided with the inauguration of the Mansarovar route, Delhi-based Nepal experts pointed to Chinese interest in Nepal-India border problems (Nayak, 2020). To them, Nepal could have issued the new map in November of 2019 itself to counter India's new map, instead of unveiling it while India-China border tension emerged (Nayak, 2020). They believe that China's interest in India-China border problems surfaced for the first time in 2008, when Bamdev Gautam, the then home minister of Nepal made a statement that the Kalapani border dispute between India and Nepal could be resolved through trilateral understanding between China, Nepal and India. Interestingly, Gautam remarked after meeting with a Chinese military delegation led by General Ei Hujeng (Nayak, 2020). But, Nepalis reiterate that China has no

hand in India-Nepal border problems, and it will be wrong to assume that Nepal is acting on the behest of China (The Times of India, 2020). Responding to General MM Naravane's remarks that Nepal might have raised the border problem "at the behest of someone else", an indirect reference to China, Chinese scholars too didn't see China's hand (Ethiranjan, 2020).

Because of the geographical proximity, and economic relations they have, the relationship between India and China is often labelled as one of the most 'electrifying' of this century. Their interactions are not only expected to determine the future of reciprocity, interdependence and globalization itself but are also anticipated to shape the hopes and prospects of international institutions (Bhattarai, 2017). Their interactions are also estimated to determine the U.S. power globally and in the Asian region. Most importantly, their ability to cooperate is projected as crucial on the core issues, ranging from climate change to multilateral trade negotiations (Martin, 2016). But, there are certain similarities and unusual differences in the foreign policy behaviours of India and China, particularly in dealing with the small states in the South Asian region (Bhattarai, 2017). India's Mansarovar route through Nepal and China's response over the same provides an apt example. Such similarities and differences are often deemed as the outcomes of the geopolitical vulnerabilities that have gripped the region, amidst the rise of China and India. Such similarities and differences can be better understood with the help of the CFP which builds a multilevel and cross-national theory of foreign policy, and subjects such a theory to rigorous empirical testing. The CFP inherits scientism and behaviourism in the genealogy of the FPA. With the help of the CFP, events can be compared to understand whether the particular foreign policy has positive or negative impacts, and also to evaluate the instruments of statecraft including diplomacy, military, economics, etc. In comparison to Groupthink, Organizational and Bureaucratic Politics models, the CFP approach underlines integrated multilevel explanations. Hence, the CFP helps us to understand 'who does what to whom, how' in international affairs. For instance, while comparing the foreign policies of India and China towards Nepal's new map, not only unusual differences at the strategic front may be discovered, but also the implications of such differences are felt. The recurrent instances of standoffs, brawls, and skirmishes in the Himalayan borders between India and China have already burgeoned security threats for Nepal. Following the death of 20 Indian soldiers in the recent skirmish with China in the Galwan valley, Nepal's security threat has multiplied, which was visible in the press statement issued by Nepal on 20th June 2020, mentioning that the two neighbouring countries need to resolve their dispute in Galwan valley area through "peaceful means in favour of bilateral, regional and world peace and stability". Most importantly, the geographical location of any state shapes the outlook of a state's leaders, and, thus, influences their decision-making process over the foreign policy affairs" (Sempa, 2002, p. 5). Today, India seemingly executes foreign policy towards its neighbouring states by assessing the influence of China on the small states of South Asia. For India, which is strategically alarmed, South Asia is the sphere of influence. While for China, which seems economically concerned, South Asia is a big market (Bhattarai, 2017). As a result, the geopolitical contestation in the Himalayas has further aggravated the challenges in resolving the border problems between India and Nepal.

## 1.6 Challenges in Resolving Nepal-India Border Problems

Foreign policy analysts have emphasized that Nepal and India need to find a lasting and permanent solution to the border disputes that have riveted their bilateral relations. But, it's

not an easy task (Giri, 2020b), as foreign policy decision making is variously influenced at different levels, as represented in Table 1 below. Assessing the status of the EPG report, Groupthink hints at India’s reluctance in resolving border problems with Nepal. In the same way, Bureaucratic Politics indicate India’s interest in continuing Himalayan frontier theory and securitize the Himalayan region instead of resolving border problems. The CFP gives a clear understanding of how Himalayan geopolitics and power contestation in the Himalayan region has made India disinterested to resolve the border disputes with Nepal. Social-Psychological Milieu, however, demonstrates China’s increasing presence in Nepali politics and society following India’s 2015 blockade peeving New Delhi to explore China connection in Nepal’s new map.

Table 1 Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) of Challenges to Nepal’s Diplomatic Efforts in Resolving Border Problems with India

Groupthink	Bureaucratic Politics	Comparative Foreign Policy	Social- Psychological Milieu
Lack of interest in Indian leadership to receive EPG report	Continuity of Himalayan frontier theory in India’s foreign policy	Himalayan geopolitics	2015 unofficial blockade on Nepal
Group consensus in EPG helpless in front of Bureaucratic Politics	India’s policy of the securitization of the Himalayan region	Sino-Indian border standoffs, skirmishes, border clashes	Public pressure on Nepali leadership to issue a new map
EPG limited to recommendations	Indian bureaucracy as Permanent Government	Indian exploring China connection in Nepal’s map	Role of Indian media
EPG Report not made public	Standard Operating Procedures offering little flexibility and creativity	China calling for no unilateral action in the disputed territory	Mind of the foreign policy decision-maker

Although Nepal was aware of the fact that India had been constructing a road via Lipulekh pass for the past 12 years (Gyanwali, 2020), the successive governments didn’t take up the matter seriously. Although the incumbent Nepali government pledged to resolve the border disputes with the help of diplomatic negotiations and dialogues, because of the rift inside the ruling communist party, the government focus shifted towards resolving the internal conflicts (Mehta, 2020), which waned the Nepal government’s will power while New Delhi had already indicated in holding talks only after the end of the pandemic. As a result, Nepal’s border problems with its Southern neighbour remain unresolved. In the same way, group consensus in EPG appears helpless in front of Bureaucratic Politics, as Indian Prime Minister Modi hasn't received the EPG report. This has raised doubts over India’s commitment to implementing recommendations forwarded by the EPG and leaving the fate of Nepal-India borderlands in limbo.

While the report will be made public only after the prime ministers of both countries receive it, it becomes clear how groupthink falls victim to bureaucratic politics, which offers little flexibility and creativity in resolving the border problems. India's policy of securitization towards the Himalayan region through continuity of its frontier theory has pervaded the Indian bureaucracy, a major actor in Indian foreign policy formulation and implementation, yielding a continuous reluctance to resolve the Himalayan border problems with Nepal. The CFP analysis helps us understand how the resurgence of Himalayan geopolitics and power contestation in the Himalayan region has obliged India to take refuge in the Himalayan frontier theory, while China aims to transform the Himalayas with the infrastructure and connectivity projects under its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative(BRI) project. Although Beijing demanded no unilateral action in the disputed territory, the way Sino-Indian border clash in Galwan coincided with Nepal-India border problems over Lipulekh, New Delhi started to explore China connection in Nepal's new map that further lessened the chance of reaching a diplomatic resolution of border problems.

The cognitive process of the foreign policy decision-maker is variously influenced. For instance, the unveiling of the new map was the upshot of the intense public pressure on the Oli administration. But, it should be also understood in the socio-political context of the 2015 unofficial Indian blockade on the landlocked country. The way China was hauled by Indian media in Nepal-India border problems should be also understood in the socio-political context of how Indian media has been traditionally hostile to China by exploiting paranoia and sensationalism (Lahiri, 2017). India wanted to convey to the world that the Himalayas are under constant threat from China, and synchronously New Delhi attempts to position itself as the guardian of the Himalayan region. But, as India aims to draw legitimacy to its Himalayan frontier theory, Nepal's diplomatic efforts in resolving border problems has to suffer. In the context of Nepal-India border problems, the Kathmandu-based analysts floated three ways to deal with India over the border problems, which were: deploying the military to secure Nepali land, pursuing a diplomatic approach, and if such an approach failed to yield results, then to seek international arbitration (Giri, 2020b). But, such approaches may further worsen bilateral relations with India. Because, India is already not in a position to realize that China has nothing to do with Nepal's position on Lipulekh (Baral, 2020). Thus, Nepal-India border problems in Lipulekh have permeated a geopolitical challenge.

Further, the challenge lies on Nepal's part not to exploit any geopolitical benefits out of the intermittent presence of rivalries in Sino-Indian relations. Because Nepal cannot afford to get wedged in the middle of another geopolitical contestation in the Himalayas. Deploying the military to secure Nepali land hasn't yielded any result so far. On May 13, 2020, the Nepal government sent an Armed Police Force to Gaga in Chharung, near Kalapani. But, after two days, on May 15, hinting at China, Indian army chief Naravane made his reactive remark that Nepal is acting at the behest of someone else (Basnet, 2020). Kathmandu-based Security experts were also heard saying that mere 25 APF troops won't be of much help. The post was established to get rid of disparagement from locals criticizing the government's ineptitude in protecting the country's border (Thapa, 2020). Also, the post not being established at the strategically significant place, and less number of security personnel makes it meaningless (Thapa, 2020). As the disputed territory of Kalapani is about 20km uphill from the place where APF is positioned, Indian activity cannot be monitored (Basnet, 2020).

Nepal's diplomatic dealings with India is also not free from mounting challenges. Although Nepal was asking India repeatedly to sit for talks since November 2019, New Delhi expressed its willingness to sit for talks only after the Covid-19 pandemic is over (The Kathmandu Post, 2020g). But, when India held talks with China to resolve the month-long border standoffs and skirmishes (The Kathmandu Post, 2020h), it made Nepali policymakers raise their eyebrows. China was the priority for India, owing to the gravity of the dispute. But, the resolution of the India-China boundary dispute could also accelerate Nepal's chances for talks, as the dispute between Nepal and India also includes China in some capacity (The Kathmandu Post, 2020h). Although it was reported earlier that Prime Minister Oli is engaged in backchannel communications with New Delhi to start the foreign secretary-level talks, it hasn't gained any momentum. Also, in 2017, during the Doklam standoff between India and China, Kathmandu-based analysts had said that Nepal should raise its boundary issues with India, including the row over Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura, so that Nepal doesn't have to face the fate of Bhutan, during Doklam crisis. Also, in 2015, Kathmandu dispatched diplomatic notes to both Beijing and New Delhi after they agreed to open a trade route via Nepal's Lipulekh without informing Nepal. But, the issue wasn't given any attention until India issued its new political map including Nepali territories inside India in November 2019. Since then, Nepal sought two dates for talks at the foreign secretary-level and sent four diplomatic notes, but India has never responded to any of these notes (The Kathmandu Post, 2020h). The three notes were sent at the end of 2019, one on November 20, another on November 22 and one more on December 30. The fourth one was dispatched on May 11, 2020, after the opening up of the new road in Lipulekh by India. But, India wasn't responding to Nepal's concerns, leaving room for the ruling communist party in Nepal to reap geopolitical benefits out of the Sino-Indian dispute (Giri, 2020c).

Indian media went on cynical, portraying Nepal's relations with China as anti-Indian, when, on June 19, 2020, the School Department of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) organised a virtual meeting of the communist parties of Nepal and China (Bhattarai, 2020b). The meeting was held at the time when India and China were not in good relations because of border skirmishes and clashes along the disputed border in Ladakh. Nepal and India also had border disputes at the time of the meeting of the two communist parties. Not only did the meeting make India cast doubt over Nepal's neutrality, it also gave Indian media an opportunity to endorse the Indian army chief's remarks: "Nepal is acting on the behest of someone else" (The Wire, 2020). Although the meeting was scheduled long before the clash between Indian and Chinese troops on June 15, 2020, the timing was not appropriate and would draw widespread criticism for its preventable geopolitical ambitions (Bhattarai, 2020b). The Sino-Indian rivalry includes the features of conflict, cooperation and competition, and exploiting Machiavellian benefits out of the rivalry might not be in favour of Nepal's equidistant foreign policy (Bhattarai, 2020b). Aware of this, Nepal has proposed trilateral partnership (Giri, 2016), and expects New Delhi and Beijing to renegotiate their perceptions about each other accordingly. The Xi-Modi meeting in Wuhan in 2018 aimed to stabilize relations between India and China. Yet, the relations continue to be stirred by border problems and competition for regional supremacy and global influence (Bhattarai, 2020b). Nepal views Sino-Indian ties in three different ways: as geopolitical rivals; as economic giants; and, as two distinct civilizational entities. The India-China dispute for Nepal shouldn't be seen as an opportunity to boost its geopolitical ambitions. Given Nepal's geostrategic location, cultivating relations with one country at the expense of the other may be counterproductive.

## 2. Conclusion

By using a qualitative method, the article has made the FPA of the row over Nepal's new map against India's Mansarovar Route, with an attempt to illustrate the challenges that Nepal faces while trying to initiate a dialogue with India over the border problems between the two countries in the Himalayan region. The Foreign Policy-2020 has not only directed Nepal to resolve its border disputes with the help of effective diplomacy that relies on historical agreements, treaties, facts and evidence, but has also diplomatically addressed the Indian psyche on such issues. Although such policy directives are profoundly indispensable for the desired result, to deal with Nepal's ongoing border issues with India and the likely ramifications in the near future, Nepal could implement these policies only after India shows its interest in resolving the problem. And to reignite India's interest, friendliness and neighbourliness in Nepal's diplomatic efforts is a key.

This study has further discovered that geopolitical contestation over the Himalayas may not only aggravate the existing border problems between the countries but also tarnished the image of the contesting powers. In June 2017, when Chinese troops had reached the Doklam area, the disputed territory between China and India's strategic ally Bhutan, with bulldozers for constructing a road, New Delhi had objected to the road-building as a violation of its sovereignty over the disputed territory. But, the world's largest democracy itself announced the opening of a road linking Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh with Kailash Mansarovar via the Lipulekh pass, during the time of the pandemic, without Nepal's consent. Alerted by the preventable consequences of such acts, Nepal invited India for talks. But India hasn't paid any heed to Nepal's concerns, which however provided geopolitical opportunities for the ruling party in Nepal to inch further closer to China.

Further, having made the FPA of the row over Nepal's new map against India's Mansarovar route, it has been identified that geopolitical contestation in the Himalayas has been the persistent challenge in resolving border problems, as both the Asian giants—India and China—value the Himalayan region as strategically important for their national security. This raises a question: does India's rise comes with a responsibility towards its small neighbourhood, whenever New Delhi prioritises its security concerns?

Thus, before it's too late, India needs to fast track its diplomatic efforts in resolving border disputes with Nepal. For that, firstly, India needs to display flexibility in understanding and accepting Nepal-China relations, so that China won't be unnecessarily hauled in Nepal-India border problems. Secondly, India needs to tap this opportunity to send a clear message to the world that India's rise is a rise with responsibility towards its neighbours, and it is important to take small countries like Nepal into confidence by eliminating all kinds of mistrust, misinformation, and misperception in healthy bilateral relations.

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Research Article

## Impact of Remittances on Economic Growth in Nepal

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### Abstract

Remittances have become a significant source of foreign exchange as well as funds for small business start-ups and expansion and consumption spending of recipient households in developing countries. Accordingly, it is expected that remittances would contribute to economic development. Notwithstanding, there is yet no consensus on the impact of remittances on economic growth. This paper focuses on the impact of remittances on economic growth in Nepal, a small Asian country where remittances were 31% of GDP in 2016. Using data from the World Bank and other sources, the study found that remittances does not significantly impact economic growth. The study also found that democratic form of governance as measured by a dummy variable had a significant and positive impact on economic growth alongside capital formation and exports. Based on additional tests using cointegration and regression analysis, the paper found that there is a possibility that remittances negatively impact economic growth in the long run.

**Keywords:** economic growth; remittances; human capital; export; money supply; governance.

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## **1. Introduction**

Remittances, which are the transfer of funds by foreign workers to their countries of origin, have become a significant source of financing in developing countries. In 2011, migrants sent approximately three times more to developing countries than these countries received in official development aid. In some countries, remittances have exceeded Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). In addition, remittances to developing countries have risen 25.29% from 2009-2011 compared to the meager 0.59% growth in FDI, indicating that remittances will continue to be a major source of funds in developing countries (Ratha, 2013). However, literatures surrounding the impact of remittances on economic development remains controversial. This study explores the relationship between remittances and economic activity by analyzing the impact of remittances on economic growth and further measures the relationships between remittances and selected macroeconomic variables in Nepal- a developing country where remittances play a significant role in the economy.

Nepal is a small landlocked country in South Asia which shares its northern border with China and its eastern, southern, and western borders with India but unlike its neighbors, Nepal has a relatively small GDP of roughly \$24.8 billion (2016 US Dollars). Primarily an agricultural country, the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that around 71.3% of the total population is employed in agriculture (World Development Indicators, WDI). Nepal has a large trade-deficit with India and relies on imports for staple diets such as rice, wheat etc. Even though a large percentage of the population is reliant on agriculture, failure to incorporate effective agricultural and irrigational techniques and heavy reliance on monsoon rain has made agriculture an unsustainable means of income. Historically, the rate of economic growth in Nepal has been low with average growth rate hovering around 2 to 5 percent (National Planning Commission SDG Report 2016). After a decade-long civil conflict (1995-2005) that ended in 2007 after which Nepal became a democracy, there were high expectations that the new government would bring rapid economic growth. However, various hiccups- political instability being one of them- has limited the government's impact on developmental projects. Nepal is currently undertaking a change in its governance after it finally implemented a federal system in 2015. This new constitution brings forward with it numerous fundamental rights that aim to uplift the status of women and historically marginalized ethnic groups. The new federal system divides Nepal into seven different provinces with hopes of greater political and economic influence (National Planning Commission, 2016) and is expected to bring sustainable economic growth over the next decade. This being said, the current employment landscape in Nepal is grim as lack of good job opportunities back home has dramatically shifted the employment and migration pattern in Nepal over the last decade with a growing number of working population now seeking jobs abroad.

In 2016, Nepal received \$6.6 billion in remittances, which was roughly 31.2% of its total GDP (WDI). This ratio made Nepal the third highest recipient of remittances as a percentage of GDP- only behind South Sudan and Tonga (WDI). The rise in remittances-to-GDP ratio has been steep considering the ratio of remittances as GDP inflows was only around 2.4% in 2001 and Nepal now remains one of the most remittances dependent countries in the world. While globalization has propelled many Nepalese to settle abroad all over the world, migration for work purpose is largely concentrated within few selected regions and countries such as Malaysia

and Gulf countries. Although western destinations such as the U.K., U.S.A., Canada and countries like Australia and Japan are preferred since migrants can earn a higher salary in those regions, high costs of emigration and strict immigration policies limit Nepali workers from being able to migrate to these countries. Instead, almost 90% of migrants that migrate for work go to Malaysia and Gulf countries such as Qatar, UAE, and Saudi Arabia for employment where they are generally engaged in low-skilled labor (Shrestha, 2017). Furthermore, unlike migrants to western destinations, most migrant workers in Gulf countries and Malaysia return home after working abroad in these regions and hence are more likely to regularly send money to their households. Additionally, some recent events over the years have further increased the number of people seeking work abroad. In April 2015, Nepal was affected by a 7.8 magnitude earthquake that had a devastating impact on the economy. The Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) estimated a \$1.9 billion in economic losses – apart from the \$5.2 billion loss in destroyed physical assets (Covic et. al., 2016). Furthermore, Nepal suffered another huge setback the same year when it faced a four month long economic blockade after the political parties failed to reach a unified consensus regarding the new constitution. The trade route through India, which provides approximately 65% of Nepal's international trade was blocked and the country and its aggregate output, exports, and imports were adversely affected. The blockade also halted the post-earthquake reconstruction process and Nepal experienced a growth rate of 0.6% (at market prices) in 2016- its lowest in 14 years (Covic et. al., 2016). These two events severely impacted the economic conditions of many households in Nepal and has furthered increased number of Nepalese seeking foreign employment.

Given the importance of remittances in the Nepalese economy and the conflicting reports in the literature on the effects of remittances on economic development, this paper aims to assess the effects of remittances on economic growth by considering selected macroeconomic and social indicators while also accounting for the quality of governance. The paper uses governance as one of the variables which determine economic growth and tests not only for the effects of remittances on economic growth but also to investigate how remittances affected economic growth under two governance scenarios: monarchy and liberal democracy.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 is the literature review where selected previous studies on remittances are analyzed. Section 3 provides a description of the data and highlights the summary statistics of the variables in the study. In addition, the section provides an explanation of each of the variables used in the research. Section 4 is the Methodology and provides some details on how the data was prepared for the use in the regression analysis of the response of economic growth to remittances and other variables in the study. Section 5 is the analysis of the empirical results. Section 6 provides policy recommendations. And lastly, Section 7 discusses the limitations of the study and concludes the paper.

## **2. Literature Review**

Although remittances occupy a significant share of GDP in the economy of developing countries, number of studies analyzing the effects of remittances on economic growth are fairly limited. Furthermore, previous literature on these topics tend to focus on a specific country or a region of the world and thus, there have been contradicting findings as to whether remittance do indeed promote economic growth.

Bichaka Fayissa and Christian Nsiah (Fayissa and Nsiah 2004) explored the impact of remittances on economic growth in Africa by studying 36 African countries and found that changes in remittances have a significant and positive impact on growth rate of GDP per capita. Likewise, Meyer and Shera (2013) found that worker’s remittances were positively and significantly contributing in economic growth in the Southeastern Balkan Area. On the contrary, Khan and Islam (2013) argue that remittances tend to generate inflationary pressure in the domestic economy and another study by Lopez, Molina, and Bussolo (2007) concluded that remittances appreciate the domestic currency in small open economies. Furthermore, Matuzeviciute and Butkus (2016) argue that remittances cannot ensure long-run economic growth or solve structural economic problems such as an unstable political climate. However, the study also noted that the effects of remittances vary and noted that countries exceeding 11% remittances -to-GDP ratio were too dependent on remittances which distort the country’s internal long-term growth. The study classified countries into four groups (Table 1) based on how remittances impacted long-run economic growth in their countries.

Table 1. Classification of countries based on remittances-to-GDP ratio by Matuzeviciute and Butkus (2014)

<b>Average Real per Capita GDP (Constant PPP U.S. Dollars)</b>			
		Below 8500	Above 8500
Average Remittances-to-GDP ratio (%)	<i>Above 11</i>	Group A*-lowest likelihood of positive remittance impact on long-run economic growth (includes Nepal)	Group B-developed enough to channel remittances for long-run economic growth but too dependent on them
	<i>Below 11</i>	Group C-highest possibility of using remittances for promoting long-run economic growth	Group D-highest likelihood of positive remittance impact on long-run economic growth

Source : Adopted from Matuzeviciute and Butkus (2014)

The study noted that Group C countries were those that could promote long-run economic growth given certain structural economic problems were resolved whereas Group B countries do not have strong opportunities to channel remittances for long-run economic growth. The study identifies Nepal as a Group A country and thus, identifies Nepal as a country unable to channel remittances towards economic growth. The study argues that these countries do not have a favorable environment for use of remittances for productive investment and that remittances, when used for personal consumption, can promote economic growth at most only in the short run. This study suggests profound implications for Nepal since remittances play a significant part in the Nepalese economy- mostly through its impact on personal consumption purposes.

Most of the works on impacts of remittances indicate that remittances have had positive impacts on developing economies largely through its impacts on education, health, and alleviation of poverty (Taylor, 1999; Cox and Ureta, 2003; Adams and Page 2005). This is shown to be of similar case in Nepal too. Micro-studies analyzing the impact of remittances on household level (Pant, 2008; Shrestha, 2017) suggests that migrant remittances have led to

a decline in poverty and an improvement in living standards for migrant households. While these studies indicate some positive impacts of remittances at household levels, studies analyzing whether remittances have a positive impact on investment and economic growth of the country as a whole remains inconclusive. In her 2012 study analyzing the impact of migrant remittance on economic growth in South-Asia, Cooray (2012) found that remittance had a positive impact on economic growth when education levels and financial sector development are comparatively high. Dahal (2014 p.19) concluded that remittances had mixed effects on economic growth in Nepal. The study showed that remittances had a positive association with financial development and human capital accumulation but a negative association with productivity (manufacturing growth) and international trade. Remittances also had a positive association with school enrollment rates, life expectancy, and reduction in under-5 child mortality rate but the study highlighted that the total volume of exports and imports in Nepal have decreased as the inflows of remittances increased. Uprety (2017 p.130) concluded that remittances are negatively related to per capita GDP in the short run and had no evidence of long run impact. The study also concluded that farm products of Nepali goods contracted as more lands remained uncultivated with the increase of people working abroad and thus, affected the supply of Nepali products while increasing the demand for imported goods. This result is consistent with the 2012 micro-study conducted by Sunam and McCarthy (2015) in Sunsari district where they found that migrant households were spending remittances on either consumption, land speculation or outside agriculture and that circular migration was failing to promote entrepreneurial farming. Shrestha's (2017) study also reached a similar conclusion in that migration reduced participation in non-farm activities of men. This type of trend could perhaps be representative of migrant households throughout the country and perhaps why Uprety (2017 p.130) found that remittances were impeding economic growth in Nepal. A negative relationship between remittances and economic growth presents some implications given the high share of remittances in Nepal's GDP. Therefore this study aims to further analyze the effects of remittances by considering additional variables along with remittances. Considering the historically instable political background of Nepal, this study accounts for the role of quality of governance in explaining the impact of remittances on economic growth to analyze whether a shift to a fully democratic regime in 2007 positively impacted the economy of Nepal.

### **3. Description of Data and Model Analysis**

This paper uses growth in GDP per capita (GDPCAP) as a primary indicator for economic growth. The GDP per Capita is measured in constant real GDP (2010 US). While the main purpose of this study is to study the relationship between remittances and GDP growth, economic growth is influenced by various other factors. Accordingly, this study considers economic growth as a function of remittances, capital formation, money supply, education, exports and governance. Capital formation, money supply, and exports are used as indicators of the country's financial development, education as proxy for human capital and governance to capture the political landscape scenario. This study uses data from 1976-2019 and is based on data that were available from the World Bank, Nepal Demographic and Health Survey and the Institute for health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME). The data for remittances for years 1976-1992 has been taken from the dataset used by Dambar Uprety (2017) – who originally received the dataset for remittances from Gulianna and Ruiz-Aranna(2009). Since the data for

remittances provided by the World Bank was available only from 1993, the extended data set helps to provide additional opportunities for studying the relationship between remittances and economic growth. Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics for the data used in the empirical analysis.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Dataset used in the model

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
gdp_cap	45	471.6939	169.7541	280.8989	866.1711
rem_cap	45	66.21673	98.96629	0.950431	295.1995
exports_GDP	45	13.57106	5.211017	6.760096	26.32784
gcapform_cap	45	215.4257	119.3373	77.58648	554.4115
m2_supply	45	50.11915	25.43017	15.95033	116.9675
Educ_years	44	2.46311	0.9403779	1.23	4.365167

Source: STATA output

As indicated in Table 2, the following variables have been used in the study:

### **3.1 Remittances per capita (*rem\_cap*)**

The data for remittances is taken at current US\$ since data for remittances at real prices were unavailable. The study uses remittances in the form of remittance per capita (*rem\_cap*) to evaluate how remittances affect economic growth at an individual level by using the total population data obtained from the World Bank. Table 2 suggests a high variability in the deviation of *rem\_cap* when comparing the minimum and maximum of remittance in the dataset. This variability reflects the large growth in remittances in the country- primarily over the last decade.

### **3.2 Gross Capital Formation/Labor force (*gcapform\_cap*)**

Economic theory suggests that capital formation (physical capital accumulation, infrastructure growth, technological progress) has a positive relationship with economic growth since countries need capital goods to increase the production of goods and services- and thus, increase their GDP (Solow 1957, Romer 1986, Romer 1990, Mankiw et al. 1992). This study uses Gross Capital Formation per working population to account for the contribution of capital stock to economic growth since capital formation is a good indicator of investment. Working Population is used as a proxy for labor force since dataset for working population was available from 1976-2020.

### **3.3 M2 Broad Money Supply as percentage of GDP (*m2\_supply*)**

Money supply is the total value of monetary assets available to a country at a specific time. M2 broad money includes M1 and savings account balances and is assumed to affect economic growth through its impact on interest rate, employment, and output expansion. M2 Broad Money Supply is the broadest measure of financial intermediation and thus, is used in this study as a proxy for financial sector development. A rise in M2 is expected to increase GDP. The increase in M2GDP could cause an increase in consumer spending when interest rate declines.

### **3.4 Mean School Years of population age 16+ (educ\_years)**

Education is a proxy for human capital. Economic theory suggests that education increases human capital which, in turn, increases economic growth in the country. This study uses the mean education per capita of population age 16+ by averaging the mean school years of both male and female population. Mean school years is a good proxy for measurement of human capital and using school years of age group 16+ captures majority of working population in the country. A rise in human capital is expected to increase labor productivity and have a positive impact on real GDP.

### **3.5 Exports of Goods and Services as percentage of GDP (exports\_GDP)**

An increase in exports can often be associated with an increase in GDP. Export contributes to GDP growth by creating employment and producing foreign exchange and resources required in purchasing advanced technologies from other nations. Advances in technology increases labor productivity and hence a rise in exports promote economic growth. This study uses exports as percentage of GDP in order to analyze the role of exports in relation to GDP/capital and other macroeconomic variables. Exports, as percentage of GDP, has experienced a rather low variability compared to other macroeconomic variables in the study – with the maximum reaching around 26% and the minimum reaching around 9% of GDP with a deviation of about 5%. Nepal's top exports include Fibers, Carpets and other textile products (OEC) and a rather low percentage generated from exports might indicate Nepal's inability to position itself as a major exporting country for goods and other services. The data for export-to-GDP ratio was taken from the World Bank.

### **3.6 Governance of the country during that year (DUMMY)**

One of the primary aims of the study is to understand the effects of governance in economic growth. Nepal officially became a democracy in 2008, and this research uses a dummy variable in the model to analyze the relationship between democracy and economic growth. Democracy encourages economic freedom which is expected to inspire creativity and innovation. Good governance facilitates freedom in private and public sectors. Hence, consolidation of democracy is expected to have a positive effect on economic growth. Countries with sustainable economic growth usually have a democratic governance (Acemoglu et al. 2019) and this study incorporates the effects of democracy on the economic growth of Nepal. The dummy variable is given as 0 for the years before Nepal was a democracy and 1 for the years after it became a democratic country.

## **4. Econometric Methodology**

Since the study involves time-series data of multiple variables, the initial approach was to test the model for stationarity, autocorrelation, co-integration and multicollinearity. Instead of using percentages, nominal values were used for exports and money supply and all the variables were then converted to natural logarithms. Instead of only using the time graph of different variables as an indicator for stationarity, the research uses both the Augmented Dickey Fuller Test(ADF) and the Phillips-Perron (PP) tests on each variables to test for stationarity. After running the model using natural logarithms of the variable the results indicate that all the variables are stationary in the first differences at 1% significance level (Table 3 a.).

Table 3 a). Unit Root Test Results

Variable		ADF Test p-value	PP test p-value
ln_gdp	Zero level	0.9973	0.9990
	First Difference	0.0000	0.0000
ln_rem	Zero level	0.8687	0.9087
	First Difference	0.0000	0.0000
ln_exports	Zero level	0.3929	0.4033
	First Difference	0.0000	0.0000
ln_cap (capital formation)	Zero level	0.6602	0.6954
	First Difference	0.0000	0.6954
ln_m2	Zero level	0.9349	0.9364
	First Difference	0.0000	0.0000
ln_edu	Zero level	0.9656	0.9657
	First Difference	0.0000	0.0000

\*dummy

Source: STATA output

Table 3 a. suggests that the null hypothesis can be rejected at 1% level indicating that the variables are stationary.

After testing for non-stationarity, the study then carried out a test for multicollinearity. Having multicollinearity restricts the econometric model and thus affects the coefficients in regression. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was used to test for possible presence of multicollinearity amongst variables and since VIF values (Table 3 b.) are less than 10, presence of multicollinearity is rejected. D1. Indicates that the variables are in the first difference form.

Table 3 b). Multicollinearity Test Results

Variable	VIF	1/VIF
ln_exp D1.	1.25	0.797064
ln_m2 D1.	1.18	0.850231
ln_cap D1.	1.13	0.887924
ln_rem D1.	1.09	0.915791
dummy	1.06	0.942307
ln_edu D1.	1.05	0.954686
Mean VIF	1.13	

Source: STATA output

After running the multicollinearity test, the study proceeded to test for possible co-integration and appropriate lagged selection. The co-integration test that was carried out indicates the presence of four co-integrating equations at 5% significance level (Table 4).

Table 4. Co-Integration Rank Test

Johansen tests for cointegration						
Trend: constant					Number of Obs =	40
Sample: 1980 -2019					Lags =	4
Maximum Rank	parms	LL	eigenvalue	trace statistics	5% critical value	
0	154	414.30924	.	424.7264	124.24	
1	167	528.07565	0.99661	197.1936	94.15	
2	178	581.82854	0.93196	89.6878	68.52	
3	187	599.50454	0.58679	54.3358	47.21	
4	194	611.97781	0.46402	29.3892*	29.68	
5	199	620.70851	0.35373	11.9278	15.41	
6	202	626.26768	0.24267	0.8095	3.76	
7	203	626.67242	0.02003			
Maximum Rank	parms	LL	eigenvalue	max statistics	5% critical value	
0	154	414.30924	.	227.5328	45.28	
1	167	528.07565	0.99661	107.5058	39.37	
2	178	581.82854	0.93196	35.352	33.46	
3	187	599.50454	0.58679	24.9465	27.07	
4	194	611.97781	0.46402	17.4614	20.97	
5	199	620.70851	0.35373	11.9278	14.97	
6	202	626.26768	0.24267	0.8095	3.76	
7	203	626.67242	0.02003			

Source: STATA output

The confirmed co-integration between the variables (in natural log form and not in differences) indicates that, at the very least, four cointegrating equations exist at the 0.05 level and that there is a long-run relationship between them. Since first differences represent only short-run changes, further statistical tests can be used to determine the relationship between variables in the model in the long-run. Here, OLS regression using first difference of variables was carried out to analyze the relationship between economic growth and selected macroeconomic variables. Before running the OLS regression, all the variables were transformed into the natural log and then the logged variables were then first differenced. The natural log was taken to limit the variability of variables since the first difference of the macroeconomic variables in

its original value used in the study increase numerically over the years. Furthermore, log-linear model allows for easier interpretation of results since the coefficient represents the elasticity of dependent variable with respect to exogenous variables in question. For proper lag selection, the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) was used. The AIC suggested that remittances, money supply and education all had lagged effects on economic growth. The obtained regression result is shown in Table 5.

Table 5). Econometric Regression OLS Regression in First Differences

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of Obs =		
Model	.012240632	6	.002040105	F(6, 36) =	43	
Residual	.019871783	36	.000551994	Prob > F =	3.7	
Total	.032112415	42	.000764581	R-Squared =	0.0058	
				Adj R-Squared =	0.3812	
				Root MSE =	0.278	
					0.02349	
D.ln_gdp	Coef.	Std. Err	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
ln_cap D1.	0.0651326	0.028056	2.32	0.026	0.0082324	0.1220327
ln_edu LD.	-0.0485944	0.1951837	-0.25	0.805	-0.4444452	0.3472564
ln_exp D1	0.0764859	0.0295013	2.59	0.014	0.0166544	0.1363173
ln_m2 LD.	-0.0192524	0.0621104	-0.31	0.758	-0.145218	0.1067133
ln_rem LD.	0.0028344	0.0060592	0.47	0.643	-0.0094542	0.015123
dummy	0.0211147	0.0079941	2.64	0.012	0.0049019	0.0373275
_cons	0.0165902	83403	1.99	0.054	-0.0003247	0.033505

\*LD denotes one-period lag

Source: STATA output

## 5. Empirical Results Interpretation and Long-Run Analysis

Analyzing the regression chart from Table 5, the data indicates a positive relationship between GDP per capita and Remittances per capita. Similarly, exports, capital formation and the democracy variable all appear to have a positive relationship with economic growth (GDP per capita). The regression indicates a negative relationship of education and money supply on economic growth. This being said, both of these variables are not statistically significant.

As indicated in the study by Dahal (2016) and Meyer and Shera (2013), the positive relationship between remittances per capita and GDP per capita could be asserted to the idea that remittances have a positive association with human capital accumulation. As more money is channeled into sectors of education and health, more capital can be accumulated in the long run. While the finding suggests that remittances have a positive relationship with GDP growth, the coefficient is not as high compared to other variables. An one percentage increase in Remittances per capita growth increases GDP per capita growth by 0.0028% given that other variables remain constant. Although this finding signifies as a positive outlook towards Nepal's economy, this result is not statistically significant and thus, we cannot conclude that remittances have a positive impact on economic growth of Nepal.

One additional factor that this study considered was the effect of governance on economic growth. The regression estimates suggest a positive relationship between GDP per capita and dummy variable- which indicates that democracy has a positive relationship with economic growth. The democratic form of governance seems more favorable for the establishment of new firms- both small and large scale. It might also be less restrictive towards foreign investment, trade, startup establishments, etc. Given Nepal is still in the initial phase of democratic system, the finding presents a positive outlook for the future- should the country manage to overcome its political instability.

With regards to the long-run effects of variables on each other, Vector–Error Correction Model (VECM) has been widely used in literatures dealing with time-series data. The limited number of observations, however, limits this study from fully incorporating and analyzing the exact long-run causality amongst different variables in question. Thus, although VECM can be computed given the number of observations i.e. 44 observations, some shortcomings do remain. In analyzing long-run relation in their study, Uprety (2017) used VECM on dataset from 1976-2013 i.e. 38 observations acknowledging literatures that used even lesser number of observations (Uprety, 2017 p.130). To keep the analysis simple, we run the VECM model setting rank = 1 although the Johansen test indicated four co-integrating equations and set the maximum lag in the model to 4 time periods based on AIC lag-selection criterion for the model. Only the long-run equation is shown, and GDP/Capita is positioned as the dependent variable in the model. Since the VECM model originates from differencing of Vector Autoregression model (VAR) which uses natural logarithms of the selected macroeconomic variables, VECM is run on natural logs of the variables.

Table 6). Long Run Equation in VECM

Vector error-correction model							
Sample:	1980 - 2019			Number of obs =	40		
Log likelihood =	528.0756			AIC	= -18.05378		
Det (sigma_ml) =	8.05e-21			HQIC	= -15.50434		
				SBIC	= -11.00271		
Cointegrating equations							
Equation	Parms	chi2	P>chi2				
_ce1	6	5433.778	0.0000				
Identification: beta is exactly identified							
Johansen normalization restriction imposed							
	beta	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf Interval]	
_ce1							
	ln_gdp	1	.	.	.	.	.
	ln_cap	-0.0677482	0.1682121	-0.40	0.687	-0.3974379	0.2619415
	ln_exp	0.9929943	0.0930157	10.68	0.000	0.8106868	1.175302
	ln_m2	-0.2047387	0.2469001	-0.83	0.407	-0.688654	0.2791766

ln_edu	-4.094013	0.5680005	-7.21	0.000	-5.207274	-2.980753
ln_rem	1.211008	0.0250785	48.29	0.000	1.161855	1.260161
dummy	-2.830347	0.053485	-52.92	0.000	-2.935175	-2.725518
_cons	-21.0911	.	.	.	.	.

Source: STATA output

Table 6. shows the long run equation of the VECM. Like aforementioned, ln\_gdp is positioned as the independent variable and in order to interpret the Johansen normalization result, the sign of coefficients must be reversed. The results show that in the long run, ln\_rem has a negative effect on ln\_gdp. Exports (ln\_exp) is also shown to have a negative impact on ln\_gdp. Although this result contradicts the export-led growth (ELG) hypothesis, the relationship is statistically significant and this result necessitates further analyzing- especially considering the growing number of literatures that argue against the ELG hypothesis (Ahmad and Harnhirun, 1996; Lee and Huang, 2002; Kim and Lin, 2009; Furuoka and Munir, 2010). ln\_edu, ln\_m2, and dummy all have a significant positive relationship with ln\_gdp on long run thus indicative that education, money supply and democratic form of governance all positively impact GDP growth. The negative relationship between remittances and economic growth, however, generates a serious issue given how remittances remain a backbone of Nepal's economy.

## 6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendation

This study analyzes the effects of remittances on the economic growth of Nepal by using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression method after accounting for the stationarity in the data. The study found that remittances have a positive relationship with economic growth. However, the regression estimates for remittances are insignificant and thus, we can conclude that there is no significant impact of remittance on economic growth, especially in the short run. While the long-run analysis (Table 6) suggests that remittances negatively impact economic growth, the result, although statistically significant, should be analyzed with caution. In this context, further analysis is required to exactly determine the causal effects of remittances on economic growth. Notwithstanding, the negative relationship does validate that remittances do not positively impact economic growth in Nepal. Hence, the result indicates that there is an urgent need to quickly address 1) the ongoing labor migration pattern and 2) how remitted money can be channeled towards economic growth.

After the April 2015 earthquake and economic blockade, Nepal suffered from stagnation and low economic growth. Following a slowdown in 2016, the Nepalese economy was expected to gradually bounce back after the implementation of earthquake reconstruction. However, the ongoing worldwide COVID-19 pandemic brought several new health, education, and economic challenges to the country and the major set back due to the pandemic is yet to be over. The impact of the COVID pandemic on remittances and socio-economic condition of migrant workers is also huge. Given lucrative employment opportunities remain bleak back home, the number of people seeking work abroad is expected to increase in the coming years. Thus, the government should swiftly implement policies that support foreign workers and foreign employment as well as create opportunities at home for the returnees.

A major issue facing Nepali workers right now is the unsuitable and rough working conditions abroad. There have been numerous reports of Nepali workers suffering from domestic violence, forced overtime labor, inhumane living situations, etc. Nepal banned women from travelling to the Gulf area as domestic workers in 2016 due to such complaints and banned its people from working in Malaysia in 2018 due to disputes between the two governments regarding the immigration requirements for Nepalese workers. In light of the foregoing, the Nepalese government should make targeted policies to protect the rights of Nepalese workers abroad in order to raise their morale and productivity. Since most returning labor migrants work in Malaysia and Gulf countries and are engaged in low-skilled labor where they are more likely to be subjected to harsh work environments, the first action of the government should be to reach strong bilateral agreements that eradicates such practices. Furthermore, rather than focusing on sending people abroad for work, the first step should be to implement policy actions that support and encourage employment and investment opportunities for returning migrants. This would not only incentivize the labor force within the country to stay in the country but also encourage workers abroad to use their earned money on investment and entrepreneurial opportunities. This being said, a significant number of people still seek foreign work by travelling undocumented. Hence, the Nepalese government should continue to prevent companies and employers abroad from carrying out such practices. A major reason why a lot of money is remitted back through unofficial channels could be because workers abroad are undocumented or are engaged in foreign employment illegally. Helpful policies and regulations would prevent workers from having to seek foreign employment illegally and would facilitate the flow of remittances through official channels which can be easily measured and documented.

The study shows a positive and significant relationship between democracy and economic growth. Hence, the political landscape of Nepal provides opportunity for the country to further increase economic growth. The new constitution promulgated in 2015 divided Nepal into seven provinces- with hopes that decentralization will speed up infrastructural and governmental activities. The decentralization of power allows each province to exercise unrestricted policies regarding infrastructure development, budgeting etc. So, each province can implement policies and programs that motivate households to use the remitted money for business activities as well. Even though the federal system is still in its initial stage, the government should implement policies that support these activities as quickly as possible to utilize the remitted money. Remittances have primarily continued to become a means to alleviate poverty and improve quality of life in Nepal and even though it can help foster economic growth, the effect of remittances in fostering long-run economic growth in Nepal has been insignificant if not counter-productive. Thus, the government should not only formulate policies that promote investments but also make sure that the policies are carried out to channel remittances within Nepal so that the money can drive economic growth. Nepal's current political and social scenario provides great opportunity for such practices and it is imperative that the government immediately implement certain policies in order for remittances to have a strong impact on both short-term and long run economic growth in the country.

Although much of this paper has focused on economic growth i.e. GDP growth to be precise, it should be understood that economic growth is not the single-most important indicator of a country's development. Even though this study found that remittances had no short-run

impact and negative long-run impact on GDP growth, remittances could in fact be playing a major role in improving the socio-cultural environment of the country. As mentioned in the literature review section of the paper, several authors have analyzed the impact of remittances on household level and further microstudies can help us better understand how and why the remitted money is being consumed the way it is. Households could perhaps be spending the money on education and health thereby significantly improving economic opportunities of its members. Likewise, it is possible that remittance is playing a role in reducing gender discrimination, caste-based discrimination, domestic violence, illiteracy, malnutrition etc. Thus, further studies associating impacts of remittances on these areas will better guide policymakers regarding the role remittances play in improving the socio-economic landscape of Nepal.

## **7. Limitations of the Study**

This study analyzed the effects of remittances on the economic growth of Nepal. However, it has some weaknesses. One potential issue is the sample size of the data. The data sample for the final regression model included data from 1976-2019 i.e. 44 observations. This could lead to a poor sample since the central limit theorem suggests large datasets for the data to be normally distributed. However, this study has used the largest data set that was possible and while the data set is large enough to carry out statistical estimates, a larger dataset would have been preferable since lagging the variables during regression also caused losses in degree of freedom.

Apart from the limitation in statistical data, the study is also limited also due to the fact that remittances are also channeled through unofficial sources and are not officially recorded. The study incorporates remittances that have been sent only through official channels and thus, there is a strong possibility that a large portion of the remitted money has not been accounted for. As mentioned above, the dataset for remittances was taken from the data used by Uprety(2017) in his research- who originally used the dataset provided by Giuliano and Ruiz-Arranz(2009). So, a more accurate recording of remittance would help improve the results. Furthermore, since Nepal became a democratic country only in 2007, 13 years period of democracy used as dummy might not fully reflect the impact of governance on economic growth of the country.

Another concern of the study was in determining the lag length selection for variables. It is common to have a lagged relationship between the endogenous and exogenous variables in the model and while there have been some criterions to determine appropriate lag lengths (Akaike, Schwartz-criterion), there is a possibility that different results suggest different lag lengths. This research used Akaike Information Criterion(AIC) to select the most appropriate lag. Using the Schwartz criterion, in turn, indicated another lag selection of variables. After observing alternative models, the one with the lowest AIC value was preferred. The regression result with the lowest AIC value indicates that the variables that are being lagged show a stronger correlation with the dependent variable (GDP growth) and hence, lagging the variables would better explain the relationship between these variables more accurately since the correlation between variables is not fully observed in a single year time frame. Furthermore, the study uses the commonly practiced OLS model for linear regression. However, since the independent variables are co-integrated, there could be a possibility that the relationship between the variables is non-linear. Although the VECM does establish long-run pattern of

variables in question, limitation of VECM- especially in determining the exact impact of variables on economic growth- provides opportunities to analyze the relationship further using different theoretical considerations.

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- WDI, World Development Indicator data base (World Bank)

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## Household transitions to clean energy from traditional biomass in Nepal: Challenges and opportunities

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### Abstract

In recent years, the Nepal government has recognized and prioritized several clean energy initiatives in its national plans and policies. Despite this, more than two-thirds of households still rely on traditional biomass, as their primary source of energy, for cooking and heating, making the household fuelwood consumption per person in Nepal among the highest in the world. However, why households' transitions to clean energy for cooking is slow has been poorly understood. Using energy-specific information from the World Bank's Multi-Tier Framework (MTF) survey and the Nepal government's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), the cooking and heating energy consumption situation of households across the provinces by rural and urban areas is analyzed briefly. Also, a simple levelized cost of cooking is estimated using different fuel-technology combinations. The main findings of this paper are: limited availability, unreliable supply and high costs are hindering households' transitions to clean energy from traditional biomass; the combination of fuelwood, liquified petroleum gas and other clean energy sources (multiple fuel stacking) are common within the same household; and, the use of biogas, and to some extent, solar power, for cooking is limited to scale and geographical location. It is expected that electricity will be the most economic and common primary clean cooking energy option for households in the future provided that the government has the policy to address the reliability concerns of electricity and that it is affordable for low-income households.

**Keywords:** clean energy transitions; traditional biomass; electricity; households; Nepal

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## 1. Introduction

Traditional solid biomass<sup>1</sup> is the largest energy source in Nepal's total final energy consumption. Currently, fuelwood accounts for roughly 62% of the country's total final energy consumption (MOF, 2020b), considerably higher than most of the developing countries of the world<sup>2</sup> (IEA, 2020). Although its proportion in total final energy consumption has decreased by 16 percentage of points between fiscal year (FY) 2008/9 and 2018/19, the demand for fuelwood continues to rise in absolute terms. For example, fuelwood consumption has increased from 7.3 Mtoe in 2008/9 to 8.7 Mtoe in 2017/18, an increase of 19% (MOF, 2020b). As in many biomass-dependent developing countries, such as Sub-Saharan African countries (Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Tanzania, Namibia, Swaziland, and Mozambique) and South Asian countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and India), rural Nepalese households consume more fuelwood than urban households. The households in the mountains consume more fuelwood than the households in the hills, which consume more than those in the tarai.

Recognizing the heavy reliance on biomass and realizing the importance of clean energy as an input to the well-being and prosperity of people, the Nepal government has prioritized the United Nations-mandated energy initiatives, including Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially goal 7, in its national plans and policies. Notable targets set by these initiatives at the household level include making all households free of indoor air pollution by 2022, ensuring the availability of electric cookstoves to all households by 2028, and providing access to modern and clean energy to all households by 2030 (ADB, 2017; MoEWRI, 2018; NPC, 2020a). Likewise, SDG7 specific targets include increasing access to electricity from 74% in 2015 to 99% in 2030, reducing the share of biomass for cooking from 75% in 2015 to 30% in 2030, limiting the use of liquified petroleum gas (LPG) to less than 40% in 2030, and increasing per capita energy consumption from 16 GJ in 2015 to 24 GJ in 2030 (NPC, 2017). Also, under the "Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali" plan, the electricity consumption per person is expected to reach 3500 kWh in the next 25 years, which is more than fourteen times the current per capita consumption of 245 kWh (NPC, 2020b).

Besides, there are several acts, strategies, plans and policies initiated by the Nepal government on energy-related issues, such as National Water Resources Policy, 2077 (2020), National Climate Change Policy, 2076 (2019), National Energy Efficiency Strategy, 2075 (2018), Electric Cooktop Standard, 2075 (2018), Biomass Energy Strategy 2074 (2017), Electricity Regulatory Commission Act, 2074 (2017), Renewable Energy Subsidy Policy 2073 (2016), Rural Energy Policy 2063 (2006), National Electricity Crisis Resolution Action Plan 2065 (2008), Hydropower Development Policies 2049 (1992) and 2058 (2001), National Water Plan 2062 (2005), Water Resource Strategy 2058 (2002), Water Resources Act 2049 (1992), Electricity Act 2049 (1992),

1 Traditional solid biomass includes fuelwood, agriculture waste and animal dung. In this paper, fuelwood is focussed, as it dominates all available solid biomass.

2 For example, the share of biomass in total final energy consumption in 2017 is about 55% in Africa as a whole, 49% in Bangladesh, 46% in Pakistan, 33% in Sri Lanka, 29% in India, 25% in Asia (excluding India and China) as a whole, and 17% in China.

and Nepal Electricity Authority Act 2041 (1984) (MoEWRI, 2021; AEPC, 2021; MoFE, 2021). These initiatives, plans, and policies are critical for the country's future sustainable energy development and transitions to clean energy solutions for households. However, the lack of full understanding of why transitions to clean energy for households' cooking solutions is necessary may lead to misguided and ineffective implementation of energy plans and policies. There are several research studies on household energy use in Nepal. The focus areas of these existing studies vary widely from fuelwood use (Amacher et al., 1999; Baland et al., 2003; Baland et al., 2018; Fox, 1984; Kandel et al., 2016; Soussan et al., 1991) to modern energy use (Acharya and Adhikari, 2021; Bhandari and Pandit, 2018; Clements et al., 2020; Gross et al., 2017; Lam et al., 2017; Malla, 2013; Paudel et al., 2021; Pokharel and Rijal, 2021; Shahi et al., 2020) by households either at the national or local levels, and other wide range of issues, such as socio-economic, behaviors, and cultural factors (Acharya and Marhold, 2019; Das et al., 2019; Joshi and Bohara, 2017; Pokharel, 2004; Shrestha et al., 2020) that influence household energy consumption. However, these existing studies do not comprehensively address the household transition from traditional biomass to clean energy, especially for cooking. Nor do they account sufficiently for households' transition from biomass to clean energy sources. The main purpose of this paper is to advance the understanding of the complexities and shortcomings of households' heavy reliance on biomass and the slow transition to clean energy in the country. An energy-specific dataset compiled from the World Bank's MTF survey (World Bank, 2019) and the government's MICS (CBS, 2020) is used to analyze households' cooking energy patterns by rural and urban areas across the provinces. Also, a simple levelized cost of cooking is estimated using different fuel-technology combinations. Finally, the paper addresses the challenges and opportunities surrounding the move to clean energy solutions for households.

In the following section, a brief overview is provided of the country's current socio-economic and energy use profile at the provincial level. A brief description of data and methods is provided in Section 3. Results are discussed in Section 4 and the final section presents concludes.

## **2. Overview of province-level socio-economic and energy use**

Administratively, Nepal is federalized into 7 provinces, 77 districts, and 753 local governments. The country has three ecological belts (mountain, hill, and tarai). The provinces have significantly different demographic, economic, and climate conditions that influence the energy use patterns of households (Table 1). About 42% of the population lives in two provinces (2 and 3). The number of households is the highest (27%) in province 3 that includes Kathmandu valley. In 2019, three provinces (1, 2, and 3) accounted for two-thirds of the country's GDP, while province 6 accounted for the lowest (4%). The forest area coverage, which is a proxy for the availability of fuelwood, also varies widely, from a low 3% in province 2 to a high 19% in province 6.

Table 1 Province-level socio-economic and energy use in Nepal (2019).

	Province								Nepal
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	KTM <sup>φ</sup>	
Population* (%)	16.8	20.8	21.0	8.7	17.0	6.0	9.7	10.1	28.6 (million)
Household* (%)	17.4	19.4	22.6	9.8	17.5	5.6	7.7	10.5	6.3 (million)
Population density* (people/sq km)	175	559	272	112	202	56	131	3245	194
Contribution to GDP** (%)	16	14	36	9	14	4	7	-	3.5 (trillion NRs)
Forest area*** (%)	18.0	3.2	15.8	12.8	13.9	18.9	17.4	-	45
Grid-connected electrification rate <sup>†</sup> (%)	75.9	79.8	90.3	87.4	81.0	27.0	58.9	-	77.8
Electricity sales/household (kWh) <sup>†</sup>	402	409	758	390	493	93	242	-	472
Household electricity sales/total sales <sup>†</sup> (%)	41	34	52	55	37	68	54	-	44
Cooking with fuelwood/total fuels <sup>§</sup> (%)	63	54	25	50	61	89	79	5	54

Notes:  $\phi$  KTM is Kathmandu valley which is part of province 3. \* Estimated figures for 2017 taken from (Malla, 2021). \*\* (CBS, 2021). \*\*\* 2018 value taken from (DoFRS, 2018). <sup>†</sup> (NEA, 2020). <sup>§</sup> (CBS, 2020).

In terms of annual electricity consumption per household, province 6 has the lowest value (93 kWh) and province 3 has the highest value (758 kWh). Many factors contribute to the disparities in electricity consumption across provinces, including access to grid-connected electricity, economic conditions of households, and population density. Fuelwood is a source of primary fuel for cooking, and it remains significant in all provinces, ranging from a high 89% in province 6 to a low 25% in province 3. The actual quantity of fuelwood consumption varies across different climatic zones in the country, from warm tropical lowland in the south to the cold Himalayan mountain range in the north.

### 3. Data and methods

Household-specific energy consumption information is collected from the World Bank's MTF survey and the government's MICS. The MICS is supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS). Information on annual household energy consumption is collected from the United Nations (UN) and the International Energy Agency (IEA).

The MTF survey data was collected between July and December 2017 from 6000 households and the MICS data was collected between April and May 2019 from 12800 households. The MTF collected data on a topic of energy-access needs in the country and the MICS data focused on a wide range of indicators about children and women in the country, including household energy use. National-level data on different types of energy used in households was

collected from the UN and the IEA. Every year, the UN and the IEA collect and publish energy statistics for Nepal.

Since the focus is on household's cooking and heating end-uses, relevant cooking and heating datasets were, first, extracted from the MTF survey and MICS. Some examples of the information collected from these variables include whether a household is connected to the grid, off-grid, or has no electricity; willingness to pay for grid-connected electricity; the main source of lighting for children for study; problems associated with grid and off-grid electricity connections, such as damage to electric appliances due to voltage fluctuations; and whether monthly electricity bill is a financial burden to the family. Second, based on these datasets, simple descriptive statistics on household energy use patterns at disaggregated levels (provinces and regions) are estimated using a statistical software tool. The MTF and MICS include both categorical variables and numerical variables. For categorical variables, the percentage of households that fall into each analytical region was calculated, and for numerical variables, summary statistics that include the mean, the standard deviation, and median values for each analytical region were calculated. The UN and IEA datasets were used to evaluate the current household energy consumption status of Nepal compared to other developing countries in the world.

A simple leveled cost of cooking (sLCOC) by households was then calculated using different fuel-technology combinations. To estimate the annual simple leveled cost of cooking (sLCOC), the following equation is used:

$$sLCOC(d) = \left( \frac{C_d + O\&M_d}{n} \right) + \left( \frac{F_f}{CV_f} \times \frac{UE}{\eta_d} \right)$$

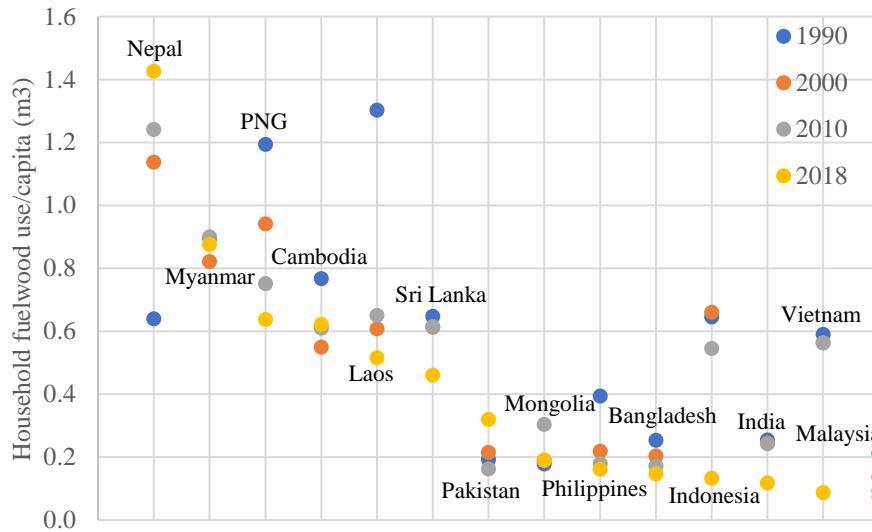
where  $C_d$  is the capital cost of device  $d$ ,  $O\&M_d$  is O&M cost of device  $d$ ,  $n$  is the device lifetime,  $f_i$  is the fuel cost of fuel type  $f$ ,  $CV_f$  the calorific value of fuel  $f$ ,  $UE$  is the annual useful energy requirement for cooking, and  $\eta_d$  is the thermal efficiency of device  $d$ . A leveled cost of cooking estimates the average annual cost of cooking using different fuel-technology combinations.

A very basic approach to calculating sLCOC is used, an approach in which the sum of capital and O&M costs (without discounting), and fuel costs (fixed) over the lifetime of cooking technologies (varying thermal efficiency) to meet the specific amount of useful energy requirements for preparing meals of a typical household is calculated. Also, several assumptions are made on the capital and O&M costs of cooking devices, their thermal efficiencies, and fuel prices (see Table 2 notes).

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 Household fuelwood consumption per person in Nepal is among the highest in the world.

Nepal has one the highest fuelwood consumption per person in the world and has continued to increase over the past three decades. For example, in 2018, household fuelwood consumed by each person was about 1.43 m<sup>3</sup>, an increase of more than two-folds from the 1990 level (0.64 m<sup>3</sup>). Nepal is ranked second in terms of per capita household fuelwood consumption in Asia (Figure 1) after Bhutan. Almost all fuelwood available in the country is consumed by households for their cooking and heating needs.

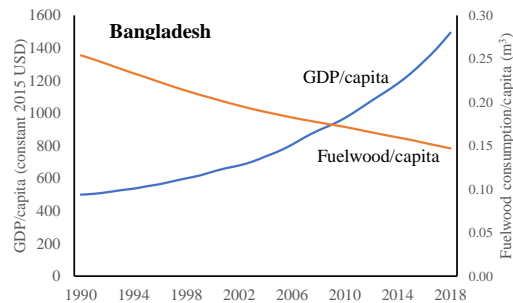
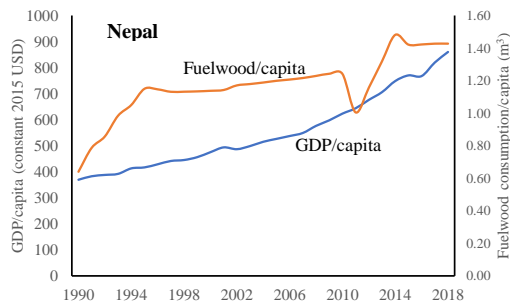


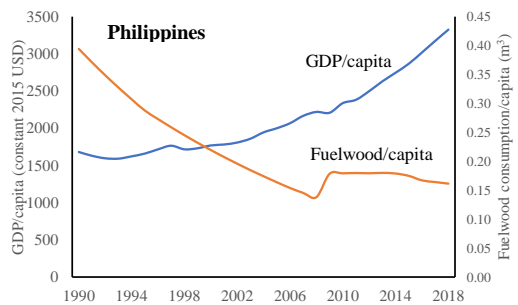
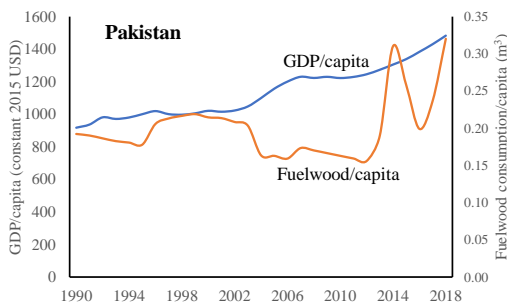
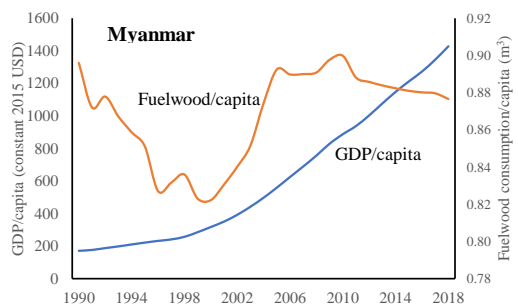
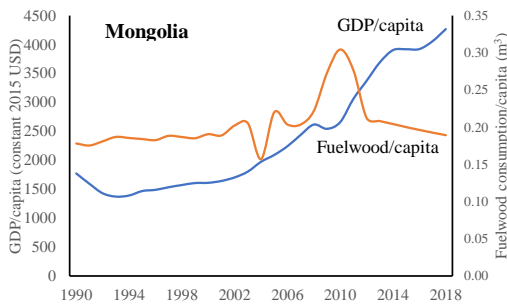
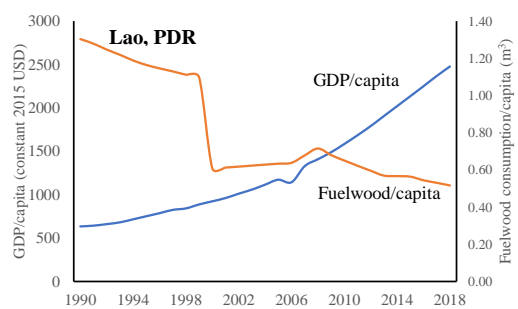
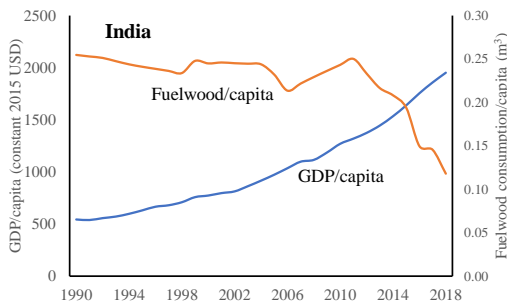
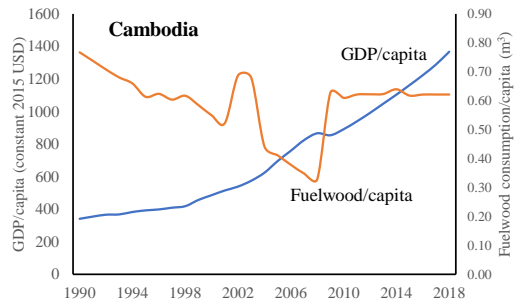
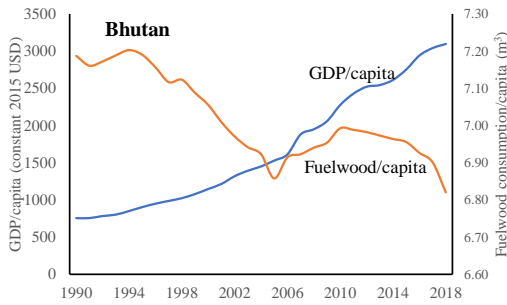
Notes: Bhutan, excluded for the clarity of the graph, has the highest fuelwood consumption per person in the world, ranging from 7.2 m<sup>3</sup> in 1990 to 6.8 m<sup>3</sup> in 2018.

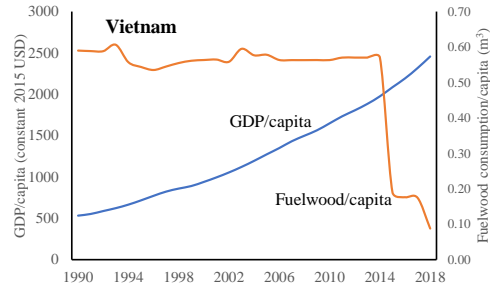
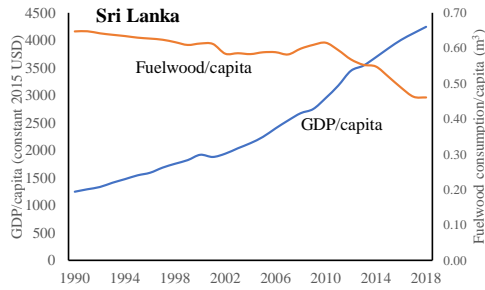
Source: (UNSD, 2021)

Fig. 1. Household fuelwood consumption per person in top 15 Asian countries from 1990 to 2018.

One of the key determinants of fuelwood consumption in households is income. In general, fuelwood consumption tends to decrease in proportion relative to modern fuel as household income increases. This is evident in many developing countries of Asia and other regions of the world. For instance, in per capita terms, residential fuelwood consumption declines or at least remains the same as the income rises, as Figures 2a and 2b show. This also indicates the evidence for the energy ladder hypothesis: households move towards modern energy sources as their income rises.



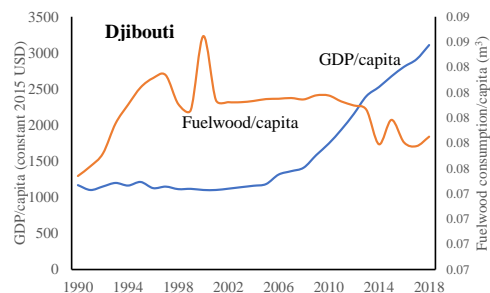
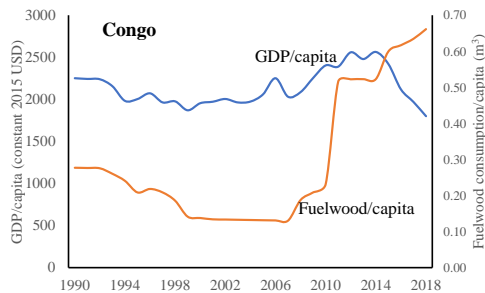
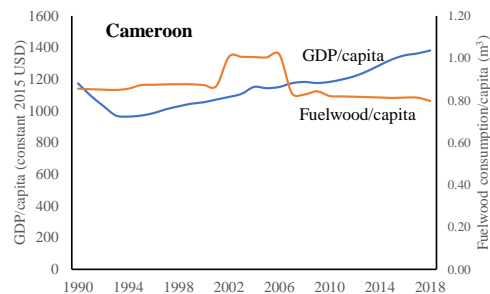
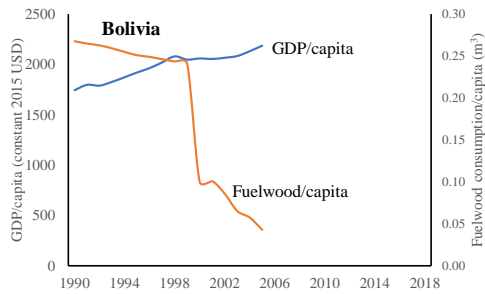
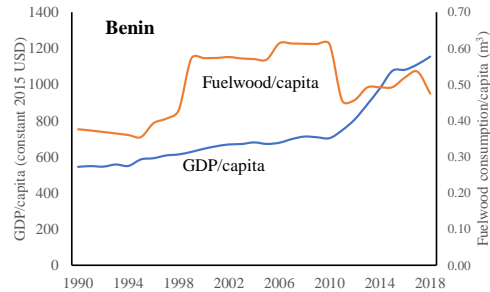
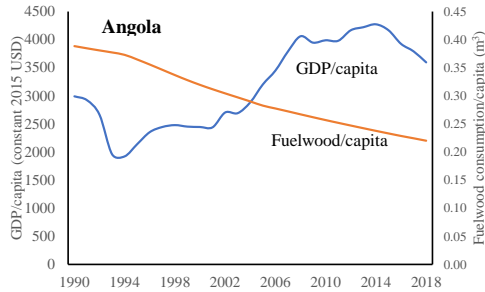


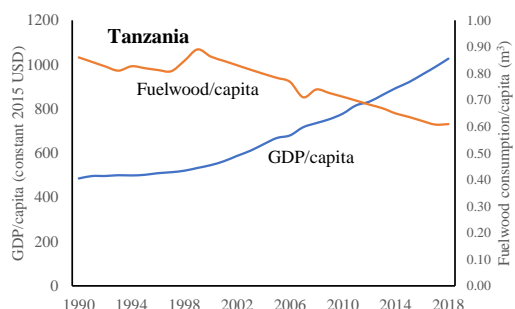
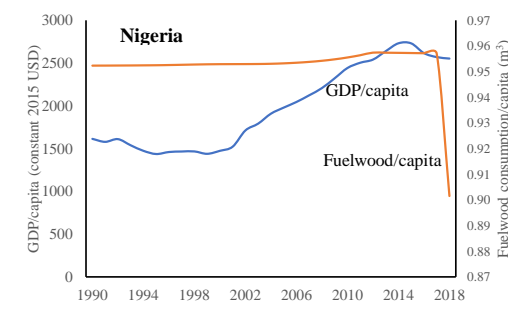
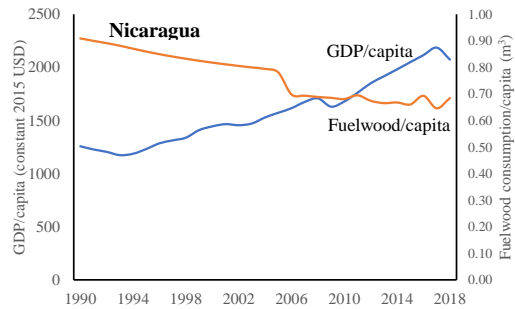
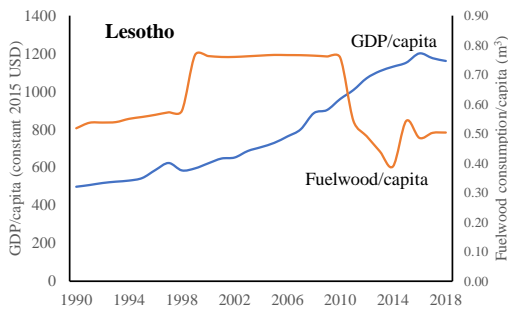
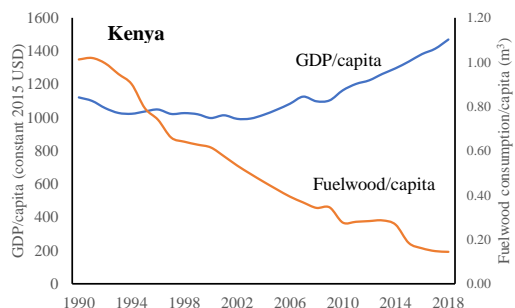
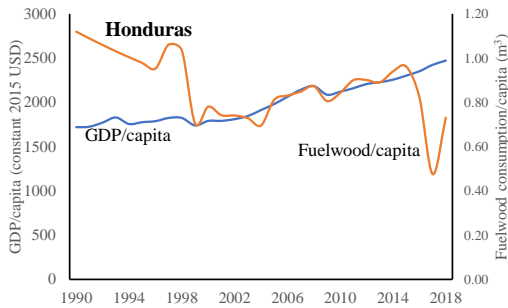
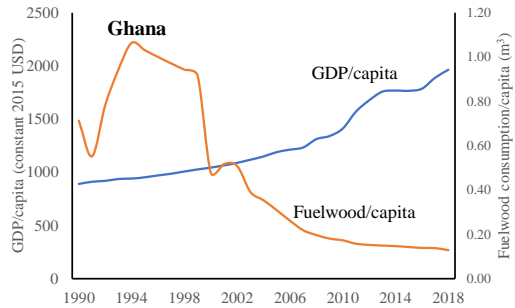
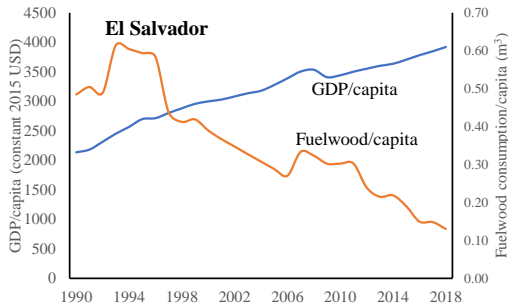


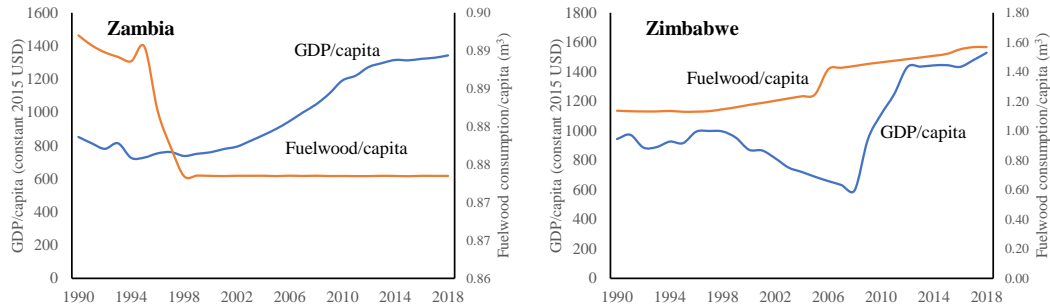
Notes: Countries are selected based on the predominance of household fuelwood consumption, the GDP per capita is less than USD4,500, and data availability.

Sources: (IEA, 2020; UNSD, 2021; World Bank, 2021).

Fig. 2a. Per capita relations between income and household fuelwood consumption in per capita for selected countries of Asia between 1990 and 2018.







Notes: Countries are selected based on the predominance of household fuelwood consumption, the GDP per capita is less than USD4,500, and data availability.

Sources: (IEA, 2020; UNSD, 2021; World Bank, 2021).

Fig. 2b. Per capita relations between income and household fuelwood consumption of selected countries of Africa and Latin America between 1990 and 2018.

However, this may not be the case in Nepal. Over the past three decades, fuelwood consumption by Nepalese households increased with a rising income with some variation (Figure 2a). Many factors might have influenced the evidence against the energy ladder hypothesis in Nepal as compared to opposite cases in other developing countries in Asia and other regions of the world. First, the hill and mountain regions of Nepal, where most of the fuelwood use is concentrated, differ from many other developing countries. Fuelwood is used by Nepalese households both for cooking and heating. Also, the forest conditions in the country, measured by forest cover and biomass, remain steady in the past two decades so. For example, MoFE (2018) reported an overall increase in forest coverage in the country based on the forest resource assessment from 2010 to 2014, despite a declining rate of forest loss in the tarai, about 0.44% per year during 2001-2010. Likewise, Hurni et. al. (2019) find forest cover in Nepal expanded from 26.2% in 1992 to 44.9% in 2016. This makes Nepal different from the global trend of deforestation in other developing countries. Second, Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) in the country helped protect, own, and manage forest resources and contributed to improving forest conditions. A study by Oldekop et al. (2019) finds community-based forest management has contributed to forest resurgence in most areas of the country. These conditions may have induced easy availability and collection of fuelwood for free in a controlled environment.

Fuelwood is also readily available for free from non-community forests and it does not require any processing before use. Further, fuelwood yields charcoal that is commonly used for some commercial purposes, such as by goldsmiths, hotels, and restaurants. This might have encouraged households to use more fuelwood than its modern substitute for charcoal and sell it in the informal market for financial gain. Third, the growing population combined with a lack of affordable, reliable, and sufficient supply of alternative, modern household energy resources, together with the successful promotion of improved cookstoves, likely have contributed to the country's heavy and continued reliance on fuelwood. For example, between 2008/09 and 2018/19, more than 1.1 million improved cookstoves that use fuelwood as their main fuel source were installed across the country (MoF, 2020b). Fourth, although common in other developing countries as well, smoke from burning fuelwood makes thatched roofs

insect- and water-repellent while helping preserve food stored in the rafters (Wood and Baldwin, 1985). These factors might have increasingly continued Nepal’s reliance on fuelwood (in per capita terms) as compared to other developing countries.

This heavy reliance on fuelwood is also evident from its share in the country’s total energy supply (TES). For example, over the past 40 years, the share of fuelwood in TES only slightly declined, from 74% in 1981 to about 62% in 2019 (MOF, 2011, 2020b). However, the supply of fuelwood, in absolute values, increased by almost three-fold, from 3.4 Mtoe in 1981 to about 8.7 Mtoe in 2019. This increasing trend of fuelwood use over the years is alarming. Without any targeted policy initiatives, this trend is likely to continue in the future that would negatively affect the country’s forest resources and climate, and the health of those who have been exposed to household air pollution, especially, women and children.

## 4.2 Electricity is likely the most economical cooking energy solution for Nepal.

A levelized cost of cooking estimates the average annual cost of cooking using different fuel-technology combinations. Excluding a 3-stone fuelwood cookstove, our initial assessment indicates that biogas is the most economical cooking energy solution for households, followed by fuelwood, LPG, electricity, and kerosene cookstoves (Table 2). Of course, many strong assumptions are made in ranking cooking energy solutions for households. For example, discounts or interest rates for the cost of capital of cooking devices are not accounted. Likewise, if fuelwood is collected for free, it would be the most economical cooking solution. In contrast, if all the fuelwood used is purchased, then it would become the least economical cooking solution.

Table 2 Simple levelized cost of cooking using different fuel–technology combinations for Nepal (NRs/year)

	Capital cost <sup>a</sup> (NRs)	O&M Cost <sup>b</sup> (%)	Device Life <sup>b</sup> (Year)	Device Efficiency <sup>c</sup> (%)	Fuel Cost <sup>d</sup> (NRs/unit)	Simplified LCOC (NRs/year)
<b>Fuelwood</b>						
3-stone cookstove	0	0	1	10	0	0
Traditional cook- stove (mud)	0	0	1	15	7.5	13165
Improved cookstove (two-pothole)	150–200	10	4	25–30	7.5	7222–7731
Metallic cookstove ( <i>Bayupankhi</i> )	600–1650	5	5	25–30	7.5	7303–9161
Kerosene pressure stove	1000	5	5	45–55	100	23324–24356
LPG stove	3500–4000	5	10	60–70	1350	13069–15102

Biogas stove	3500–4000	5	10	60–70	0	4.4 <sup>e</sup>
Electricity						
Coil	400–500	20	5	60	10	19113–21117
Hot plate	3500–4500	10	10	75	10	15598–20163
Induction	4000–5500	5	10	90	10	13098–15978

Notes: a) The value for fuelwood cookstoves is from (Thapa & Subba, 2015). Others are from authors' assumptions based on online market data and local news articles. b) Jain et al., 2015 and authors' assumption. c) Malla & Timilsina, 2014. d) The unit for fuelwood is in kg, kerosene is in a liter, LPG is in cylinder and electricity is in kWh. The fuel prices for kerosene and LPG are from (NOC, 2021), fuelwood is from local news articles, which is NRs 15 per kg in 2015 (it is assumed that half is collected free and half is purchased, i.e., NRs 7.5 per kg) and electricity is from (NEA, 2020). The calorific values (GJ/ton) used are 15.6 for fuelwood, 43.8 for kerosene, and 47.3 for LPG taken from (UN, 2018). It is assumed that 1 ton of kerosene is equivalent to 1.236 kl and 1 cylinder of LPG is equivalent to 14.2 kg. It is estimated that UE per person using 4.55 GJ for cooking meals (Pokharel, 2004) and 1.375GJ for snacks per household, with a household size of 6.2. To reflect the current household size, 4.3 is used (CBS, 2020) to estimate the annual useful energy required per household, which is 4.1 GJ (or 1140 kWh). The average value for the fuel cost to estimate sLCOC is used. e To estimate sLCOC for biogas, NRs 80,798 is used for 6 m<sup>3</sup> capacity of a biogas plant with lifetimes of 20 years (AEPC, 2015), which is NRs 4000 per year plus the Levelized cost of biogas.

Even if fuelwood is collected for free, adding health-related costs associated with air pollution from its use and the opportunity cost of time spent collecting it, the fuelwood would most likely be the least economical cooking solution. Also, any costs related to the lack of availability, affordability, and reliability of cooking with biogas, LPG, and electricity are not considered. Further, biogas may not be feasible in some regions in the country, while the supply of LPG is frequently disrupted due to economic blockade and political instability. However, one interesting finding is that kerosene is the least economical cooking solution. With subsidies removed in 2014, the use of kerosene has dramatically declined in the country. Indeed, the recent MTF and CBS surveys find that households no longer use kerosene for cooking. Although biogas is the most economical option, it might have many limitations. For example, its initial investment is huge, and it requires 36–45 kg dung, an equivalent of 4 cows, to produce 1.6 m<sup>3</sup> of biogas per day, which is good for cooking meals for a household with 5 people (AEPC, 2015). In the case of LPG, if the subsidy is removed, it will be less economical than electricity for cooking. Considering all these issues, our sLCOC analysis indicates that cooking with electricity is likely to be a promising clean cooking option.

### 4.3 High level of accessibility but low level of reliability and affordability of electricity use.

In recent years, Nepal has made excellent progress in improving access to electricity for its people. In just the last eight years, the percent of the country's population with access to electricity (grid and off-grid) increased from just over 28% 2000 to 94% 2018 (World Bank, 2020), and it is expected to reach 100% by 2024 (NPC, 2020b). Despite this improvement, Nepal's average household sector electricity consumption per person is one of the lowest in Asia. For example, in 2018, Nepal's per capita household electricity consumption (101 kWh) was less than half of India's consumption (207 kWh) and only about one-seventh of China's

consumption (704 kWh) (UNSD, 2021). Further, the electricity access is disproportionate across the regions and provinces in the country (Table 3). For instance, in rural areas, electricity from the grid and off-grid connections is still limited, even more so in provinces 6 and 7, where about half of the population currently does not have access to electricity. Another notable concern is that a significant proportion of the children who are enrolled in school still use kerosene lamps as the main source of light for study and homework.

The reliability of electricity is a concern. Households reported damage to their electric appliances caused by voltage fluctuations and frequent supply disruptions from grid-connected electricity, ranging from low of 4% of households in rural province 5 to high of 54% of households in rural province 2. Voltage fluctuations of off-grid electricity are even more severe across all the regions and provinces. There are also contrasting issues of affordability of electricity. On the one hand, a high percentage of households who do not have access to grid electricity is willing to pay for electricity connection, while a significant proportion of the households with access to electricity, both in rural and urban areas across the provinces, feel that their monthly electricity bill is a financial burden to the family (Table 3). These observations suggest that focusing only on increasing the proportion of households with access to electricity, as highlighted under the SDG7 initiative, may lead to misguided program and policy formulations to achieve the “electricity for all” goal set by the government. Both reliability and affordability of electricity must be prioritized as well by the government, especially in the regions and provinces where electricity from the grid is expected to expand in the future.

Table 3 Accessibility, reliability, and affordability metrics of electricity use by region and province in Nepal (% of total household)

	Rural							Urban							KTM *
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Access to electricity															
Grid	57	92	79	86	75	11	48	90	96	93	94	94	38	86	98
Off-grid	25	2	14	11	9	32	12	2	2	3	5	1	14	4	2
No electricity	17	7	7	2	16	57	41	8	2	4	1	5	49	10	0
WTP** for grid electricity	90	78	86	88	89	92	82	69	91	67	100	79	88	83	na
Kerosene lamp for study	28	57	12	32	12	9	28	25	57	4	31	23	7	37	na
EA damage (grid)	17	54	31	14	4	..	14	11	14	38	11	12	32	27	10
Voltage variation (off-grid)	81	..	88	71	68	25	61	53	..	..	..	100	38	44	na
Electricity bill burden***	24	34	11	21	19	25	53	31	47	15	17	17	15	46	27

Notes: \* KTM is Kathmandu valley, \*\* WTP is the willingness to pay, and \*\*\* Electricity bill burden is for grid-connected electricity. na is not applicable. Sources: (CBS, 2020; World Bank, 2019)

#### 4.4 Households' dilemma of fuel choice for their cooking and heating needs.

Unlike in many other countries, households in Nepal do not have many choices of energy sources for their cooking and heating needs. Solid biomass, mainly fuelwood, remains the main cooking fuel for most households. From more than two-thirds to as high as 90% of rural households in all provinces rely on fuelwood for cooking (Table 4). Even in urban households, cooking with fuelwood is significant, ranging from about 28% in province 3 to 82% in province 6. After fuelwood, LPG is ranked second for households' primary fuel choice for cooking, mainly in urban areas. Cooking with biogas and electricity is so far insignificant.

Table 4 Households' primary cooking fuels for cooking and heating by region and province in Nepal (% of total household)

	Rural							Urban							KTM*
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<b>Primary cooking fuels</b>															
Fuelwood	79	63	77	76	80	96	90	54	50	28	36	48	82	71	5
LPG	13	16	20	22	15	2	5	40	40	68	59	45	17	22	94
Biogas	3	1	2	2	4	0	2	3	1	2	5	5	0	5	0
Electricity	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	1
Others*	5	19	1	1	2	1	3	4	8	1	0	1	1	0	0
<b>Primary heating fuels</b>															
Fuelwood	70	47	86	77	81	91	71	58	49	50	56	66	75	55	14
Others**	13	18	1	1	7	1	2	10	13	3	2	8	1	3	9
Electricity	1	2	1	3	1	0	0	3	4	8	4	2	1	1	23
None	17	32	12	20	11	8	27	29	35	40	38	25	23	41	54

Notes: \* Mainly agriculture waste and animal dung. \*\* Mainly agriculture waste, charcoal, lignite, and solar.

Sources: (CBS, 2020; World Bank, 2019)

Households' reliance on fuelwood is likely to remain high unless collecting it for free from the forests declines and is available only for those who can purchase in the market. This will be challenging and even if households shift away from fuelwood, LPG and electricity are the only two fuel choices available for most households. LPG is a relatively clean and convenient fuel for cooking but it is not easily accessible and affordable for many rural households. Frequent supply disruptions and other risk factors, such as cylinder explosion and associated HAP, further complicate promoting LPG for cooking. Also, if subsidy for LPG is removed, it will less likely be used by households if alternative cheaper fuel choices are available. Since alternative fuel choices are limited, removing the LPG subsidy may push households back to using fuelwood unless electricity and biogas are available reliably and affordably. As for cooking fuel options, biogas and to some extent solar and bio-briquettes have limited expansion possibilities country-wide due to many geographical, technical, and financial constraints.

One interesting observation is the opposing trends of kerosene and LPG sales over the past 15 years (Figure 3). Kerosene subsidy reform in 2008 and the automatic petroleum products pricing mechanism in 2014 led to a sharp decline in kerosene consumption. This is evident from the MTF and MICS surveys that find households no longer using kerosene for cooking barring a few exceptions. Despite a steady rise in its retail price, LPG sales have increased at an average annual rate of 13% in the past 15 years. This increase in LPG demand is mainly driven by urban households having easy access, affordability, and most importantly, lacking alternative modern cooking fuels.

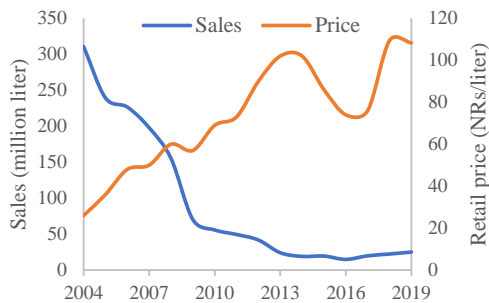


Fig. 3a. Kerosene sales and retail prices

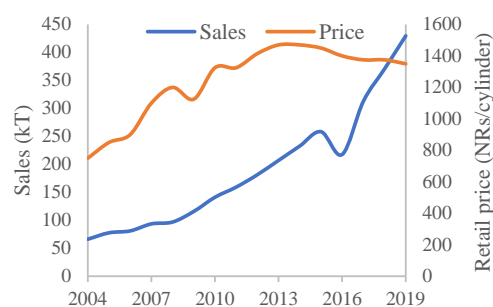


Fig. 3b. LPG sales and retail prices

Source: (NOC, 2021)

Fig. 3. Historical trends of kerosene and LPG sales and their retail prices (2004-2019).

There are some recent encouraging government steps towards making electricity accessible and affordable. Some of these steps include the allocation of NRs 4 billion for rural electrification under the “Bright Nepal” initiative in the budget speech of FY 2020/21 (MOF, 2020a). Further, under the alternative energy program, the government also allocated NRs 4.13 billion. One interesting and important step includes the provision for incentives for the use of electric appliances, including electric stoves. Also, the government has arranged to provide free electricity to households that consume up to 10 units per month, a 25% discount to those consuming up to 150 units per month, and a 15% discount to those consuming 250 units per month. This is an important step towards making electricity available for not only lighting but also for cooking.

#### 4.5 Disaggregated energy consumption data and digitization is currently not available.

The Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation (MoEWRI), the UN, and the IEA are the three primary sources of Nepal’s energy consumption statistics. The official energy statistics are published through reports from three government institutions: the Water and Energy Commission Secretariat (Synopsis Report), the Ministry of Finance (Economic Survey), and the Central Bureau of Statistics (Statistical Yearbook). It is important to emphasize that these datasets should be available at the provincial level by urban and rural areas and by energy-consuming sectors to be more policy-relevant. The UN and the IEA also publish the country’s annual energy consumption statistics. These data are available for different energy-

consuming sectors. The UN data is freely available, while the IEA data is available only for purchase.

Despite its importance in Nepal's energy system, the quality of available energy consumption statistics is poor and their geographical and sector coverage is limited. For instance, substantial differences and uncertainties exist in the country's fuelwood consumption statistics published by national (official) and international organizations. Depending upon the topography and the level of development of different regions of the country, there are wide variations in household fuelwood consumption ranging from 400 kg to 700 kg per person per year (Malla, 2021). Therefore, the concepts and definitions and the conversion factors used in estimating biomass energy consumption should be documented for meaningful comparison with other fuels. Energy data digitization is also lacking in the country. Most of the available energy data from government sources are in portable document formats which are very difficult and time-consuming for researchers, policymakers, and other end-users to dissect and process. These energy datasets must be made available by the government in a digital (computer-readable) format.

## **5. Policy recommendations**

Nepalese households rely heavily on traditional biomass, mainly fuelwood, for their cooking and heating needs. It is a growing problem because using fuelwood for cooking is associated with many negative health and environmental impacts. Despite the government's efforts over the past two decades or so, households' transitions from biomass to clean energy have not picked up as expected. Many factors are attributed to such a slow transition to clean energy. The lack of alternative clean energy sources that are affordable and reliable is key among other factors. Fuelwood is still readily and freely available in many areas across the county and LPG use is mostly concentrated in urban areas with frequent supply disruptions. Other factors include unreliable grid and off-grid electricity supply due to frequent outages and voltage fluctuations and households' limited ability to pay for electricity bills, despite the percentage of people with access to electricity has improved in recent years. Also, cooking with biogas and solar is limited both in scale and geographic location.

As hydropower projects are expected to expand rapidly in the country, electricity will likely be the main clean energy cooking option in the future. However, the government will need to pursue decentralized and innovative clean energy policy efforts and initiatives that make electricity reliable and affordable for low-income households. Particularly, provinces 6 and 7 should be given top priorities, where the level of clean energy use by households is very low. Recent government initiatives, such as providing free electricity to low electricity-consuming households, and incentives for the use of electric cookstoves, are encouraging steps. Also important is the policy that targets awareness of clean cooking, including benefits related to health, gender, social, and time savings from moving away from fuelwood cooking. To measure the success of these efforts requires the availability of disaggregated good quality data of household energy use across all end-uses by region and province. The digitization data, which is currently lacking, is also necessary.

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Sunil Malla is an independent research consultant. Sunil is also currently working as a short-term consultant for the World Bank. Before becoming an independent consultant, he worked as a senior researcher and faculty (adjunct) at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand. He has also worked as a researcher and a consultant for United Nations Environment Programme and Asian Development Bank. His multidisciplinary research focuses on modeling, management, and policy options in innovative sustainable energy development, energy markets, energy efficiency, air pollution, and access to clean energy cooking with special emphasis on developing countries. He received his Ph.D. in economics from the University of Hawai'i – Manoa (USA), M.E. in energy technology from AIT (Thailand), and B.E. in electrical engineering from the National Institute of Technology – Rourkela (India)



## Nepal's growing dependency on food imports: A threat to national sovereignty and ways forward

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### Abstract

Nepal's food imports are growing at an alarming rate. Recent reports suggest a 65% jump in the imports of the key agricultural products between 2015 to 2020. It signals not only the growing dependency trends but also raises serious questions about the future of the agricultural sector in the country--a potential threat to national security and sovereignty. While the topic receives regular media coverage, rarely examined are the historical contexts and the socio-economic, (geo)-political, and cultural drivers of the growing dependency on food imports. Using a political economy approach, we take a systematic look at the food production and import trajectories along with a set of historically important internal and external factors affecting Nepal's food systems. The main objective of this paper is to examine how Nepal became a net food importer in recent decades and discuss some potential ways forward. We argue that while the sharp rise in food imports is unprecedented for Nepal's historically agriculture-based economy, it is hardly surprising in a globalized world; it is emblematic of the global decline of subsistence agriculture in the face of the wider market economy. We conclude that the changes in Nepal's food production and import trajectories are largely influenced by four key interconnected endogenous and exogenous drivers: 1) the politics of modernization and economic growth affecting the agriculture and food systems, 2) regional geopolitics and increasing economic/market dependence, 3) ineffective government policies on food production and imports, and 4) political instability and insurgency forcing migration and off-farm incomes.

**Keywords:** agriculture; food import-export; dependency; food security; food sovereignty; political-economy and policies

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## **1. Introduction**

There is a growing recognition that Nepal is becoming a country dependent on the food imports to meet its domestic demand. The irony is that Nepal is historically known for its agriculture-based economy, and yet, the food import is growing at an alarming rate in recent years. Recent media reports suggest a 65% jump in the import of key agricultural products between 2015/16 to 2019/2020 (Prasain, 2020). In the 2020 fiscal year alone, the country imported agricultural products worth Nepali Rs 243 billion, out of which NRs 79 billion was for food commodities and the rice import was 75% of the total food imports (Himal Khabar, 2021). These media reports certainly signal Nepal's growing dependency trends, but these also raise serious questions about the future of agricultural sector in the country, which potentially could pose a threat to the national security and sovereignty. While the topic itself receives regular media coverage, rarely examined are the historical contexts and the socio-economic, political, and cultural drivers of the growing dependency on the food imports.

This paper examines the issue of a growing dependency on the food import in Nepal. As social scientists who have closely observed and studied Nepal's agriculture and food systems for decades, we believe that this case is not just concerning, but it is also exemplifying a bigger picture of the changes in agriculture and food systems occurring at the global scale. In this paper, we argue that the sharp rise in the food import of the last decades is unprecedented and troubling, given Nepal's historically agriculture-based economy. However, Nepal's growing dependency on the food imports is hardly surprising in a globalized world; it is emblematic of the global decline of subsistence agriculture due to the penetration of the wider market economy into rural life. To support our main thesis, we apply a political economy approach that takes temporal and spatial perspectives: 1) to systematically study the current state of agriculture and food productions and imports in Nepal, and 2) to analyze a set of historically important internal and external factors affecting Nepal's agriculture and food production systems. The main objective of the paper is to illustrate how Nepal turned into a net food importer within the last few decades despite the agriculture-based economy and discuss some potential ways forward, mainly the lessons learned from other comparable countries.

In the following sections, this paper will first examine the status and the meaning of troubling scenarios of food import, followed by the detailed discussions on the historical trends and their socio-economic, cultural, and political drivers. We particularly elaborate on the historical facts and drivers of the changes in food production and distribution as well as larger agricultural systems in Nepal, specifically looking into three key interconnected drivers: 1) the politics of economic growth (or modernization) affecting the agriculture and food systems, 2) regional geopolitics and increasing economic/market dependence, 3) ineffective government policies on food production and import, and 4) political instability and insurgency forcing migration and off-farm incomes. This paper will then provide some insights and lessons from other countries and recommend a set of ways forward for Nepal.

## **2. Status of food imports and some troubling scenarios**

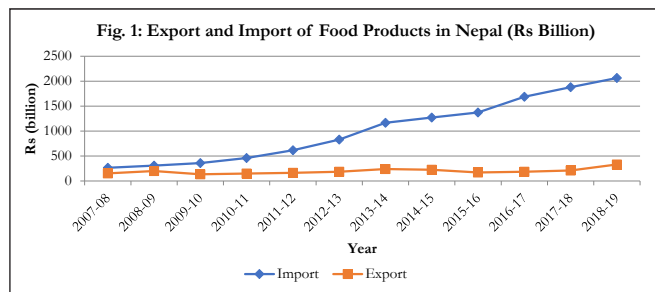
Nepal is currently in a paradoxical position in terms of economic development. A large majority of the population is engaged in agriculture, and yet, this sector's contribution to national gross domestic product (GDP) is declining fast. In 2019/20, the agriculture sector

contributed 27.7 % to the GDP of about \$22 billion as compared to 37.1% in 2010/11 (MoF 2020: 67). In 2008, the agriculture sector employed 73.9% of the population, but this number declined to 60.4% in 2018 (CBS 2008, 2018). In contrast, the non-agriculture sector contributed about 72.3% to the GDP in 2019/20, of which only about 13% came from the industrial sector and the rest (about 60%) came from the service sector. It is widely believed that the growth in the service sector has been possible because of the growing remittances from migrant workers working in foreign countries (e.g., Gulf countries, Malaysia). This is supported by the fact that by 2018/2019, about 3.2 million Nepali became migrant workers (CBS 2018/2019). From 2008/09 to 2018/19, the government of Nepal (GoN) issued over 4 million labour permits to work in foreign countries--except in India where work permits are exempted per the Nepal-India Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950. The total remittance from these migrant workers constituted NRs 879.3 billion (about \$8.79 billions) in 2018/19, which is over a quarter of national GDP (GoN/MoLESS, 2020: p3). Most of the remittance income is believed to be spent on foods, consumer goods, education, health, and some real estate purchases.

Although the import of food started to increase in the early 1990s, the dependence on food import has been growing alarmingly in the two decades. Ramesh Kumar writes in a popular weekly Nepali Times:

*“A typical urban Nepali kitchen is globalised these days: there is rice grown in India, soybeans from the United States, the garlic is from Shandong in China, the chilies are Vietnamese. Vegetables are cooked in soybean oil from as far away as Paraguay, the small cardamom is from Guatemala and even the dal lentil is from Tanzania. Other food essentials could be from Australia, Ukraine, Indonesia, or Argentina. Even staples like rice and dal, vegetables, and spices are not likely to be home grown. Despite this growing dependency on food imports, Nepal still officially describes itself as an agriculture-based economy (Kumar, 2020)”.*

This is no exaggeration. It captures the household experience in rapidly changing Nepal—more urbanized and “modern” but heavily dependent on imports for domestic consumption. Food grains like rice, wheat flour and lentils even in remote villages that used to be once domestically supplied are now largely reliant upon imports from India. As shown in Figure 1,

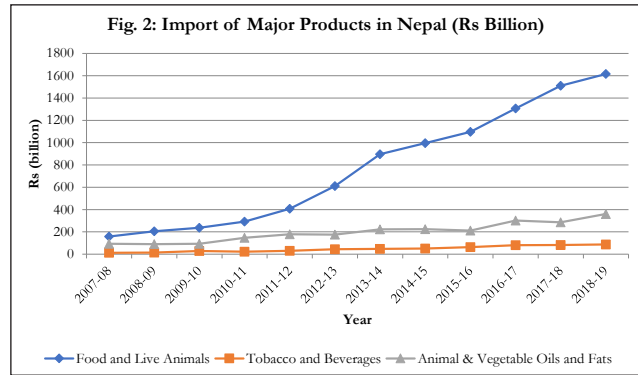


Data source: Economic Survey (2019/20. p.72 Annex)

food imports have been constantly rising in the last two decades. In 2007/08, the trade deficit in food products in Nepal was NRs 11 billion, but it increased to Rs 173 billion in 2018/19, which is the 16 times increase in about a decade. In 2018/19, Nepal imported about 14 million MT of cereals (e.g., rice, maize, and wheat), but exported almost none. Kumar (2020) further writes “Nepal is now importing 80% of the grain it consumes, and spending on food imports has increased 62% in the last five years (Kumar, 2020). Similar trends are reported in the

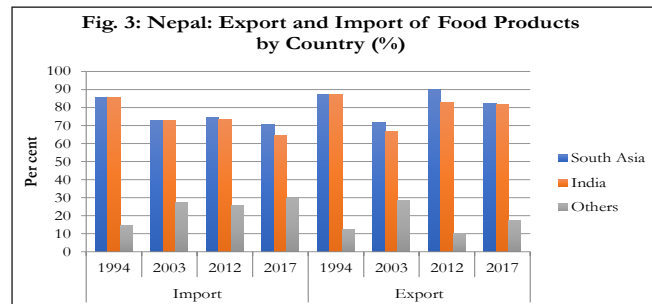
imports of other food products, meat and fish, tea/coffee, and spices” (Prasain 2019).

Importing some agricultural commodities to meet the domestic demand has become a common practice in a globalized economy; however, it can be a serious issue when the export from the country stays stagnant or declines while the imports jump at an alarming rate—it grows the country’s dependency on foreign countries and could potentially create nonmilitary threats to national security and sovereignty (Fullbrook, 2010). In the case of



Data source: Economic Survey (2019/20, p.72 Annex)

Nepal, its trade deficit in food products has increased rapidly since the early 2010s (Fig 1). More importantly, the imports of “food and live animals” have grown significantly in this



Data source: Calculated based on data available on ‘World Integrated Trade Solutions’ ([https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/NPL/Year/2017/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/all/Product/16-24\\_FoodProd](https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/NPL/Year/2017/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/all/Product/16-24_FoodProd)).

period, even though the imports of “tobacco and beverages” and “animal and vegetable fats and oils” are relatively flat (Fig 2). Nepal has a smaller export portfolio, mainly selling some commodities, mainly soyabean and vegetable oil, to India. However, the trade deficit with India has been constantly growing, particularly in agricultural commodities and consumer goods (see Fig 3).

Pandey and colleagues (2014) argue that the 1996 Trade Treaty between India and Nepal boosted India as the major trading partner of Nepal. Among the six agricultural commodities included in the study (i.e., jute, pulses, spices, wheat, tea, and fresh vegetables), India is reported to have competitive advantage in all export commodities, including jute—a major export of Nepal to India in the past. Even in pulses and tea, in which Nepal has more suitable climatic conditions, Nepal continues to see a decline in both production and export for a variety of reasons. The decline in pulses or lentils, which is a prerequisite to Nepal’s staple diet of *Dal-Bhat*, and a major source of protein for the people, especially poor, Nepal is alarming. A recent study confirms the constant decline in lentil productivity and total volume, mostly owing to crop failures caused by climate variability, modest yields, and low levels of profitability (Paudel et al 2020). Until recently, Nepal was one of the world’s top producers of lentils – it was the seventh biggest producer of lentils in the world in 2018, producing almost 250,000 MT (Joshi, 2020). Until 2014, Nepal exported lentils, especially to Bangladesh and it had continued despite low yields compared to other countries. In recent years, however, both India and Bangladesh

have prioritized lentils, and have provided subsidies and support to farmers, which have boosted productivity (Joshi, 2020) and increased export volumes. Nepal started importing lentils around 2015, as domestic production was not keeping up with the domestic demand.

Two areas in which Nepal has increased domestic production in recent years are poultry and vegetables. In these two areas too, Nepal continues to rely on imports for animal feeds and seeds. As a result, the import of maize is growing high and about 60% of which is used in poultry feed. In recent years, maize worth Rs 12 billion is being imported annually, and most of it is imported from India (Guragain, 2019). The growing dependence on these agricultural inputs is also of significant concern. This trend is true in agriculture production as well. In 2020, the GoN faced a serious public backlash for its inability to import a large amount of chemical fertilizer from foreign companies. As illustrated in Table 1, the demand for pesticides started to increase steadily from 2012/13 to 2016/17, and almost all of those were fulfilled by imported and/or formulated. This is representative of a growing trend of dependence on imports in the agricultural sector in Nepal. The growing imports of seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, machinery equipment, and in some cases farm laborers from India only add more to the ever increasing and already complex dependency on food imports.

**Table 1: Pesticides Imported and Formulated in Nepal (2012 – 2017)**

Year	Pesticides	Liquid a.i. (Kg)	Solid a. i. (Kg)
2012/2013	Insecticides	99607.42	39154.24
	Fungicides	319.6	163571.2
	Herbicides	97025.02	3808.26
2013/2014	Insecticides	123799.24	38526.76
	Fungicides	7290.63	184913
	Herbicides	76355.65	13771.34
2014/15	Insecticides	117314.52	38727.41
	Fungicides	782.52	250025.32
	Herbicides	118391.43	15465.95
2015/16	Insecticides	140277.18	40993.69
	Fungicides	727.92	246747.35
	Herbicides	113598.03	20634.34
2016/17	Insecticides	122713.17	46646.83
	Fungicides	1651.25	346055.97
	Herbicides	70357.13	35088.31

(Source: CBS 2019)

As alarming as these food import facts are, these are not ahistorical; these can be explained well by closely examining the historical roots and contexts of Nepal's agriculture and food production systems that the economic relations and networks at a regional scale, especially with India with which Nepal shares an open border and close socio-economic and cultural ties. In fact, every aspect of Nepal's current agriculture and food systems is linked to the economic

and trade policies with India, and hence, is influenced by the agricultural and economic policies of India. These changes started to happen mainly after the restoration of democracy in the 1990s, which among other things, also saw the rise in trade between the two countries. This trend only accelerated in the 2000s and 2010s.

### **3. Historical trends and their drivers**

#### **3.1 The politics of modernization and economic growth affecting the agriculture and food systems**

Although food import is growing rapidly in recent decades, Nepal has faced issues and challenges in food production and security throughout history. For most Nepali, life has always been hard, and yet, country overall was largely self-sufficient in food production. The problem was of course with the feudalistic food distribution or uneven access to food, coercive measures of the state, and exploitative agrarian structure (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999), which kept the agricultural sector focused on stability and sustenance of the feudalistic structure for much of Nepal's history. There have been three major historical milestones in Nepal's political and economic history since 1950 when the country embraced democratic governance after disposing of the autocratic Rana regime. Dividing Nepal's historical timelines into three time periods—all representing historically the most significant political and economic changes in the country—is helpful in describing the changes seen in Nepal's agriculture and food systems

##### ***3.1.1 The pre-1950 period of feudalistic nationalism in Nepali agriculture***

Food sufficiency has historically been part of the economic self-reliance mantra of Nepali nationalism. King Pratap Malla (14th century) checked on every household to make sure enough food supply for a season. King Prithvi Narayan Shah, the founder and uniter of modern Nepal, famously in his Ditya Upadesh preached the economic, cultural, and social self-reliance from the colonial forces. However, the rise of Janga Bahadur Rana as the ruler after a coup and his famous trip to Europe in 1850 set the new era of the “modernization” concept in Nepal, especially with the introduction of mechanical technology from British India and new trade relations between these countries. This “modernization” meant mimicking the western ideals and standards in Nepali irrigation canals, land use classification, revenue records, and taxation policies. The ruler and elites were the direct beneficiaries of this modernization drive, as food supplies to the towns and urban centers were used as a primary tool to retain the regime. One of the main aims of the early public food distribution system in Nepal was to maintain the army and bureaucracy's loyalty to these ruling families (Adhikari and Bohle, 1999). In other words, the Rana regime used western ideals and standards to further the feudalistic control over food systems.

During this period, several famines and hunger were reported in the region, mainly the 1900 and 1943 famines in India (Mukerjee, 2013). In contrast, Nepal did not suffer the way India did. Nepal managed to be food self-sufficient at the country level, even though the inequality and food shortage existed in many parts of the country. It is interesting that Nepal had in fact supplied food grains to the Bengal famines as a gift to support people, and Nepal's Tarai also received refugees from India. Damodaran writes “many of the surviving peasants in Purnea migrated to Nepal where the state was less confiscatory than the East India Company” (Damodaran, 2007: p148). This was also coincided with the Rana ruler parceling out Tarai land

to those close to the power through *birta* (a land grant to individuals) and opening the frontier land for resettlement of the hill migrants with the hope of raising revenue from land resources. The Rana regime's plan hit the major road block; it was the malaria infestation in the Tarai jungles, which created reluctance among the potential hill migrants. Many Nepalis instead migrated to the hills of northeastern India like Assam, Darjeeling, and Sikkim. Some fled because of coercive labour required for the unification process (Caplan, 1970; Nakane, 1966) while others were forced to work, often without wages or food support, for the state and for the ruling class (e.g., supporting armed service with transportation, carrying mails, and supplies and building palaces, temples, forts).

All in all, much of the Rana regime's machinery centered on extending their rule and the centralization of resource extortion to benefit the ruling class. The Rana regime was so self-serving that they provided British colonial interests with access to Nepal's forest resources, people (mercenary army) and trade—all in return for the revenues to maintain the regime and acquiring luxury goods from the colonial centers. Gurkha soldiers fought on behalf of the British regime in two World Wars and several other smaller wars. Historians argue that Nepal faced a severe shortage of labour in the hills and mountains, while thousands of Nepalis sacrificed their lives to protect the British empire (Onta, 2016; Ahmadzadeh, 2017). Although much is unknown about the direct and indirect impacts of this form of labor migration on Nepal's agriculture, it is safe to argue that the absence of able-bodied men in the household meant women had to shoulder the burden of running households and worse, caring for disabled family members.

### **3.1.2 The 1950-1990 period of modernization and development interventions**

After the fall of the Rana Regime in 1950, Nepal underwent some transformative changes in political and economic policies, which in turn, profoundly influenced the agricultural sector. Nepal formally opened to the outside world and diplomatic ties with western countries were formally established. Largely influenced by the western industrialization ideas, Nepal became a recipient of the “modern development” ideas and interventions, and agriculture development was the primary target. The western donors like the USA leveraged its financial resources and strategic interest to play a leading role in the modernization of state machinery, particularly in agricultural production, land management, and natural resource extraction. The government in partnership with the US agencies organized the first conference to develop the agriculture sector in 1958, which clearly portrayed a gradual decline of agricultural outputs and eventual collapse of subsistence farming systems in Nepal. Referencing a large-scale migration of seasonal workers from Nepal to neighboring countries, the agricultural minister opined at the conference:

*“Those who are compelled to leave their birthplaces to seek livelihood outside their country spend the most valuable periods of their lives making other's homes prosperous. Once they are physically disabled, weak, and disease-ridden, do they return to their homeland? In this condition, they can no longer work for themselves or the country. They remain hungry and thirsty. .... We have to solve these problems by adopting various measures to improve agricultural productivity” (Dahal, 1997: p150).*

Thus began the massive migration and resettlement plans in Tarai. With the help of the US Mission to Nepal (later the USAID), malaria was eradicated using DDT, which paved the way

for resettlement projects (Robertson, 2018) and eventually helped Nepal acquire more fertile land to produce more food while reducing the population pressure in the hills. The government also attempted to address the unequal agrarian structure through a land reform program in the late 1950s. The western countries, mainly the USA (through the Ford Foundation), were keen to pursue this project, not as a matter of social justice but were mostly driven by the Cold War era fear of the communist uprising sweeping through Asia, often triggered by rampant inequality and food shortage. The issue of land reform, unfortunately, raised alarm among the wealthy landlords connected with the military and the ruling families, who later supported the royal coup of 1960 and helped dispose of the democratically elected government that was attempting land reform and agricultural change. In later years, land reform was implemented as a populist agenda but did not result in any fruitful outcome, as evident with the Land Reform Act 1964, which could only appropriate about 1.5 % of the surplus land (Adhikari, 2009).

Since the mid-1970s, there was a growing push for adopting new mechanization technologies modelled after the Green Revolution success in India (see Section 3.2) and promoting monoculture of agricultural commodities suitable for the market. As a result, a culture of buying food from the market rather than solely relying on subsistence farming became a step toward modernization—a symbol of progress or *bikash* (Pigg, 1992; Shrestha, 1997). As Berry (1977) cautioned in the case of agricultural change happening in the US, agriculture as a way of life was also changed to “agri-business” to be done by few people in larger farms, farming for higher profit rather than better health and better food.

### ***3.1.3 The post-1990 period of economic liberalization and market-driven agricultural policies***

Another major milestone in Nepal’s political and economic history was the 1989-1990 period when the democracy restoration movement forced the king to accept multi-party democratic system. In this period, Nepal also adopted economic reform policies—in the form of deregulation and expansion of market economy—pushed by the donor agencies in Nepal, which was mirrored other low-income countries worldwide. The immediate economic impacts were obviously felt in the agriculture and food systems, mainly the privatization of national industries and public corporations directly and indirectly connected with agricultural commodities (e.g., jute, sugarcane, tobacco, fertilizer). Beyond the privatization, economic liberalization policies also enhanced market access for business communities of Nepal and India. Through this process, Nepal started to see subsistence agriculture as the barrier to the modernization, but soon fell into the trap of being dependent on India for meeting domestic demands.

One major turning was the 1996 Trade Treaty with India, which only intensified Nepal’s economic ties with the market networks of India (Pandey et. al., 2014). First, there was a big bump in the investments in Nepal from Indian companies (e.g., Dabur, Colgate-Palmolive) which enabled Indian brands to directly access Nepali raw materials as well as the market. Besides creating new market opportunities for Indian companies in Nepal, this period of economic liberalization also brought major shifts in the flow of consumer goods, including food and agricultural commodities in Nepal (e.g., food grains, oil, seeds, fertilizer). All these changes were occurring while the country was attempting some major policy changes in the

agricultural sector, essentially promoting “market-driven” agricultural development policies (e.g., Agricultural Perspective Plan of 1995) and subsequent policies driving the agricultural value-chain model, in which subsistence agriculture is seen as a barrier to modernization. Cumulative effects were unfavorable to Nepali subsistence farmers, and subsistence farming started to be perceived as impractical and obsolete in the face of a rising production cost and cheaper alternatives flooded from the Indian market network.

The restoration of democracy also meant individual freedom. Unlike the Panchayat period when individual’s freedom and foreign trips were restricted, the new political change allowed individuals to freely move about anywhere in the country and could easily get a passport to travel abroad. While foreign travel itself was not a new phenomenon—some Nepalis traveled abroad before (e.g., British Gurkha), Nepali youth population was soon attracted to employments in foreign countries (e.g., Gulf countries, Japan, Korea, Malaysia). This triggered an exodus of youth labor from farming to off-farm employment abroad, which resulted in the abandonment of distant cultivated lands (Khanal et. al., 2006) and growing competition for prime, irrigated lands in the valleys and those near the markets (Shrestha, 2014). Unlike the remittance from the British Gurkha regiments employment, the remittance sent by these workers was no longer being reinvested in agriculture, since the migration to urban areas in search of a more comfortable life (education and health access) accelerated and more households became dependent on the market for household consumption. As the reliance on the market for food and consumer goods increased, so did the competitive advantage of India in supplying foods and other household goods. By the 1990s, India was rebounding with higher productivity and volume in agricultural commodities, mainly riding on the success of the Green Revolution and favorable policies and support from the government in the agricultural sector. India’s competitive advantage simply overwhelmed Nepal.

### **3.2 Regional geopolitics and economic relations**

Rebounding from several historic famines and food shortage issues, India successfully innovated and implemented the Green Revolution from the early 1960s, which helped India achieve a surplus in food production by the late 1980s. Although there were several downsides (e.g., environmental impacts, growing inequality), the Green Revolution managed to increase domestic production of food grain from 83 million tons in 1960-61 to 252.7 million tons in 2014-15; the Yield rate of all cereals increased from 710 kg/ha in 1960-61 to 1734 kg/ha in 2001-02 (Chaudhary, 2017: p107 and p110). It has reached a new height that India now has a problem in surplus grain management (RBI, 2020). Expanding the market network for the agricultural commodities in foreign markets was an obvious choice and the 1996 Trade Treaty between India and Nepal was just part of the broader strategies of India. Interestingly, while India thrived in the success of higher productivity of their agricultural commodities, Nepal reversed the role of being a net food exporter to a net food importer within this period (Adhikari, 2021). The situation that Nepal is facing now in terms of food imports is akin to what India had faced until the 1960s.

The main foundation of the Green Revolution was technological innovations, but it would not have been possible with the sustained support from the government to the farmers in the forms of subsidies and guaranteed purchase with minimum support price, which played a crucial role in making farmers produce more volume and make the country surplus in food-

grain. This worked well for India for the most part, but the cracks are beginning to show as India itself is attempting to lessen the government's role in a more market-driven economic liberalization of its agriculture sector. The farmer's resistance in the late 2020 and early 2021 (which is still going on as of writing this article on 8th April 2021) is a response to the Indian government's attempt to deregulate and reduce its active role in the management of agricultural markets.

**Table 2: Production, availability and consumption of cereals in Nepal**  
(‘000 Mt., annual average in five yearly period, except 2001 and 2002)

Year	Production	Import	Export	Net import as % of availability	Consumption	Per capita Consumption (Kg)
1971-75	2809	4	166	-6.5	2029	157.8
1976-80	2812	14	60	-1.7	2272	159.3
1981-85	3186	50	45	0.1	2701	169.9
1986-90	4083	41	10	0.7	3422	192.0
1990-95	4478	45	2	0.9	3805	190.6
1996-00	5361	89	23	1.3	4198	187.7
2001	5733	55	12	0.7	4662	193.8
2002	5839	38	10	0.5	4773	193.9

Source: Pyakuryal, B., YB Thapa and D. Roy. 2005. Trade Liberalization and Food Security in Nepal. MITT Discussion Paper No 88. IFPRI, Washington DC. Table 3, page 6.

Table 2 shows the situation in the agricultural sector from the 1970s to early 2000s. The data clearly shows that Nepal exported more food than imported until the early 1980s. It started to become a net importer of food (cereals) from the early 1980s. But, until 2002, the import was only marginal – remaining at most just 1.3% of the available food. But, as Figures 1-3 show, the import accelerated since 2008. These data pertain to only cereals. Nepal started to import other food products as it became more connected to the world market after 1990. It should also be noted that there is an increase in per capita (calorie) food consumption, with a significant rise in the demand for foods in urban centers, and much of this is met with the increased supply from the market networks linked to India.

As we discussed earlier, Nepal's agricultural sector—just like the larger economy—is closely linked to what happens in India. Nepal too followed the footsteps of the Green Revolution inspired the modernization of agriculture, but Nepal could neither provide necessary policy and infrastructure support nor could completely transition away from subsistence agriculture. Besides, the mountainous landscape makes it challenging to implement the key parts of the Green Revolution (e.g., abundant supply of irrigation and agricultural inputs, large farms practicing monoculture, mechanization of agriculture). More importantly, Nepal simply could not compete with the kind of volume produced in India nor could it see its competitive advantage areas (e.g., high value and low volume crops, specialization of commodities unique or suitable to mountain environments). Much of Nepal's modernization of agriculture push

mimicked India and focused on the major grains like rice, wheat, and maize—all the commodities in which India simply outcompeted Nepal in both productivity and volume. The cost of production in Nepal remained high as compared to India, and with the open border and mainly free trade also means that Indian agricultural commodities became readily available in Nepal. This trend accelerated in the late 1990s, as Nepal's political turmoil began to take a toll on the labor force and the entire economy.

### 3.3 Political instability, insurgency, and youth migration

The multi-party democratic system established in 1990 faced a major setback after the country went through frequent government changes and political rifts, which eventually led to political instability and a decade-long insurgency headed by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) between 1996 and 2006. Cashing on the frustrations of common Nepalis had with the constant political turmoil of the 1990s, the Maoists promised a revolutionary rhetoric: scientific agriculture and land reform, as one of the major political agendas behind the armed conflict with the GoN. However, their scientific agricultural reform ideas remain elusive even when they led the government on multiple occasions.

The most devastating impact of the Maoist insurgency was visible in the agriculture and food systems of Nepal. First, the private investment in farming started to significantly decline due to the insurgency. A study by Uprety, Ghale, and KC (2016) finds “the Maoist rebels in their stronghold areas evicted local landlords, captured their lands, and distributed them to landless people. Hence, local owners were not able to invest in agriculture and kept their land barren. Those who received the redistributed land were not able to cultivate it due to fear of the security forces. Consequently, already scarce land resources were underutilized” (p.166). Many of the Maoists confiscated lands were also underutilized because those receiving the land also feared reprisals from the government police and army. Just to illustrate this complicated nexus, let's take an example from far-western Nepal, from where the insurgency had begun. When a landowner Jayalal Bam of Khin VDC-3 of Kalikot district asked a *dalit* (lower caste) family to vacate the land that was given to them for use by the Maoists, the Maoists cadres murdered him. The police then arrested 15 dalits in connection with this murder. Eventually, these dalits who were promised the land were handed life imprisonments. Such cases happened all over the country.

Secondly, the Maoist insurgency also created major barriers in the marketing of agricultural products, damaged agricultural market infrastructures, disturbed regular hat-bazaars, and above all, exerted a sense of fear and insecurity with the rise in extortion of food and money. To simply put, the Maoists managed to disturb and destroy the existing structures easily, but never managed to demonstrate anything that would resemble their political agendas related to scientific agriculture and land reform. For instance, the CPN (Maoists) had initiated some 50 communes and co-operatives in their stronghold districts like Rolpa, Rukum and Jajarkot. These communes/cooperatives, however, did not make headways, as the Maoists were also confused whether to convert co-operatives into communes or vice-versa. Similarly, the constant extortion harassment by the Maoists to the entrepreneurs and innovative farmers forced them out of their villages and towns to cities for safety and livelihoods. The overall impact was a decline in agriculture and a perceived notion of farming as a backward occupation. Those who remained in farming were not able to move out of poverty. For example, the Living Standard

Survey NLSS) in 2003/04 revealed these facts and a report based on the NLSS I (1995/96) and NLSS II (2003/04) indicated that those who transition to the non-farm sector and those in foreign labor employment were able to move out of poverty (CBS, 2006). As the agriculture sector deteriorated, food imports started to rise.

Lastly, the most direct and profound result of the Maoist insurgency was the forced migration, which directly hit the self-reliance norms of Nepali societies. The forced migration was not only limited to the wealthy families and the landowners, but also the young adults of the poor family who would often find themselves between the Maoist cadres and the security forces. Many joined the Maoists for a variety of reasons, while others left the village in search of employment in the cities and abroad. This trend only exacerbated already surging youth migration. These converging factors are important in explaining why and how Nepali experienced explosive urban growth in several cities and towns in the last two decades (Ishtiaque et. al., 2017; Rimal, 2018), and how the country started to increasingly rely on remittance to sustain its economy and the food imports for its domestic consumption. The numbers from the last two decades' food import trends only show the tip of the iceberg; socio-cultural changes tied to food systems occurring at the grassroots level show even more troubling scenarios.

### **3.4 Changing socio-cultural values associated with food systems**

When the country depends heavily on remittance and does not see much prospect in subsistence agriculture, it is natural for the people to see growing consumption as part of “modernization” and devalue the labor-intensive subsistence agriculture. In Nepal, coarse grain crops (e.g., millet, barley, buckwheat, maize) have historically been the main staples for those living in hills and mountains. These crops suited well to the agroclimatic conditions of the mountain environments, mainly rain-fed agriculture, short growing season, lower external input requirements, and less labor-intensive. These coarse grains are not only rich in nutritional value but are also resilient to climatic variations. However, those were slowly displaced by the “rice culture,” as the latter is widely perceived to be superior food consumed by the elites. In the past, the lowlander people working for the government in these hilly regions established ‘white rice’ as a superior food. They forced local people to keep ‘white rice’ for the purpose of feeding government officials (Adhikari, 2008). The social status attached to rice played an important role in its growing appeal among those who wanted to be presented as “modern” to the elites. After all, most agricultural policies of Nepal consistently supported rice, wheat, and maize as the main agricultural commodities. This is not an isolated case of Nepal. There is a global level change in dietary patterns because of the supply of cereals like wheat from industrialized countries to food-importing developing countries at the expense of locally grown crops like cassava, sorghum, or millet, and forcing local farmers out of the market (Hoering, 2013: p5).

A parallel trend of importation and consumption of globalized imported food, which has become a status symbol of the urban populations, is the trend of devaluing local foods. As the reliance on local foods is seen as a symbol of backwardness and subsistence farming as underdevelopment, subsistence food production is declining heavily leading to the import of so-called superior foods. This new trend has also led to a downgrading of the social status of farming as an occupation. Society, in general, now looks down upon the youth engaged in farming – a backward and drudgery-filled occupation to be shunned by the educated. In his

recent book ‘Koglé’, Prem Bahadur Bohra from Dolpa, describes how he was ridiculed in the school as a man to eat ‘Koglé’—local maize-based porridge. He writes that people eating local foods were considered inferior to those consuming rice—a status symbol among the upper class. This attitude toward local food items has been expanding all over the Karnali region (Adhikari, 2008) along with the growing activities of development agencies and NGOs. The Karnali region is massively shifting toward food-aid dependency leading to the abandonment of local food and local food culture. The young generation is systematically forgetting the traditional knowledge of the food that could be gathered in the forest and pastures, and of the value of such local foods.

### 3.5 Recent agricultural policies and the consideration of food sovereignty and wellbeing concepts

It would be an exaggeration to claim that the sole focus of Nepal’s agricultural policies so far has been on the increased per capita yield and volume than the quality and environmentally friendly outputs. What is more striking is that these agricultural policies are influenced by the Green Revolution ideals, but the level of sustained support needed from the government—in credit, irrigation, price support, subsidies, agricultural extension, and importantly, competitive market—is falling short in almost all fronts. Consequently, these agricultural policies are driven so much by the lofty economic gain ideals that not much attention has been paid to the barriers and constraints faced by the small farmers to get fair price for their products in the market that is controlled by the network of actors (e.g., merchants, contractors, dealers) that has more to be gained from pushing the cheaper consumer goods flooded from India.

One of the major limitations of the market-driven agricultural policies is its failure to recognize the enormous geographic and biocultural diversity that exists within the country. Although subsistence agriculture is known for its higher labor drudgery and lower yield, this system relied exclusively on the adaptive capacity of local communities to manage their labor in producing fresh and healthy food with very low ecological footprints and conserving both indigenous varieties and the cultures that sustained them for generations. Choosing higher yield and productivity unfortunately came at the price of losing agricultural diversity, quality, and skills. No one can tell now whether Nepal can afford to ignore the value of the regenerative nature of subsistence agricultural practices that had adapted to the varied and diverse agricultural settings of Nepal. This argument is also important from the perspectives of “food sovereignty” and “food wellbeing”(see Gartaula et. al., 2017).

The food sovereignty concept came in the wake of flooding cheap food—mostly subsidized by the governments—from the wealthy industrialized nation to South American countries. The dumping of food grains like wheat, rice and maize had destroyed the local farming in these countries causing distress to farmers, and loss of local food and food culture. Via Campesina was instrumental in developing the concept (La Via Campesina, 2003). Starting from 2006, Nepal has been adopting ‘food sovereignty’ as an approach to develop agriculture and make the country self-reliant in food production. The reality, however, is that Nepal has failed to develop any substantive and specific implementation policies to ensure food sovereignty. At present, Nepal’s main agricultural development policy is captured in the *Agricultural Development Strategy* (ADS), which was developed with the backing of the Asian Development Bank and other international donor agencies. It follows basically a market-based approach and use of

inputs that are not produced in the country and is believed that some donors agencies openly advocate for the entry of multinational companies and their control over seeds and agrochemicals. Skeptics argue whether the ADS can serve subsistence farmers well, who constitute 80% of the farm population in Nepal (Roka, 2017). It is seen that whatever subsidies that government gives like in fertilizers, it is taken up mainly by a few of the larger farmers (Hiroyuki, 2019).

#### **4. Lessons from other countries and current challenges**

One need not go far back to know how dependence on food import could lead to. As recent as 2008, when there was the global financial crisis, countries dependent on food imports faced 'food riots.' These included Haiti, Guinea, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Egypt, Senegal, Uzbekistan, Yemen, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Indonesia (Mukerjee, 2013 quoting Jayati Ghosh). In Pakistan and Thailand, troops had to be deployed to guard food stocks and prevent the seizure of grain from warehouses. The price of food rose because of use of grains in ethanol production in developed countries. Some companies like Goldman Sachs stocked the food and sold food at high prices (Kaufman, 2011). Nepal did not suffer much because until then Nepal was largely sufficient in basic food like cereals, and people did not experience the problem. If this had happened as of now, it would have led to a problem. In this instance, we may also recall the trade ban from India in 1990 and 2015. In 1990, no one noticed the problem of food or other things (except petroleum products) and that had no consequences except for Kathmandu. Whereas by 2015, Nepal's dependence on India for food and petroleum products including gas had tremendously increased, and this had caused severe consequences in Kathmandu and other cities within a short time of the ban.

Taking the case of countries which suffered during the 2008 financial crisis, the common thing among them was the 'dependence on food import'. Haiti was largely food self-sufficient in staple rice until the 1980s, but then International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed a structural adjustment program that led to the reduction in tariff on rice from 35% to 3% to qualify for a loan (Hoering, 2013). Cheap rice imports from the USA (it became cheap because of subsidies) led to the decimation of domestic rice production. By the middle of 2008, when international rice prices soared by more than three times since early 2007, Haiti was importing most of its staple. This same situation applies to other countries as well. A report adds further:

*"Food imports itself are nothing negative. But the experience shows that imports of basic foods, on which many people and especially poor people depend, can become "a weapon". This is what India experienced in the 1960s, when the USA withheld food deliveries under the programme PL 480 for political reasons, or Southern Africa in 2002, when the US insisted to send GM-maize as food aids" (Hoering, 2013: p4).*

The conversion of land from staple food production to cash crops for the short-term high profit also caused the food crisis in various countries. Free-market economists argue that with ample earnings from high-value exports, poor countries could buy cheap foreign grain to feed their people. This has also been a suggestion made to Nepal by international donor agencies, and Nepal reduced its budget for agricultural development thinking that it is easy to buy cheap food than product itself. Yet, there is no guarantee that there will always be a high price for the cash crops or that the price of staple food remains low forever. The private institutions,

including international big corporations, could manipulate the price for their own benefits. At present, cheap cereal grains (produced through highly mechanized methods with subsidies from the government) have been flowing from developed countries (food-exporting countries like USA, Canada, Australia) to developing countries, and whatever developing countries export are mainly cash crops, sometimes for luxury products and consumption. If the prices of basic staples increase like in the financial crisis of 2008, poor people in developing countries lose out as they cannot afford even the basic food, and their own luxury cash crop production may not be useful for food (Hoering, 2013). This has led to the food crisis in various African countries. Until now, Nepal has been producing some cereals and could withstand few months if there is a ban on food export from other countries. However, this ability has been declining fast, which could lead to problems faced in for example Haiti and other African countries.

## **5. Conclusions**

The sharp rise in Nepal's food imports in the last two decades should certainly concern Nepali policymakers, scientists, farmers, and alike. This trend has historical roots in a set of interconnected and complex socio-economic, cultural, and political drivers that had not been fully and systematically explored. As we argued in this paper, this trend is mainly an outcome of the political instability and failed government policies on food production and import, which are influenced by larger socio-economic and cultural changes conditioned by free market economy, urbanization, youth migration, and consumerism.

This trend of growing food imports, however, is not unprecedented or even surprising, given the fact that many countries like Nepal are currently facing similar challenges, albeit to different degrees; these countries have historically relied on subsistence agriculture but embraced the wider market economy without any adequate preparation (e.g., infrastructure, credit, extension support, the value of unique places) and could not be competitive. In a globalized world, where agricultural commodities are increasingly tele-connected, countries like Nepal will have to reexamine these endogenous and exogenous factors that have constrained their ability to be competitive. Above all, these countries have failed to recognize that the food sovereignty and wellbeing ideas have been the core principle of the national food production and import policies of the industrialized and emerging economies. It is time for Nepal to reimagine its regenerative agriculture for food production and distribution systems.

Lastly, we are not suggesting a retreat to the romanticized “old ways” but only emphasizing a set of the lessons learned from some of the unique and salient features of Nepali agricultural practices that sustained Nepali farmers for generations despite unequal and exploitative societal structure. By doing so could enable Nepali farmers to thrive with place-based, high-value agricultural entrepreneurship that are not as homogenized as the kind of agricultural commodities and business practices promoted by the green revolution-based technologies; those have higher demands for external inputs (e.g., fertilizer, irrigation, seeds, pesticides), which are out of reach for most Nepali farmers. In this perspective, we recommend the following broad policy measures:

- More investments in the agriculture sector to facilitate innovative solutions based on local resources that improve both production and productivity and help Nepal achieve a higher level of multiplier impacts within the country.

- Incentivize farmers to follow diversity in food systems and retain the regenerative agriculture practices
- Provide farmers easier access to critical infrastructures like transportation, irrigation, and market access and information.
- Protect farming against the vagaries of the market and supporting them through insurance in case of loss and guaranteed purchase of their produce at the minimum support price.
- Mainstream the food sovereignty and wellbeing ideas as the core part of Nepali food production and import policies.

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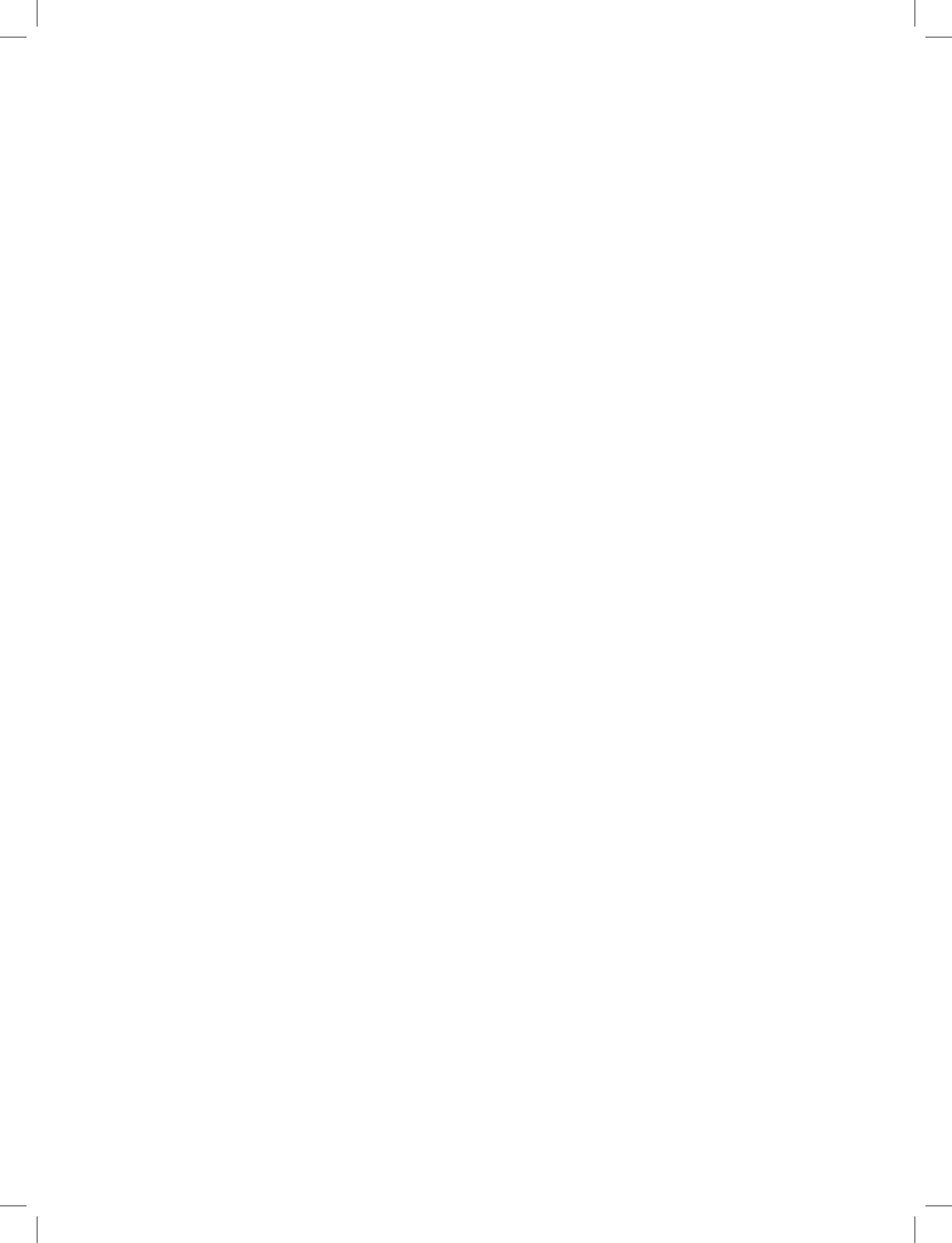
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Research Article

## National Statistical Management System: Opportunities, Challenges and Future Steps

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### Abstract

Globally, countries adopt either centralized or decentralized statistical management system. With over 60 years of history, Nepal has been practicing decentralized statistical management system where various government agencies alongside non-government and private agencies manage statistics based on their needs and requirements. Statistics Act 1958 set the foundation for statistical management system, that is in operational stage as of 2021. This paper sets an objective of reviewing the legal instruments associated with statistical management system and explores the opportunities and challenges of integrated statistical management system. Paper adopts systematic literature review method to search, sort and filter the relevant literature associated with opportunities and challenges of statistical management systems and/or practices. The adoption of statistical management system among countries were found to be varied (centralized/decentralized) based on the countries' needs, interests, capacity to set-up infrastructures. Hence the paper recommends updating the statistics related legal instruments and emphasizes the establishment of single institution. Based on which, country can adopt the principle and modality of either centralized or integrated statistical management system based on its needs and interests. After identifying the complexity, privacy, confidentiality, safety and security associated with integrated statistical management system, the paper suggests laying out a foundational framework for a strong and effective system. Afterwards possible concerns could be addressed through updated statistical acts and rules.

**Keywords:** government, legal instruments, service delivery, integrated statistical management, policy

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## **1. Introduction**

Statistical management system is one of the core aspects of development for any country. Strong statistical management practices provide an enormous opportunity for planners to analyze theme-wise data and plan accordingly (Alghamdi et. al., 2011; Hilbert, 2016). At the global level, the modality of statistical management system largely varies based on the interest and priorities, availability of human resources, technological and financial resources. The main objectives of statistical management systems are twofold: first, the record keeping of national citizens namely vital event registration and national ID, second maintaining sectoral statistics. Both sets of statistical management system are developed or established to serve the national need of delivering public services and engage in evidence-based planning (ADB, 2016; Aritonang, 2017; Khan, 2018; Mohammed et. al., 2016; Piotrowicz, 2015; Soja & Cunha, 2016; Szabó & Chiriac, 2016).

National needs and priorities enforce countries to either adopt integrated statistical management system or sector based statistical management system. Sectoral based system, also known as stand-alone or component-based statistical management system, is managed under specific statistical guidelines. These guidelines vary between institutions based on their plans, policies, strategies and objectives. In such a system, all the statistical management practices are done by different institutions which may or may not inter-link with each other. This necessitates the need for individual specific or sector specific data collection. With different institutions (government, private and I/NGOs) collecting same information without an interlinking system, concerns of duplication (cost, time, and resources), confidentiality, privacy and their misuse is a global concern. To reduce the issues associated with duplication, data security, and to strengthen the e-governance system, technologically advanced countries have been practicing various versions of integrated statistical management system.

To maintain an effective integrated statistical management system, governments must spell out periodic strategic plans and establish centralized server which can be further accessed by government agencies, private agencies, I/NGOs as well as civil society to some extent.. Policy formulation to set-up, implement and monitor the effectiveness of an integrated statistical management system is the key initial task that get carried out by respective countries. At the implementation level, governments set-up a mechanism to provide unique identifier to each individual and conduct data collection .The depth of individual-specific data collection system rely on country-specific system and objectives (Gelb & Diofasi, 2016). Government and non-government agencies link unique identifier to their statistical system, plans and service delivery such as health service, academic institution service, financial transactions, government services, transportation services, personal cards such as license, passports, etc. (Alghamdi et. al., 2011). In an integrated statistical management system, diverse government agencies rely on a single system, analyze existing information, and form plans and focused programs based on their respective institutional objectives.

Nepal has a long history of managing statistics but in the stand-alone or component-based system, that is individual and sector-specific separately through different government agencies. The concept of integrated statistical management system is brought forward for discussion; however it is yet to be materialized due to the lack of policy focusing on integrated statistical management system. Based on Statistics Act 1958, Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) has been

updating sectoral database and carrying out census. Starting with the first five-year plan (1956-61) the government has prioritized towards strengthening the national database and statistical system. Thereafter, citizen (individual) related database has been updated since the promulgation of Birth, Death and Other Personal Events (Registration) Act 1976 & Rules 1977. United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics: Implementation has been adopted to manage and update national database.

In the current context, the need for stronger statistical management system and integration of information is incorporated into diverse set of legal instruments and periodic plans in a scattered manner. Thus it has not been prioritized or emphasized by neither government nor private agencies (Subedi, 2020). The lack of integrated system has adverse effect at various levels of both government and non-government agencies. The existing requirement for a survey by each organization based on their respective objectives has resulted in duplication and waste of resources among agencies. Individual di-trust towards data collection process have also been observed in some cases in the recent days (Shrestha, 2019; Verhulst & Young, 2017).

To resolve the issues of identification, tracking as well as to respond to the needs of individuals, many countries across the world have already started moving towards promulgation of policies in order to support and set up the integrated system. Under this system, with detailed entry of information into the system, individuals are provided with a unique ID or identifier, that is linked with sector-specific statistical management system, (Phuyal, 2020). The process of promulgating such policies and adopting such system is taking a momentum after technological advancement and national commitment to provide legal identity for all by 2030; this also aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 16.9 (Brewer et. al., 2015; Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). Barring some challenges, the scenario of verification-based integrated statistical management has worked for countries to identify, track and respond to the needs of the public. Though Nepal already initiated providing national ID, this has yet to be effectively implemented as country still lagged behind in terms of infrastructure and resources (financial, human and technological). Thus, disconnection between data availability and government/non-government decision-making process and plans is one of the most frequently raised issues in Nepali context. This paper focuses on reviewing the strengths of centralized or integrated statistical management system and pointing out underlying challenges and the key areas to be incorporated in national legal instruments (policies, guidelines and strategies).

The objective of this paper is twofold. First, to explore opportunities and challenges associated with the current statistical management practice of Nepal. Second, to review the existing legal instruments (act, policies and strategies) and make recommendations for integrated statistical management policy for Nepal.

## **2. Research Strategy**

The study adopts systematic literature review method, where articles written between 2000 and 2020 are taken into consideration. As the study revolves around the statistical or database management system, combination of key words such as “national statistics”, “national database”, “registration system”, “opportunities”, “challenges”, “strength”, “best practice”, “issues”, “benefits”, “integrated” and “weakness” were searched into the database of google scholar. Considering the high number of documents with any of those combinations, documents most relevant to the study’s objective were screened. Documents without any

reference to subject area were removed. Selection process emphasized on reviewing the documents that could point to the statistical management practices and/or civil registration and vital statistics in the Global context as well as specific context of Nepal.

Legal instruments such as act, policies, plans, strategies and guidelines associated with statistics, civil registration and e-governance were reviewed to explore the existing strength and gaps.

Table 1 List of document supporting statistical management system

Constitution	Constitution of Nepal 2015
Act	Statistics Act 1958 Birth, Death and Other Personal Events (Registration) Act 1976 Local Government Operation Act 2017
Rules and Regulations	Statistics Rule Birth, Death and Other Personal Events (Registration) Rules 1977
Strategy	National Strategy for the Development Statistical System 2018-2023
Plan	Periodic Development Plan (1 <sup>st</sup> Plan – 15 <sup>th</sup> Plan) Consolidated National Statistics Plan 2000
Directives	National Information Technology System Directive 2014 National ID Program Implementation Directive, 2020
Framework	2019 Digital Nepal Framework: Unlocking Nepal's Growth Potential
Fiscal Year Budget	Fiscal Year Budget from FY 2016 to FY 2021
Guideline	United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics: Implementation Guideline, 2015

### 3. Results and Analysis

#### 3.1 Statistical Management Practices in Nepal

Nepal has over 60 years old history of statistical management officially started with the establishment of Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) under Statistics Act 1958 (Phuyal, 2020). CBS carried out its first agriculture statistics (1961) within its first five-year period of establishment. As of 2021, Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) in coordination with various ministries collect, interpret, analyze data. It also publishes sectoral reports such as Population censuses, Food and Livestock Survey, Nepal Living Standard Survey, Nepal Labor Force Survey, Censuses of Manufacturing Establishment, Demographic Health Survey, Economic Survey etc. (Dennison & Rana, 2017; Phuyal, 2020). With the approval of CBS, other government and non-government agencies have been carrying out statistical management system based on respective needs. Registration of vital events started in 1977 after promulgation of birth, death and other personal events registration Act 1976. The registration process was first piloted in 10 out of 77 (then 75) districts and later in 1990 it was made nationwide (Gautam, 2016). As of 2021, department of national ID and civil registration is the responsible agency to process national ID and register vital events through digital as well as paper-based medium.

The concept of developing integrated statistical system was previously recognized with the establishment of National Statistical Council (NSC). However, citing multiple reasons, the concept of integrated statistical system was not materialized until 2015, when Constitution of Nepal mandated the integrated identity management system under article 15. The concept of integrated statistical management system has been detailed out on Local Government Operation Act (LGOA) 2017, 15<sup>th</sup> periodic plan (2018/19-2023/24) and annual plan for the fiscal year 2021/22. With Federal structure in place, LGOA 2017 mandated the need of updating statistics or database under the responsibility of local level (Subedi, 2020). National Strategy for Development of Statistical System (2018/19-2022/23) envisions the use of updated technology to improve the qualitative aspects of data collection practices in Nepal (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2018). It also emphasizes on strategically formulating legal instruments to support government institutions at different levels in having a system which are either centralized or linked with each other to act as the platform for further planning and budgeting.

To strengthen national statistics and civil registration process, National ID and Registration Act 2019 mandated the need of ensuring each citizen get National ID along with an establishment of integrated national ID management information system. The Act also mandated the need of aligning civil registration system with government services, national development plan and security system. Though the Act mandated the need of integrated database with multiple objectives, it has excluded the role of CBS or National Planning Commission (NPC) which are among the key government authority responsible for development of related database. Exclusion of CBS or NPC from responsibility made the Act weaker as all other sectoral ministries aligned themselves with CBS or NPC in terms of statistical management and evidence-based planning.

### 3.2 Legal Instruments to Support Statistical Management Practices

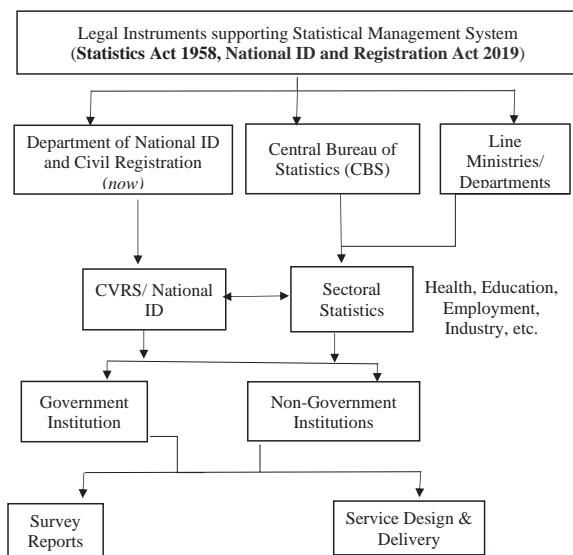


Figure 1 Operationalization Process of Statistical Management System (Contextualized)

Statistics Act, 1958 and Statistics Rules 1984 paved the way for statistical management at official level in Nepali scenario. Under the provision of Statistics Act, Central Bureau of Statistics was established, which is actively collecting, compiling and presenting the statistical scenario of diverse sector agriculture, economy, industry, tourism, etc. The Act emphasizes on collection, compilation, and publication of statistics. It also details out the provision of their usage and the penalty system associated with misuse. The Act has not talked much about the quality of statistics, their consolidation mechanism

and repository system. With digital revolution in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Act is yet to be updated to accommodate the provisions of digital engagement and associated concerns of safety, security, privacy and confidentiality. With the permission of CBS, organizations (government or non-government) could establish their respective statistical management systems. Separate statistical management practices in the form of Census (under CBS), Health Information Management System (under Ministry of Health and Population), Education Information Management System (under Ministry of Education, Science and Technology) exist in the government sector. Data collection practices also exist among some I/NGOs. Overall, this practice has resulted into multiple and scattered statistical management system.

**Birth, Death and Other Personal Events (Registration) Act 1976 & Rules 1977** was promulgated to initiate the registration process of vital events, which includes birth, death, marriage, migration and divorce. The Act detailed out the responsible person and institution to register personal events and also laid out the provision of penalties for potential misuse or false information. It also required the local level institutions to share registered personal event on a monthly manner. Even though the concept of e-governance was widely discussed during the time, the significance of adopting technological tools to register and share the registered personal events in real-time was not provisioned in the Act. As of 2021, Birth, Death and Other Personal Events (Registration) Act and Rules have been replaced with National ID and Registration Act 2019.

**Consolidated National Statistics Plan (CNSP) 2000** details out issues, challenges and gap areas along with the recommendation to rectify the identified issues/gaps in eight different statistical systems focused on agriculture, social sector, demographics, labor and employment, industry, public finance and national account. CNSP incorporated the statistical calendar for 2000-2005, where all the data collection or survey related activities were listed alongside the major statistics to be extracted from those data collected. Though, such type of plan/strategy was developed for the first time when the significance of maintaining an integrated statistical management system was not considered. Rather, the sector wise statistical plan was emphasized and presented in a calendar form.

**National Information Technology System Directive 2014** provisioned the government institutions to set-up and have information technological system in place. The directive mandates the government institution to maintain uniform information technological system. The directive detailed out the provision of accessing the system through multiple institutions based on their needs and requirements. It went a step ahead with an inclusion of key aspects of privacy, confidentiality, security, infrastructure set-up for back-up and archiving. These aspects were not intensively included in previous legal instruments.

**Constitution of Nepal 2015** incorporated the aspect of right to information and right to privacy. In the right to information, each Nepali individual does hold a right to access information of public interest. Meanwhile, right to privacy ensured the civil right to maintain privacy of their personal information including personal event related information. The requirement to update national statistics and use them for national development plans alongside the integrated national identity management information system and their use to deliver government led services and facilities is recognized and addressed by Constitution of Nepal 2015. Enlistment of “collection of local statistics and records” under the local level paved a path for initiating the integrated or consolidated statistical management system at local level.

However, the current practice of maintaining sector-specific statistical management system could pose a challenge in setting-up an integrated statistical management system at local level.

**Local Government Operation Act (LGOA) 2017** provisioned context-based plans and policies at the local level. It includes the requirement of collecting and managing statistics at local level and using them appropriately for local level budgeting and planning processes. The existence of separate statistical management policy at each local government could create a scenario where, each LG have their respective statistical management system that are non-identical and non-uniform to each other. This could create a challenge in compiling and publishing nationwide statistics as directed by Statistics Act 1958 for Central Bureau of Statistics.

**National Strategy for the Development of Statistical System (NSDSS) 2018/19-2022/23** sets the vision of establishing well-coordinated, functional and strong national statistics system. NSDSS strategizes to develop statistical system aligning with federal structure, managing the statistical arrangement ensuring their reliability and quality and strengthening the institutions responsible for statistical management. By 2020, countries have adopted diverse set of statistical management systems based on their needs/priorities, available human resources, technological advancement and financial capacity. NSDSS indicates towards upgrading national statistical management system, however it has not indicated the possible modalities that could be adopted based on success/failure of global practices. NSDSS focuses on having statistical management system at different levels, that is, local, province and federal. However, the need of maintaining integrated system alongside their safety and security is not prioritized. NSDSS emphasizes on setting-up institutions for appropriate statistical management at different levels such as National Bureau of Statistics, National Statistical Training and Research Centre and dedicated statistical units at local and province level. However, the status of institutions currently managing sector-based statistics is not addressed.

From technological advancement perspective, 2019 Digital Nepal Framework paved the pathway for government authorities to shift towards adoption of digital technologies to deliver their respective services. This framework emphasizes on eight sectors namely digital foundation, health, agriculture, education, energy, tourism, finance and urban infrastructure and identifies three prioritized areas namely technology and infrastructure, private sector participation and talent and skill development. Areas incorporated in the framework are also the major areas where CBS intensively engages in having periodic and systematic collection of data/statistics. Thus, the identified priority areas could play significant role in upgrading the existing infrastructure and scaling to local level, authority to update statistics as mandated by Local Governance Operation Act (LGOA) 2017.

**Strategy of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) 2019** was developed with an objective of intensifying the civil registration and vital statistics related works aligning with commitment of government towards achieving international goals. The strategy sets the vision of having technology friendly advanced information management system for civil registration and statistics management. Strategy details out the possible linkage between existing civil registration mechanism with other sectors in order to present the progress made by Nepal on global (SDG's) indicators. One of the action plans is to coordinate with institutions responsible for census to include civil registration and vital statistics during census itself.

**National ID and Registration Act 2019, Rules 2020** provisions the need of functional national ID management information system. National ID and Registration Rules 2020 details out the process and requirements to acquire national ID and the types of details that are incorporated into national ID. As the national ID includes details such as nationality, birth, migration, marital status, occupation, education and information of parents, it provides an opportunity to link the national ID management information system with other statistical management systems under government-led institutions especially under Central Bureau of Statistics. As the registration process envisions the use of digital medium to initiate registration process, the integration of government-led statistical system could be the possibility. National ID and Registration Rules 2020 mentions the sectors such as passport, land, vehicle registration, vital event registration, social security, tax, citizenship and other areas as identified by the government. These aspects could play a pivotal role in initiating the establishment of integrated statistical management system as envisioned by Constitution of Nepal 2015.

**National ID Program Implementation Directive 2020** was prepared based on National ID and Registration Act 2019 to guide authorities on implementing National ID project. It mandated the need of establishment of unit at District Administrative Office (DAO) to collect, document and distribute national ID. The directive provisions both digital as well as manual practice for an application of national ID. During an application process itself, applicant (national citizen) needs to detail out the demographic information. The directive, however, fails to address approaches to be adopted to ensure the safety, security and confidentiality of the collected data. Coordination committee is envisioned at district and national level but with federal system most of the powers are already delegated to Local Government. In this case, the role of Local Government to facilitate the registration process is neglected. As the whole program itself largely depends on the digital system, an exclusion of representative from Ministry of Communication and Information Technology could play crucial role in near future.

### **Periodic Development Plans:**

First plan (1956-1961) included cadastral survey to collect agricultural and land related statistics. Lack of statistics was largely felt on sectors such as commerce, tourism, industry and trade which limited the government's effort to formulate evidence-based plans. Identifying the gaps, the plan emphasized on having sector specific statistics as well as vital statistics. Third plan (1965-1970) focused on having strategic and meaningful statistical management system with an objective of making data available to individuals and institutions. The Plan focused on making data and information accessible to public through statistical publication. Detailed report of population census and agricultural census was published. Collection of vital statistics was expanded across the country. Fourth Plan (1970-1975) initiated the process of standardization, coordination and mechanization to make the statistics more reliable and dependable. Plan attempted to address the issues of duplication associated with the collected statistics through multiple government institutions. Sixth Plan (1980-1985) strategized to make development plans more practical and effective with an input of reliable and updated statistics. Furthermore, the updated statistics were utilized for formulating policies and programs. Fifth plan (1975-1980), sixth plan and seventh plan (1985-1990) were more about adopting technological tools to collect, compile and analyze statistics by setting up infrastructures and training human resources. These plans utilized updated statistics to formulate short-term and

long-term plans. National Statistical Council (NSC) which facilitates the process of collection, compilation and analysis of statistics was established. Several surveys namely agricultural census, industrial census, population census were carried out and published during the Eighth Plan (1992-1997).

The provision of sharing statistics to national and international organizations were advanced during the Eighth plan period. Furthermore, the plan highlighted the need of conducting periodic household level survey to update socio-economic status and improve survey technique. Ninth plan (1997-2002) was among the key development plans that expanded the computerization process of recording civil service related data. Meanwhile, the records were consolidated and combined with central record. This plan emphasized on collection, analysis and update of local level statistics. Tenth plan (2002-2007) incorporated the strategies to make statistics authentic, reliable and user-friendly. Furthermore, it intensively formulated action plans to carry out multiple surveys and make them periodic, comparable and also worked towards reducing the duplication in statistics. Eleventh Plan (2007-2011) strategized to strengthen the two institutions responsible for statistical management, namely National Planning Commission (NPC) and Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS).

Continuing the progress from previous periodic development plans, 12<sup>th</sup> plan (2011- 2013) worked towards strengthening the statistical management system from national to local level. It envisioned the establishment of Geo-information System to store the statistics in central manner. Thirteenth plan (2013/14 - 20154/16) envisioned the development of central statistics to upgrade statistical management system. It worked on having coordinated national statistical system to regularize statistical and approval system. It also discussed the need of standardizing statistics based on international standards. Fourteenth plan (2016/17- 20418/19) focused on result-based statistical production and their usage for planning and policy making. Plan introduced the concept of national statistics training and investigation center along with the formation of inter-ministerial or inter-departmental statistical acting group. The survey to have baseline value for the indicators as stated in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) was carried out. Fifteenth plan (2019/20- 2023/24) envisioned the national statistical profile to incorporate integrated data and indicators in order to make statistics accessible and available to local level. Plan strategizes of making standards, formats and classifications as per globally recognized templates and formats. The use of modern information and communication technologies has been mentioned in the plan but the type and mechanism of usage has not been well elaborated. To put the uniform and consistent statistical management system in place, the fifteenth plan includes the strategies to upgrade the capacity of local levels and establish a basic system of data management at local level.

### **Annual Budget and Programs:**

Prior to the annual budget and plan for Fiscal Year (FY 2018/19), statistics related plans used to be incorporated within the sectoral plans and programs. However, budget for FY 2018/19 specifically highlighted the need of having think tank to provide reliable, contextual and implementable statistics to the government for preparing annual plans as well as short-term and long-term plans. Similarly, budget was allocated to carry out initial works for population census, household survey and agricultural survey. A separate section was included in the budget to state annual plans and budget to carry out statistics related activities. The same trend

thereafter follows till current plan (FY 2021/22). FY 2019/20 highlighted the open statistical system by allocating budget for the same. Continuing to previous fiscal year's budget, it also allocated the budget for population census, agricultural survey, multi-indicator survey, household survey and industrial survey. FY 2020/21 emphasized on the need of having reliable statistics for policy development and decision making, thus included the plans to strengthen institution. Continuing the previous trend of allocating budget to carry out census, household survey, agricultural survey and industrial survey, Fiscal Year (FY) 2021/22 also added some budget to carry out the remaining works. Most importantly, annual budget includes the plans to integrate the existing statistical management system and focus on establishing safe repository mechanism alongside the capacity development to analyze big data. Similarly, the implementation of open statistics was also included as prioritized plan.

**United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics: Implementation Guideline 2015** details out the principles that support having a strong national statistical system. The guideline provided recommendations to ensure the independence of national statistical systems. It also guides countries to set up the foundation for respective national statistical system in areas of accountability, transparency, legal processes, confidentiality, safety, security, relevancy, and accessibility. For each identified areas, the guideline details out best practices among diverse national statistical system.

### **3.3 National Statistical Management Practices at Global Level**

Globally, countries have been adopting various forms of citizen registration systems alongside sectoral statistical management system with an issuance of unique identifier cards depending on their local needs, priorities, and capacities (Gelb & Diofasi, 2016). Eighteen percent of developing countries have system for single purpose meanwhile, 55 percentage of countries have used for specific function and services ranging from cash transfers to health. Statistical management system adopted by diverse countries across the globe is basically categorized into centralized or decentralized statistical management system. Depending on the national needs, priorities, requirements, capacity, infrastructures and end-use, countries preferred to have either centralized or decentralized statistical management system. Both set of systems have their own respective advantages and disadvantages (United Nations, 2021). Centralized or integrated statistical management system tend to have specific and clear set of rules and policies setting out the foundation for confidentiality, independence and impartiality. Coordination and collaboration within the departments ease decision making process. Quality assurance of national statistics further makes data reliable and usable for evidence-based planning process. Countries such as Pakistan, Peru and India have centralized system emphasizing registration and identification services. Whereas, countries such as Mexico, Nigeria and Tanzania have multiple systems in use in a parallel manner (United Nations Children's Fund, & United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2019; The World Bank Group [TWBG], 2017). Establishing an effective national statistical system mainly relies on relevance of statistics for societies, technical qualification and independence of leading institution responsible for managing national statistics and the relationships of national statistical system with wider range of stakeholders (Quintslr, 2015).

Malaysia adopted a system entitled MyKad which is used for identification, verification purpose as well as for accessing government services and day to day transportation services (Salman,

2010). Indonesia has electronic identity card termed as e-KTP which allows the government for effective implementation of their services, conducting census, controlling security threats as well as issuing driving licenses, insurance policies, taxpayer certification and other identity related documents (Priyantu, 2012). Singapore adopted centralized identification system, where citizens are required to provide detailed information through which they can access services at government or private institutions. In other words, it has helped to eliminate duplication in information collection system (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2016).

Indian Statistical System is operating at varied level with both horizontal and vertical division across the government units. Data and information from national statistical system get used for decision making process of public and private institutions. Furthermore, the statistics are easily accessible to individuals and institutions (Radhakrishna, 2012). India's Aadhaar card system which is also one of the largest digital card systems eased the process of accessing government services and subsidies (Barde, 2018). Through the national ID system, citizen of Pakistan can access wider range of government and non-government services such as registration at academic institution, health institution, banking services, telecommunication services, transportation services, financial and land transactions, etc. (Ullah et al., 2015). Belgium practices e-ID card system which allows citizens to access public services, link with tax declaration, register at public libraries and community services (Arora, 2008). Biometric identification along with smart cards are in use in case of South Africa through which government authorities provide social protection and support to their citizens (Breckenridge, 2005). Nigeria adopted colonial statistical management system where single statistical institution is made responsible to manage national statistics. Nevertheless, it does have focal person in each of the major government institutions. The provision of a focal person helped in harmonization of data and made them efficient (Geteloma et. al., 2019; Olubusoye et al. 2015). Thailand government approved Digital ID bill to link users (citizens) from multiple institutions (Greenleaf & Suriyawongkul, 2018). Philippines is in planning stage for adopting digital ID through which government can prioritize the minorities during planning and citizen can access government services as well as link with economic sector (job) and financial sector (registration at banks) (The World Bank Group, 2017).

### **3.4 Opportunities of Integrated Statistical Management System**

From citizen to policy makers to institutions (government and non-government), integrated statistical management system based on integrated statistical management policy provides diverse benefits to all.

#### **Shifting from Paper-Based System to Digital System:**

In recent times, government institutions have started documenting individual and family related information in digital manner. Series of capacity building sessions have been held from federal level to local level after an introduction of national ID card system. However, the progress is limited. Though, there are plans to integrate national ID with other government provisioned services, it has not yet been fully executed. As the ID number contains series of crucial background information, government as well as private institutions with authority to access details of national ID need to mandatorily adopt digital registration system (Dass & Bajaj, 2008; Mitra, 2019). As one of the objectives of integrated statistical management policy is to bring together government services and facilities under single platform, their adoptability

towards Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) further enhances the e-governance status of the country (Rokhman, 2011).

### Evidence Based Inclusive Programming:

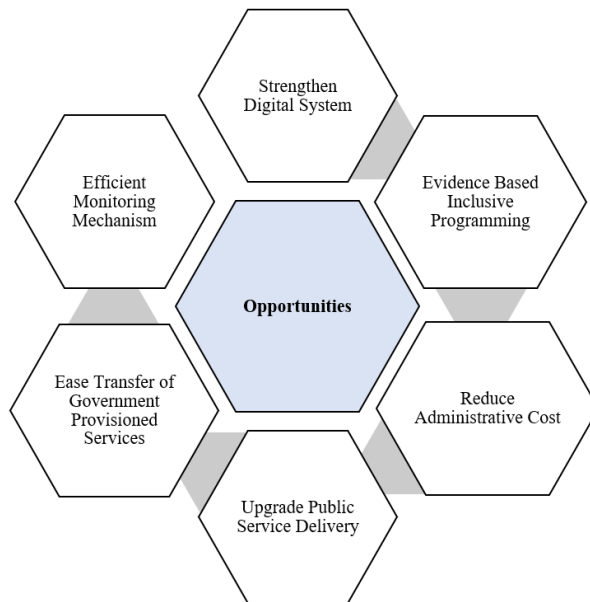


Figure 2: Opportunities of Integrated Statistical Management System

and implement them in effective manner as well (Atick, 2016).

As integrated statistical management system incorporates detailed information regarding the areas and individuals accessing government and non-government services alongside their frequency and intensity, government can plan accordingly to prioritize more among the individuals and communities which are usually excluded from receiving government services (Atick, 2016; Hilbert, 2016; ADB 2016). Either it be development-based programs or response packages, integrated statistical management system based on integrated statistical management policy can help to track the excluded groups and incorporate them in forthcoming plans and programs (Brewer et al., 2015; Mitra, 2019).

### Effective Public Service Delivery:

In an annual manner, government from federal to local level has been planning and implementing dedicated programs to empower excluded, marginalized and vulnerable groups (Giri& Shakya, 2019). Barring the social protection related activities, there has been voices of dissatisfaction towards targeted programs. With integrated statistical management system in place, the probability of reaching out the targeted groups to provide dedicated services increases (ADB 2016; Bertot et al. 2016; Sarker et al. 2018). The case of wrong person receiving the government services in the name of targeted groups gets reduced or eliminated as the

With federal structure in place, government institutions are developing plans and programs to adopt consultative approach from community to local and federal level with participation of key stakeholders and communities. However, none of the programs are developed based on statistical evidence but are based on observations and interactions. With integrated statistical management policy in place, each local government can contextualize and develop the guideline to have statistical presentation of digital information (Hilbert, 2016). Evidence based programming helps to identify real need of communities and individuals

digital system can efficiently track the individuals benefitted from targeted programs (Oracle 2008; Peeters & Widlak 2018).

### **Ease Transfer of Government provisioned support and services:**

It has been evident that the social protection related programs have been effective once the system was made digital and linked with financial institutions (Giri & Shakya, 2019). Firstly, targeted groups received the services. Secondly, the whole transfer of services was smooth and timely (Mitra 2019; Rokhman 2011). Citizens eligible for receiving the services can easily access the services as per their convenience from allocated financial institutions. With right tracking and monitoring system in place, implementation of other dedicated programs such as subsidies, grants, scholarships, cash transfer, etc. can be accomplished in a timely and efficient manner further increasing transparency and trust among citizen.

### **Efficient Tracking or Monitoring Mechanism:**

With integrated system in place, the government authorities implement targeted and inclusive programs in a timely and efficient manner as well as can generate evidence to claim the effectiveness of programs (Hilbert 2016; Peeters & Widlak 2018). Government can get clear idea on individuals receiving the benefits. Either it be for *ad hoc* response activities or regular subsidies, grant and scholarship related activities, government authorities get an opportunity to track the potential beneficiaries and ensure right beneficiary got the support further strengthening the tracking and monitoring mechanism of government (Bertot et al. 2016).

### **Reduces administration cost:**

In current scenario, citizen need to fill-up the same information in every single form either it be government or private. With the implementation of integrated statistical management policy citizens can only provide ID number instead of complete information to data collecting agency (Atick, 2016). While doing so, time and resources of both citizens as well as institutions are optimally utilized further increasing efficiency of service delivery (Alsheshri et al., 2013). Sector-wise survey or census is costly compared to integrated statistical management system (Kitchin, 2015). In the latter, majority of the costs occurs during initial phase due to infrastructure set-up and capacity building. With continuous use of same system and periodic updates based on national needs and priorities, the long run cost goes down. Hence, integrated statistical management system could be an effective statistical system to adopt for cost minimization purpose (Tam & Clarke, 2015).

### **Relay Accurate and Real-Time Information:**

With the management of sectoral information and citizen registration related information through respective websites, it has been evident that the users can easily access information in real-time (Bertot et al. 2016; Hilbert, 2016). However, the progress of information fill-up in both sites are not satisfactory as it is not mandatory for individuals as well as for institutions. Integrated statistical management system is mandated by integrated statistical management policy. Hence, each updated information gets compiled and displayed real-time through graphical presentation as well as numerical presentation (Kurfali et al. 2017; Rathore et al. 2018). Recently, information regarding the COVID cases was displayed in real time by ministry of health and population using different visualization techniques. It was beneficial for all concerned stakeholders to analyze the status and plan accordingly.

### Link with National and Global commitments (periodic plans and Sustainable Development Goals):

With integrated statistical management policy and system in place, government institutions can track and monitor the progress on indicators such as income level (from formal and informal employment opportunities), vulnerability status, accessibility to basic facilities (water, latrine, internet, health), education status, registration card, financial institution, social protection, etc. (Sarker et al. 2018). These statuses are linked with indicators incorporated in Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030 and their measurement and efficient tracking can help Nepal understand its progress in various SDG milestones (Badiee et al. 2017).

### 3.5 Challenges associated with Integrated Statistical Management System

Integrated statistical management policy and system does have its own share of challenges. Literature have highlighted the case studies of countries that have adopted similar system. Some of the challenges are explained below:



Figure 3: Identified challenges to adopt Integrated Statistical Management System

#### Lack of supportive legal instruments:

To have smooth implementation of integrated statistical management system requires efficient legal instruments in place. Many countries have adopted similar system but they still are struggling with legal instruments such as acts, guidelines, and strategy (Alghamdi et al., 2011; Rana et al. 2013; Yadav et al., 2020). Legal instruments can lay a foundation where each institution can be supportive in making the system operational (United Nations [UN], 2016). However, in the absence of legal enforcement, government as well as non-government institution may not comply.

#### Data Security:

With technological advancement, the concerns of data security have been increased in recent times (Buzzioli & Biggeri 2001; Giri & Shakya 2019; Morabito 2015; Rana et al. 2013). From small to large scale organizations even at developed countries, data theft and malwares (virus) attacks have been challenging issues to deal with (Cofta 2008; Oracle 2008; Sarker et al. 2018; Yadav et al., 2020). Nepal still lags behind technologically, thus the concerns of data security remains one of the key challenges in implementing integrated policy and system (Brewer et al., 2015).

### **Data Confidentiality, Permissibility and Transparency:**

Integrated Statistical Management System can include wide range of statistics related to individuals, families and institutions (private or public). From individual level to institutional level, everyone can adopt the “right to information” policy and access national statistics. Thus, maintaining the confidentiality of the statistics is the prime task of the institution responsible to manage national statistics (Quintslr, 2015). A successful operation of Integrated statistical management system requires linkage and sharing of data between agencies. With availability of data, government as well as private agencies may opt to use them for their own purposes (Kasozi and Brendon, 2018). In such case, questions and debate may arise regarding who gets the permission and accessibility to data (Brewer et al., 2015; Landefeld 2014; Morabito 2015; Tam & Clarke 2015). Considering the human right principle to maintain confidentiality of statistics related to individual, countries have adopted the system where civil related data are kept confidential from government institutions (ADB 2016; United Nations (UN) 2016). However, with ever-evolving technology and current practices of national statistical management system through diverse institutions, and ever-increasing demand of national statistics among government and private institutions, confidentiality remains the most challenging aspect of the system.

### **Low Level of Coordination among agencies:**

Implementability of integrated statistical management system requires strong coordination among government institutions, non-government/private institutions and citizens. In current scenario, integrated approach has not been prioritized among institutions (Gautam 2016; Phuyal 2020). Low level of coordination between government agencies responsible to manage statistics; and duplication or overlapping roles among agencies remains a challenging aspect across the globe (Olubusoye et al. 2015). As each institution have their own sectoral priorities, plans and programs, integration between agencies in current scenario seems to be a daunting task.

### **Lack of Resources (human, financial and technological):**

In recent times, Government institutions (Department of National ID and Civil Registration and Central Bureau of Statistics) have adopted digital system to register and update the databases of individual and sectoral in the form of national ID system and national statistics, respectively. Theoretically, local government is responsible to regularly update information at registration system and sectoral ministries are responsible to regularly update information at sectoral database. However, the reality is bleak (Phuyal, 2020). Rana et. al. (2013) emphasize the role of resources for the success of the system. However, in the case of Nepal, one of the major constraints faced is lack of resources either it be human, financial, or technological. Nepal is still at early stage comparing to other countries technologically, Financial resource allocation is also not very encouraging. Furthermore, it is still not considered prioritized area of government body both at federal and local levels (Gautam, 2016). With the implementation of IT Policy 2000, government institutions started adopting technologies at wider level. This also requires presence of trained human resources, however the government sector still faces shortage of skilled manpower to operate the complex system (Adhikari, 2009; Yadav et al., 2020).

### **Awareness Level among citizen:**

If any system is to be successfully implemented, awareness level among users remains one of the key aspects. In the case of integrated statistical management system, government

representatives and citizen are the users of those system and their awareness level plays a significant role in making the system successful (Badiie et al. 2017; Rana et al. 2013; Voutinioti 2013). It has also been observed that whenever new legal instruments and systems implemented, users take some time to get habitual with the system. It mostly depends on what level of awareness among users and promotional activities from the implementation side (Kurfali et al., 2017; Writz et al., 2018). Though multiple systems such as National ID and National sectoral database are in place, people are not that much aware about their establishment and their significance in day to day life which is also one of the underlying causes of ineffectiveness.

### **Digital Literacy:**

Integrated statistical management system is more about digital system than manual paper-based system. Nepal is among the countries, where formal literacy is still not at satisfactory level. In the given context, making the citizens aware and habitual towards digital literacy is a challenging task for government institutions (Adhikari 2009; Writz et al. 2018). There is a possibility of citizens from remote areas being excluded from registration process due to lack of digital literacy which can further exclude them from receiving government related services and benefits (Brewer et al. 2015; Mitra 2019; Peeters & Widlak 2018).

## **4. Conclusion and Policy Recommendation**

From policy perspective, Government of Nepal have promulgated wider range of legal instruments to strengthen the civil registration, sectoral statistical management, and adoption of digital medium to store and manage the database. Individually, all those respective legal instruments have their own underlying strength and gaps. Barring Statistics Act 1958, other legal instruments have been either updated/revised or new supporting legal instrument has been formulated. In the case of Statistical management, Government of Nepal has been following the same mandate as that of Statistics Act 1958 which has not been revised or updated thus making the policy less relevant in the current settings. To mark the progress made over national and global commitments, Government of Nepal need to have documentation of real-time progress on sector-specific targets and programs, primarily to align with Sustainable Development Goal 2015-2030. Technologically, Government of Nepal have comparatively weaker statistical management system thus has been relying on multilateral and I/NGOs to carry out data collection process and present the progress. With an integrated statistical management system in place, Government of Nepal can present the progress on each sector in an independent manner. The statistics can be further utilized for designing and implementing periodic plans and programs.

Understanding the opportunity and need, both developed and developing countries in their varying capacity or ability have already initiated implementing digital mechanism to register and link with government services and facilities (Alshehri et al. 2013; Peeters & Widlak 2018; Rokhman 2011; Sagarik et al. 2018; Third et al. 2018). Some of the noticeable systems similar to the context of Nepal include Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) from Pakistan, Unique Identification or Adhar from India, Estonian Id Card, smart national identity card from Bangladesh, National Identification System from Iraq, etc. (Datta et al. 2020; Jabbar et al. 2013; Kalja et al. 2015; Mali & Avila-Maravilla 2018; Ullah et al. 2015).

From Policy perspective after the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal 2015, Government of Nepal has already set the foundation to adopt digital technology in order to

register individuals as well as to link with various sectors of the government. In current setting, sectoral and civil registration systems are operationalized under their respective policies by different government agencies. This can be taken as one of the noticeable gaps in implementing the integrated statistical management system.

Analyzing the scope of integrated statistical management system and past trend of priorities set by the Government of Nepal, this paper strongly recommends for the update of Statistics Act (1958) and emphasizes on the use of Integrated Statistical Management System.

- a. **Update Statistics Act 1958:** National Statistical System (NSS) is functional based on Statistics Act 1958. Over the 60 years period, statistical management approach has its own share of success and failures. However, with ever-increasing demand of the national statistics and advanced technologies at global level, Government of Nepal should immediately initiate a process towards updating statistics act 1958. Similar to the strategy adopted to reform the Birth, Death and Other Personal Events (Registration) Act and Rules into National ID and Registration Act 2019, Statistics Act 1958 should move towards either updating or reforming the Act.
- b. **Manage national statistics under single institution:** As of 2021, government as well as non-government agencies have been managing statistics based on their needs and requirements. It is inefficient; increases the overlapping of the statistics and also reduces the trust among public or end-users towards national statistics. Instead, adopting the modality of integrated statistical management system, a single institution should be established and made responsible to manage all national statistics either it be sector-based statistics or vital event registrations. Having a single institution helps to form a uniform, consistent, responsive, reliable and effective statistical management system. It further helps citizen as well as other agencies to coordinate with a single institution to seek statistics as per their requirements.
- c. **Establish specialized agencies to manage sectoral statistics:** Integrated statistical management system requires strong coordination, communication and support from diverse sector-based agencies ranging from thematic areas such as health, education, finance, information technology, civil registration, etc. The issues as stated in challenges section are also more or less due to having diverse agencies under different legal instruments and government ministries. To reduce the issues associated with coordination and linkage, the study suggests to have a provision of different sectoral agencies under single institution (ministry). The sectoral departments could be decided based on the areas of national interests along with the national and global commitments. To ensure the safety and security of the public data or big data, a specialized department has to be established under the single agency (as stated on point b.). Other existing sectoral ministries can carry out the designing and implementation of sector-specific interventions.
- d. **Allocate resources for infrastructure set-up:** To establish a strong national statistics management system, the government needs to invest for infrastructure set up. That includes infrastructures for collection, compilation, processing, analyzing, visualizing and safe repository of the larger set of collected data i.e. big data. It also requires, strong set of layouts to ensure the safety and security of national statistics. As of now, government prioritizes more towards set-up of IT structures and capacity

building to human resources. With this, policy should focus towards investment on assuring safety and security of data through strong data warehouse or repository mechanism under complete control of government institution.

- e. **Ensure Data Quality:** National statistics requires wider range of data from diverse sectors including that of individuals and households. Similarly the use of national statistics is not only limited for the purpose of government-led planning and budgeting process but also to update the progress on national and global level indicators i.e. Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) etc.. Thus, data quality remains one of the challenging areas in managing national statistics. As of now, there has not been well-defined and articulated legal instrument focused towards data quality assurance. Thus, during the update or reform of statistics act 1958, data quality assurance (DQA) needs to be well articulated. Meanwhile, a separate guiding document stating the process to functionalize the opted Data Quality Assurance tools shall be prepared and published.
- f. **Prioritize on national statistics related awareness campaign:** National statistical system can only be said to be effective, if users (citizen) know about its existence and use them on frequent manner.. Most of the Nepali legal instruments are focused towards the process and legal provisions for institution set-up, management strategy, roles and responsibilities of the committees, etc. The component related with sensitization of national statistical system is often ignored. Thus, to have an effective system from user perspective, clear strategies should be incorporated within legal instruments to carry out sensitization events on national statistical management system at federal, provincial and local level.

## Limitations of the Study

Different countries adopted different principles and theoretical approaches to develop their national statistical system and/or national identification system. Each sector can have their own set of guiding theories, that have been overlooked while preparing this paper. The study limits itself to the fundamental aspects of the aforementioned systems and focuses more on opportunities and barriers that could be applicable for policy level recommendations. The study explains fundamental concepts about the existing systems adopted at global scenario in surficial level, thereby providing an opportunity for future researchers to delve into in-depth analysis and findings focusing on individual sector specific principles, theories and systems.

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## Declaration of Interest

I wish to confirm that, there are no known conflicts of interest associated with the publication article. I hereby confirm, no funding support has been received and no agencies are associated with this article thus removing the potential conflict of interest.

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## Post Disaster Agricultural Strategies for Food Sufficiency and Economic Resilience: Special Focus on Gorkha, Nepal in Relation to Barpak Earthquake, 2015

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### Abstract

Barpak earthquake 2015 (7.8 Richter scale) killed 8,800 people, injured thousands and made nearly 3.5 million homeless. It created food shortage and hardship on livelihood because of damaged agricultural infrastructures, loss of stored food, feed, seed, livestock and reduced crop yield. This research aims to find out post the disaster situation of food availability, consumption and food balance in Gorkha district, as well as to assure livelihoods support and economic resilience. Relevant literature was reviewed, and field verification and interactions were organized in different rural municipalities/municipalities in the year 2019. The study revealed that Gorkha has a high agricultural potential with a surplus production of cereals (49.7%), fruits (6.2%) and spices (175.7%). However, the surplus on cereals was only in Palungtar, Ajirkot, Arughat, Siranchok, Barpak Sulikot, Dharche and Gorkha municipalities (7491.3, 6000.1, 5946.6, 3424.9, 2699.8, 1255.2 and 707.3 t/year, respectively), but Chun Numbri, Bhimsen, Gandaki and Sahid Lakhani municipalities were in a deficit of 101, 661, 333 and 1799 t/year respectively. Moreover, the district was producing a negligible amount of fish, oilseed, ghee (animal) and honey but was in deficit in the production of vegetables (31.5%), potato (30.0%), milk (29.6%), egg (65.0%), meat (54.0%) and pulses (53.0%). In fact, the food surplus and deficit in different commodities varied in different municipalities with different degrees. It is thus suggested to adopt a municipality-wise, commercial-focused agriculture programme that includes potato/seed production in Chun Numbri (high hill), medicinal herbs in Dharche, maize in Barpak Sulikot, intercropping agroforestry of utis (*Alnus nepalensis*), timur (*Zanthoxylum armatum*), white sandalwood (*Santalum album*) with cardamom/tea/coffee in Ajirkot, goat production in Siranchok and Arughat, avocado in Bhimsen, citrus in Sahid Lakhani, organic vegetables in Gandaki and Gorkha and milk/fruit production in Palungtar. Finally, it is recommended to integrate all the development programmes, farmers' welfare programmes, agro-tourism and resources to give synergy on food security and economic resilience of the earthquake victims in Gorkha district.

**Keywords:** earthquake, food deficit, livelihood, priority crop, resilience

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## **1. Background**

Nepal is highly vulnerable to several disasters: earthquakes, floods, landslides, fires, epidemics, avalanches, windstorms, hailstorms, lightning, glacier lake outburst floods, droughts and dangerous weather events (Subedi and Poudyal Chhetri, 2019). Nepal falls under a seismic zone with the probability of large earthquakes of magnitude greater than seven in each 70-80 years (Mahato, 2014). It was placed at the eleven-top earthquake vulnerable countries in the world paralleled as sitting on a time-bomb. It has encountered 19 major earthquakes since the twelfth century (Subedi and Poudyal Chhetri, 2019). Earthquake is the scariest and the most damaging disaster in Nepal (Subedi and Poudyal Chhetri, 2019). Records show that since 1255 AD Nepal experienced 19 earthquakes with significantly large impacts. The last two big earthquakes that hit Nepal were that of 1833 (of 7.7 magnitude which killed 414 people) and 1934 (of 8.3 magnitude, 8519 people were killed). The other earthquakes that occurred in far western Nepal in 1980 (of 6.5 magnitude, 103 people were killed), and in eastern Nepal in 1988 (of 6.5 magnitude that killed 721 people) were comparatively much smaller in magnitude (Chhetri, 2018; Upreti, 2015).

There was a devastating earthquake of 7.8 magnitude on the Richter scale on 25 April 2015. Its epicentre was Barpak of Gorkha district. This earthquake severely affected 14 districts (Gorkha, Dhading, Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Kavrepalanchowk, Sindhupalchowk, Dolakha, Sindhuli, Makawanpur, Ramechhap and Okhaldhunga) and another 31 districts affected to varying extents (Chhetri, 2018; Upreti, 2015). The Gorkha earthquake enormously affected human, socio-economic and other multiple sectors and left deep scars mainly on the economy, livelihood and infrastructure of the country (Subedi and Poudyal Chhetri, 2019). The earthquakes destroyed 604,930 houses completely and 288,856 houses partially. It is estimated that the total value of the damages caused by the earthquakes was NPR 706 billion or equivalent to US\$ 7 billion (NPC, 2015).

Entire villages were flattened, especially those near the epicentre (Shrestha, 2015; McCarthy, 2015 and Kaini, 2015). The earthquake killed more than 8,800 people and injured nearly three times as many (Jason and Rauniyar, 2015). Likewise, nearly 3.5 million people became homeless (National Emergency Operation Centre, 2015). Around 800,000 people displaced by the earthquake in Nepal had to struggle to survive in a context of persistent and severe lack of safe and adequate housing, poor hygiene and trauma (AIN, 2015). Moreover, people did not receive recovery support immediately and had to spend the monsoon season without a house.

Reconstruction and recovery efforts have not been achieved as expected because of the weak governance and leadership of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA). Humanitarian relief work, including immediate food support, remained chaotic for months until the rainy season. The majority of the people lacked food and shelter (Subedi and Poudyal Chhetri, 2019). The conflict victims who received supplies repeatedly complained that the rice distributed was “substandard and inedible” (Chhetri, 2018). Concerns were also expressed that crop harvests could be reduced or lost that season, as earthquake-affected people would have only a short time to plant crops before the onset of the monsoon (UNNC, 2015). Thousands of agricultural infrastructures, livestock/poultry shades, irrigation channels and storage were destroyed. Thousands of productive livestock were killed. A big volume of stored food, feed and seed was damaged, affecting food shortages and creating a hardship on the livelihood of the earthquake victims.

Gorkha is a geographically diverse district, politically divided into 11 rural municipalities/municipalities in Gandaki province. The climate ranges from a southern tropical belt (300-1,000 masl) to the subtropical, temperate, alpine and Himalayan belt (3,000 to 6,400 masl) in the north. Gorkha district covers an area of 3,610 km (1,390 sq mi) and has a population of 271,061. Of these, Khas is the largest ethnic group (38%) followed by Pahadi Brahmin (21%) and Gurungs 16%. Magar, Tamang, Ghale, Muslim, Newar, Kumal, Chepang, and Dalits are other ethnic and caste groups in the district (National Population and Housing Census, 2011). The population in northern rural municipalities is sparsely distributed. It is dense in the southern part of the district.

Chun Numbri, Dharche, Parpak Sulikot and Ajirkot rural municipalities lie in the north, Siranchok, Gorkha and Palungtar in the south-west and Arughat, Bhimsen, Sahid Lakhan and Gandaki in the south-east areas (Fig. 1).

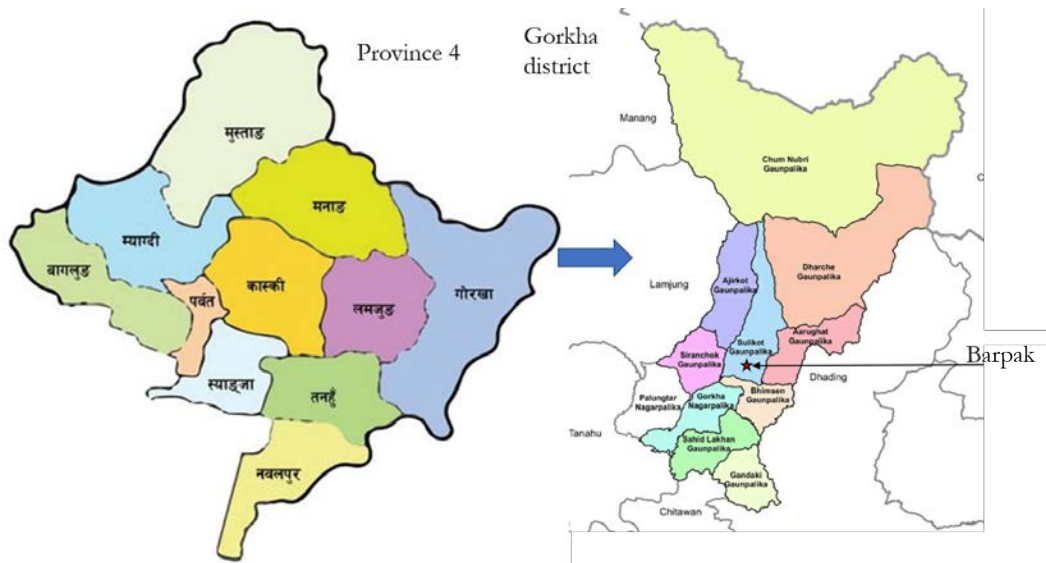


Fig. 1: Gandaki province, Gorkha district and municipalities, 2015.

## 2. Problem statement/Rationale

The post-disaster priority of the Nepal Reconstruction Authority (NRA) was on housing and infrastructure support rather than on food security, livelihood and economic resilience (NRA, 2016; Subedi and Poudyal Chhetri, 2019; Chhetri, 2018). A new project - Food and Nutrition Security Enhancement Project - was initiated to target the livelihood recovery and economic resilience of the earthquake-affected communities in eight different districts, including Gorkha (FAO, 2020). Although local, provincial and federal governments were involved in meeting the demand of the earthquake victims in the post-disaster period, all those efforts seemed insufficient for the livelihood recovery and economic resilience of the victims (Subedi and Poudyal Chhetri, 2019). Post-earthquake, food access in Gorkha district is decreasing because of low production, availability and low purchasing power, as well as poor food collection, distribution and marketing system (FAO, 2015a). Overall, the district appears to have a low

level of investment in agriculture, donor-dependent food security programs, poor coordination, overlap and duplication among programs, the non-specified role of the private sector, insufficient marketing network and infrastructures and very low access of farmers' to government extension services (17%) (Pokhrel, 2019).

In this situation, it is of utmost necessity to find the post-disaster food and nutrition availability and balance, and recommend the way forward for sustainable/commercial economic improvement of Gorkha district to ensure livelihood recovery and economic resilience for the earthquake victims.

### **3. Literature review**

A natural disaster is a sudden event that causes widespread destruction, major collateral damage or loss of life, which might be earthquakes, flooding, volcanic eruption, landslide, hurricanes and so on. Nepal is prone to some of these types of natural disasters due to its geophysical structure, complex geology and climatic changes (Paudel Chhetri, 1999).

The biggest death toll by an earthquake in world history was in China (Shaanxi and Tangshan) which killed 830,000 and 655,000 people in 1556 and 1976 respectively, and the Haiti earthquake which killed 316,000 people in 2010 was the second-biggest (Deveci, 2018). A magnitude of 7.8 earthquake struck Nepal on April 25, 2015, and killed 9,000 people and injured 22,000 people. It was the deadliest earthquake in the seismically active region in 81 years (World Vision, 2018).

The Agricultural Livelihood Impact Appraisal (ALIA) undertaken by the Nepal Food Security Cluster, led by FAO in 2015, indicated the need for livelihoods support with the prioritized agricultural recovery programmes in more severely affected districts (6) including Gorkha. Impact on stored grains was very significant, particularly on rice, maize and millet seeds posing a threat to household food security. Destroyed agricultural tools have seriously reduced the capacity for cultivation. Household access to fertilizer and other inputs for use in the summer cropping season was reduced. Labour availability for agriculture was also a problem. Animal health was at risk due to a lack of shelter and feed. Animal losses were significant with 16% for cattle and 36% for poultry, with more animals injured and sick. Damage to small-scale irrigation had significant negative consequences on the winter cropping season. Limited technical services were available to farmers because of the damage to the Agricultural and Livestock Service Centre buildings and facilities (FAO, 2015b). The most urgent needs for the summer cropping season were seeds and fertilizers, followed by irrigation, tools and technical support. Rehabilitation of irrigation, as well as barley and wheat seeds, were the critical need for the winter cropping season. Recovery of the livestock shelter, support to feed and water access, restocking and health services were in urgent need. There was an urgent need to support and promote resilient livelihood recovery. However, the disaster management system, on the whole, was weak in Nepal.

Coordination across and within state agencies and government departments was equally poor. The recovery of the millions of people affected by the earthquake and the country to build back in a better, more resilient way is recommended by Risk Nexus (2014). Not only should there be a focus on the effects of this earthquake, there should also be a comprehensive approach to reduce the vulnerability of households to other more frequent hazards, such as

landslides, floods, droughts, pests and diseases. The disaster-resilient agriculture that covers structural improvement of farm structures like storage houses, livestock and poultry shades, threshing floors, irrigation canals, pump houses and others, adoption of technologies that control soil erosion and conserve the soil carbon and moisture are equally important for earthquake resilience too. A diversified agriculture production system that includes an ecological design, adaption of traditional landscape technology and conservation agriculture is recommended (Lengnick, 2018). Improved institutional and technical capacities of farmer groups, adoption of improved agricultural technologies/practices, livestock, soil and plant health management, increased access of farmers to input and output market and improved rehabilitation work in agriculture infrastructures are important (ADRA, 2017). Particular awareness should be given to the needs of women farmers and elderly headed households (FAO, 2015b).

A proactive disaster management legislation focusing on disaster preparedness is important. Strong law enforcement and monitoring of building codes on earthquake-resistant construction practices are necessary. Adequate preparedness, response capacity and coordination among various stakeholders on disaster management are needed. Earthquake resistant infrastructures are needed. An arrangement should be made for appropriate and essential equipment/s and stuff – based on the nature of disaster – to undertake search and rescue works effectively. Modern technology and strategic communication/risk mapping/satellite mapping/earth observations are important tools and techniques to be applied in reducing disaster risks and life-saving (Subedi and Poudyal Chhetri, 2019). Mass awareness, community resilience, effective disaster governance, institutional efficiency in all phases (preparedness, response recovery and reconstruction) is necessary. The government, local people, INGOs, NGOs all should address disaster specific needs, priorities and plans to reduce risks and improve disaster management perspectives and skills (Chhetri, 2018). We must build on the fundamental strengths, social capital and community resilience that we possess. Educating the people to ‘build back better’ (BBB) must be the motto of the government. Non-governmental organizations, the private sector, experts, intellectuals, media and the international community can contribute to the rebuilding and disaster-preparation efforts by working together (Subedi and Poudyal Chhetri, 2019).

Earthquakes and any other disaster quickly create food shortages because of restrictions on transportation and disruptions in the markets (Patho.Org., 2019). Therefore, the establishment and management of an emergency supply chain during the containment effort is of paramount importance (Thomas et al., 2012). Agriculture and food security are among the sectors that get harshly affected by natural disasters by way of fluctuation in food production and disturbances in food trade and food supply chains (Reddy et al., 2016). Communication, food buffer stocking, safe transportation, supply and distribution during the period are paramount (The FIA, 2020). The Indian Council of Medical Research and the World Health Organization have per capita food recommendations for disaster-affected people for India and globally (ICMR, 1985, WHO, 1986). Nepal doesn’t have such recommendations. ICMR recommendations can be taken as the reference for the calculation of food requirements in Nepal and Gorkha too (Table 1).

Table 1: Per capita food recommendation, ICMR 1985

Food group	Daily(g/person/day)			Yearly (kg/person/year)		
	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Average
Cereals	400	650	525	146	219	183 (WHO,1986)
Pulses	55	80	67.5	20	32	26
Green vegetables	100	125	112.5	37	46	41
Tuber and roots	75	100	87.5	27	37	32
Other vegetables	75	100	87.5	27	37	32
Fruits	30	30	30	11	11	11
Milk	100	200	150	37	73	55
Meat and fish	30	30	30	11	11	11
Eggs	30	30	30	11	11	11
Sugar and honey	30	55	42.5	11	20	16
Fat and oils	35	50	42.5	13	18	16
Total	960	1450	1205	350	514	432

Source: ICMR, 1985

Nepal has a lower rate of food self-sufficiency ratio (SSR) (FAO, 2003; Singh, 2008). This is very serious in northern Gorkha (AKC Gorkha, 2019). Hunger is mainly measured in terms of staples (Pariona, 2019). Although rice is the staple food in most of Gorkha, potato is considered a staple food in northern Gorkha. In addition, the food availability and balance are not uniform throughout the district. Northern Gorkha is most vulnerable to food insecurity (AKC Gorkha, 2019).

Each nation and municipality have their land and food policy and regulation in the world (Piesse, 2018) based on which they maintain food security. It is recommended to maintain at least a 50% food deficit as buffer stocks for emergencies (Pokhrel, 2020a).

Countries like the US, China and Brazil, either have larger landmasses or are part of bigger economic unions to address the need for the expansion of cultivation areas and herd/farm sizes for commercial production (Piesse, 2018). However, in developing countries, commercialization is possible only with prioritized commodities with increased productivity potential and improved management practices (Pokhrel, 2020b) and other institutional services. Many other countries with the potential of good animal and crop yields, like the USA and India, have developed, popularized and scaled up high tech initiatives for high and quality yields (World Bank Group, 2020).

Food education is needed to improve a nutrition pattern and balanced diet in food consumption in Nepal (NeKSAP, 2012). Add, there is a need to replace the domination of supply-driven agriculture extension approaches with demand-driven services (Birner & Anderson, 2007). Extension services based more on donor's interests than on the demand of farmers should be addressed (Dhital, 2017).

The cultivated area is 48,182 ha, of which 30.6% is irrigated. Besides crop production, livestock is another strong business in this district. The municipality-wise population, cultivated area (ha) and livestock population in the year 2019 were as below (Table 2):

Table 2: Population, cultivated area and livestock population in Gorkha, in 2019

SN	Rural/ Municipality	Popula- tion	Cultivated area (ha)			Livestock (Number)					
			Irrigated	Rainfed	Total	Buffalo	Cattle	Goat	Sheep	Chicken / duck	Pigs
1	Chun Numbri	7417	130	1832	1702	10	1500	20250	10530	30245	150
2	Dharche	13264	155	3099	3159	3450	7720	22580	10848	35570	580
3	B. Sulikot,	25399	1635	3272	4907	1500	7150	20890	3662	45700	1500
4	Ajirkot	15602	2176	1729	3905	8554	9856	24325	5240	48240	1000
5	Siranchok	23666	1289	2071	3360	8988	9277	18347		41300	2040
6	Arughat	23915	735	7244	7979	8690	7633	17180		42100	1840
7	Bhimsen	22053	1229	1698	2972	9832	7634	16241		40340	730
8	S.Lakhan	27555	971	1733	2704	9834	9435	18603		44380	1803
9	Gandaki	23262	1012	1836	2848	7776	9497	18603		43250	600
10	Gorkha	50684	3242	2282	5524	5357	7322	15580		42240	809
11	Palungtar	38244	2451	6537	8988	6681	7757	15870		42580	710
	Total	2,71,061	14,744	33,438	48,182	69,672	84,781*	2,08,468	30,280	4,56,245	1,1762

Note: Chauri= 4,630

Source: AKC Gorkha, 2019; MoALD, 2019

#### 4. Research questions & objectives

The research questions on which the article builds were the following.

- Was the food supply/availability for the earthquake victims in different municipalities and rural municipalities in Gorkha sufficient during the post-disaster period?
- How the victims could recover their livelihood options for economic resilience through agriculture development in a sustainable way?

##### Overall objective:

The overall objective of the study was to explore options for “post-earthquake livelihood recovery and economic resilience of the earthquake victims in Gorkha district”.

##### Specific objectives:

Specific objectives included the following:

- To identify the gaps in food and nutrition security of the post-earthquake situation in Gorkha district

- To recommend appropriate agricultural strategies for different municipalities for the sustainable economic improvement of earthquake victims.

## **5. Methodology**

### **5.1 Literature review and data collection:**

Relevant literature from the journals, books, newsletters, web portals was reviewed. Secondary data on cultivated areas, livestock population, crop and animal production were collected from Agriculture Knowledge Centre (AKC), Gorkha and Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MoALD).

### **5.2 Calculation of milling/dressing return of foods:**

The milling/dressing/processing returns of different commodities were calculated based on the following formula:

$$\text{MRwt (\%)} = \text{Gwt (100)} - \text{Bpwt (\%)} + \text{Mls (\%)}$$

Where, MRwt = weight of product after milling/processing or the milling return

Gwt= gross weight/production after harvesting

Bpwt= weight of by product/s

Mls= milling/processing losses (wastage and moisture losses)

Example: Milling return of paddy (e-Krishi, 2020)

Where, Byproduct of rice (Bpwt) is husk (20%), bran (5%) and embryo (3%) =28%

Moisture and wastage loss (Mls) = 2%

$$\text{MRwt (\%)} = 100 - 28 + 2 = 70\%$$

### **5.3 Milling return of cereal and pulses**

Since the milling returns of maize and wheat are higher than paddy (97%), the milling returns of cereals on average is considered to be 75%. The milling return of pulses was found similar to cereals (75%).

### **5.4 Milling return of vegetables, spices and fruits**

The transportation loss of horticultural perishables like vegetables, spices and fruits was found very high (25-35%) (Devkota et al., 2014). The moisture loss of potatoes in storage was about 4.78% and the weight losses measured up to 11% (Chourasia et al., 2005). In addition, potatoes are infested by various insect pests in storage in Nepal. Thus, the weight for table vegetables, fruits, spices and potatoes was estimated to be 75-85%. The weight of processed tea/coffee was estimated to be 75%, oil extraction from oilseed 38% and recovery of sugarcane 8% as per the standards.

## **5.5 Dressing return of livestock and poultry products**

The dressing return of meat is estimated to be 75%, while, it is 72% for mutton, 80% for poultry and 75% for fish (Christopher, 1999). Since no significant processing loss is found with milk, egg, wool and honey, the recovery is calculated 100%, while the milling return of tea and coffee is estimated at 75%, oil 38% and sugar 8%.

## **5.6 Assessment of Food Self Sufficiency Ratio and Import Dependency Ration (IDR):**

The food self-sufficiency ratio (SSR) and the import dependency ratio (IDR) was calculated based on the following formula:

$$\text{SSR} = \frac{\text{Total consumption (milled, t)} - \text{import (milled, t)}}{\text{Total consumption (milled, t)}} \times 100$$

$$\text{IDR} = \text{SSR} - 100$$

## **5.7 Site Selection:**

Gorkha was selected for the study because of it being the epicentre of the Barpak earthquake, 2015. It represents all agroecosystems in high hills, mid-hills and foothills with river basins. All 9 rural municipalities and 2 municipalities (total 11) were taken for the study.

## **5.8 Technical consultation:**

Technical checklists were prepared for each of the municipalities from a consultative meeting held in Nagarjun-1, Kathmandu on 16 March 2019. A total of 12 agricultural experts (horticulture 2, cardamom and coffee 1, apiculture 1, community development and social mobilization 1, agriculture extension 2, agri-economics 1, agronomy 1, fishery 1, soil conservation 1 and agroforestry 1) participated in the meeting. They were either from Gorkha or had the experience of work in the Gorkha district. The checklist was prepared to understand the possible agriculture commodities for commercial production and income generation in different agro-ecosystems in Gorkha.

## **5.9 Field survey and Focused Group Discussion:**

Field visits and interactions with farmers were held along road/trail sites for easy access to information. Field visits to all municipalities were organized and verified in April 2019. Interactions were held among 10-15 key informant farmers and political leaders in a form of focus group discussion (FGD) in each municipality (total 140).

## **5.10 Data analysis:**

Based on the production of commodities in the municipalities and the milling/dressing return, the SSR and IDR were calculated. Food requirement was assumed to be similar to the ICMR (?) 1985 recommendation.

Feasible commodities, alternative and secondary agro-businesses for the particular geography were identified/segregated and tabulated based on the ranking of the commodities mentioned in the checklist. The lowest number was given to the most feasible commodity starting from 1-5 by the participants. The frequency was counted to find the most feasible commodity, followed by the alternative and secondary agro-businesses. Qualitative information collected from interactions and field visits were synthesized and, then, results were presented.

## 6. Results and discussion

Gorkha produces sufficient cereals, table fruits and spices (24631.6, 503.4 and 1429.1 t/year, respectively) to feed its population. However, the district was seriously deficient in the production of milled/processed pulses (3732.6 t), table vegetable (8533.9 t), potato/tubers (8119.6 t), meat (2047.4 t), fish (2955.7 t), eggs (8,453,900 pieces/year) and milk (7295.6 t/year) in the year 2019 (Fig. 2, Table 3).

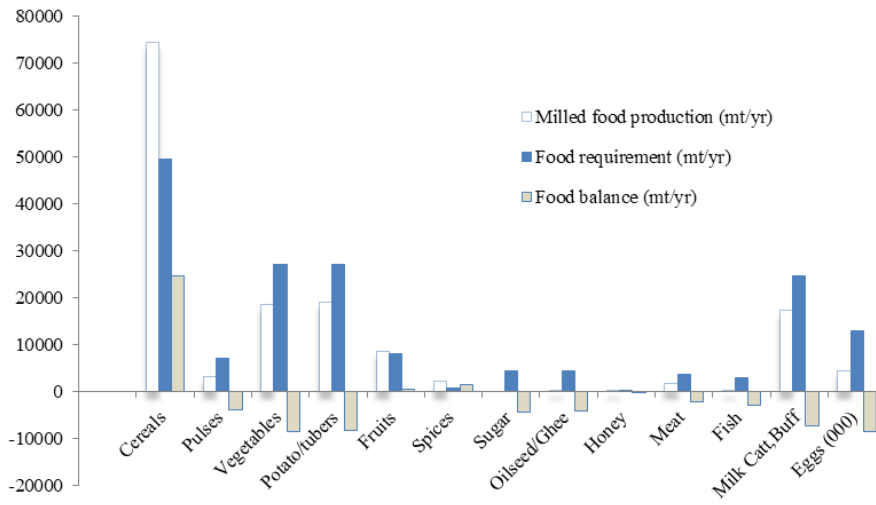


Fig-2: Food production, requirement and balance in Gorkha, 2019

Table-3: Food/fiber production, requirement and balance in Gorkha district, 2019

SN	Commodity	Recommended amount** (kg/person/year)	Area/Head (ha/nos)*	Gross production (t/yr) *	Quantity for table use (t/yr)	Requirement (t/r)	Balance (t/yr)	SSR (%)	IDR (%)
1	Cereals	183	48212	98981	74235.8	49604.2	24631.6	149.7	00
2	Pulses	26	2310	4420	3315.0	7047.6	-3732.6	47.0	53.0
3	Vegetables	100	2456.5	24763	18572.3	27106.1	-8533.9	68.5	31.5
4	Potato/tubers	100	2504	25315.4	18986.6	27106.1	-8119.6	70.0	30.0
5	Fruits	30	1437.5	11513.7	8635.3	8131.8	503.4	106.2	00

6	Spices	3	382	2989.7	2242.3	813.2	1429.1	275.7	00
7	Sugar	16	0	0	0.0	4337.0	-4337.0	0.0	100.0
8	Oilseed/ Ghee	16	865	856.5	325.5	4337.0	-4011.5	7.5	92.5
9	Honey	0.5	11609	9.85	9.9	135.5	-125.7	7.3	92.7
10	Meat	14	-	2330	1747.5	3794.9	-2047.4	46.0	54.0
11	Fish	11	17.38	34.6	26.0	2981.7	-2955.7	0.9	99.1
12	Milk Catt, Buff	91	154453	17371	17371	24666.6	-7295.6	70.4	29.6
13	Eggs(000 nos)	0.048	456245	4557	4557	13010.9	-8453.9	35.0	65.0

Note: Area coverage of tea and coffee in Gorkha was 2 and 20 ha and production was 1t and 84 t respectively (0.8 and 63 t table tea and coffee). Sheep population was 30280 in 2018 producing 22.1t wool. Gorkha was deficient in tea, coffee and wool.

Source: \*AKC Gorkha, 2019; MoALD, 2019. \*\*ICMR, 1985

Gorkha does not produce sugar at all, and the production of consumable oil/fat (from oilseeds and milk) is also minimal. The deficit of sugar and oil/fat is about 4337.0 and 4011.5 T/year, respectively. There is an ample possibility to be self-sufficient in potato, vegetable and milk having a higher SSR (70.4, 70.0 and 68.5%, respectively) (Fig. 1, Table 3).

The geographic diversity permits the possibility of commercialized production of different agricultural commodities in different municipalities for scaling up economic levels as following:

### 6.1 Chun Numbri Rural Municipality

Chun Numbri is the north most high-hill municipality in Gorkha connected to Tibet of China. The population of this rural municipality is 7,417. The gross and milled cereals and pulses production in Chun Numbri seems seriously deficit by 101.1 and 30.3 T/year, respectively. Fruits, sugar, oil/fat, fish, honey, milk and eggs are also in short supply. However, Chun Numbri is self-sufficient in meat, potato, vegetable and species (Table-4).

Production of high-hill potato and potato seeds seems most feasible in terms of livelihood recovery and economic resilience in Chum Numbri. Potato is a staple crop. Local black potato is unique in taste and colour. However, the inflow of improved varieties from outside the municipality is replacing the unique and valuable potato variety. Local potato seeds can be stored in room condition, it requires no cold storage. However, identification of geography and users group/s, training and capacity building, the establishment of facilities for true potato seed/pre-basic seed (TPS/PBS) production, construction of community storage and input management (seeds, irrigation, storage, organic manure, soft loan, technology, transportation, etc.) are necessary. The cultivation of medicinal herbs and development of production block/pocket/cluster with neighbouring Dharche rural municipality could also be an alternative to potato cultivation. In addition, deciduous fruits, trout fish and ground apple production can be tied up with agro-tourism. The production of local black potato, which shall remain a staple crop, should be backed with further exploration of the market for tubers, seed potato and potato seeds, geographically indicated (GI) niche product and agro-tourism for livelihood recovery. Seed potato and potato products will have a high impact on income generation and economic resilience of earthquake victims in Chun Numbri.

Table-4: Food/fiber production, requirement and balance in Chun Numbri, 2019

SN	Commodity	Gross production* (t/yr)	Quantity for table use (t/yr)	Requirement (t/yr)	Balance (t/yr)
A	Sufficient				
1	Potato/tubers	2639	1979.3	741.7	1237.6
2	Meat	204	153.0	103.8	49.2
3	Spices	59.5	44.6	22.3	22.3
4	Vegetables	1012	759.0	741.7	17.3
B	Shortage				
1	Honey	0	0.0	3.7	-3.7
2	Eggs (000)	302	302	356	-54.0
3	Pulses	216.6	162.5	192.8	-30.3
4	Fish	0	0.0	81.6	-81.6
C	Acute shortage				
1	Cereals	1675	1256.3	1357.3	-101.1
2	Sugar	0	0.0	118.7	-118.7
3	Oilseed/Ghee	0	0.0	118.7	-118.7
4	Milk (Catt, Buff)	172	172	674.9	-502.9
5	Fruits	103.2	77.4	222.5	-145.1
D	Other				
1	Wool	7.8	7.8	NA	NA
2	Lokta	0.465	0.465	NA	NA

\*source: AKC Gorkha, 2019; MoALD, 2019.

## 6.2 Dharche Rural Municipality

Dharche is also a high-hill municipality in the Gorkha district. The population of Dharche is 13264 (Table-5). The gross and milled pulses, table vegetables and fruit production in Dharche are seriously in deficit by 231.7, 1128.4 and 339.4 t/year (Table-5). The municipality lacks sugar, oil/fat and fish production. However, Dharche is self-sufficient in cereals, potatoes, spices, meat and milk production.

Medicinal herbs production has already been initiated and is the most feasible and profitable enterprise in the municipality. Medicinal herbs are high-value saleable crops. Here too, harvested materials can be stored in room condition. For the commercialization of medicinal herbs, it needs to identify the geography and user group/s, training and capacity building, establishment of high tech facilities for the production of planting materials and medicinal herbs, construction of community storage house/s and input management (seeds/saplings, irrigation, storage, organic manure, soft loan, technology, transportation, etc.). Alternative activity can be high-hill potato/true potato seed production, and development of production block/pocket/cluster with Chun Numbri and Barpak Sulikot rural municipalities. Deciduous fruits, trout fish, ground apple, vegetables and vegetable seeds production could be tied up with agro-tourism, in addition to medicinal herbs, for the economic resilience of the earthquake victims. All these can sufficiently generate the employment and income of the people in Dharche municipality.

Table-5: Food/fiber production, requirement and balance in Dharce, 2019

SN	Commodity	Gross Production (t/yr)*	Quantity for table use (t/yr)	Requirement (t/yr)	Balance (t/yr)
A	Sufficient				
1	Cereals	49105	3682.5	2427.3	1255.2
2	Potato/tubers	2022	1516.5	1326.4	190.1
3	Spices	355	266.3	39.8	226.5
4	Meat	361.5	271.1	185.7	85.4
5	Milk (Cattle/Buffalo)	1284	1284	1207	77.0
B	Shortage				
1	Honey	0	0.0	6.6	-6.6
2	Fish	0	0.0	145.9	-145.9
3	Pulses	151	113.3	344.9	-231.7
4	Eggs (000)	355	355	636.7	-281.7
C	Acute shortage				
1	Vegetables	264	198.0	1326.4	-1128.4
2	Sugar	0	0.0	212.2	-212.2
3	Oilseed/Ghee	0	0.0	212.2	-212.2
4	Fruits	78	58.5	397.9	-339.4
D	Other				
1	Wool	7	7	NA	NA
2	Lokta	0.54	0.54	NA	NA

\*source: AKC Gorkha, 2019; MoALD, 2019.

### 6.3 Barpak Sulikot Rural Municipality

Barpak Sulikot is also a high-hill municipality in Gorkha. It was the epicentre of Barpak earthquake, 2015. The population of this rural municipality is 25399. Pulses, table vegetable, potato and fruit production in Barpak Sulikot are in serious deficit by 543.4, 1071.4, 2085.0 and 524.1 t/year respectively (Table 6). Meat, milk, oil/fat and eggs are also in deficit in a considerable volume. Sugar is not produced in this municipality. However, Barpak Sulikot is self-sufficient in cereals and spices production (Table-6).

Hill maize seed/grain production is very suitable in Barpak Sulikot for commercialization, livelihood recovery and economic resilience. The demand for maize seed in the mid-hill is increasing rapidly. Maize grains can be used both for food and feed purposes. Barpak Sulikot is recently connected by a proper road. The main pre-requisites for the recovery of the municipality are commercialization of hill maize seed/grain production, identification of geography and user group/s, training and capacity building on production and post-harvest operations, the establishment of maize grit and feed industries, construction of community seed storage house/s with seed processing facility, and packing and input management (seeds, irrigation, storage, organic manure, soft loan, technology, transportation, etc.). Additionally, in Dharce and Chun Numbri municipality high hill potato tuber/seed production should be promoted. The probability of the production of white sandalwood (*S. album*) and timur (*Z. armatum*) cultivation, Apis cerana beekeeping and kiwi production should also be explored

together with agro-tourism to enhance local food and nutrition security, employment and income generation and other supportive programs.

Table-6: Food/fiber production, requirement and balance in Barpak Sulikot, 2019

SN	Commodity	Gross production (t/yr) *	Quantity for table use (t/yr)	Requirement (t/yr)	Balance (t/yr)
A	Sufficient				
1	Cereals	9797	7347.8	4648	2699.8
2	Spices	331.8	248.9	76.2	172.7
B	Shortage				
1	Honey	0.6	0.5	12.7	-12.3
2	Meat	223	223	355.6	-132.6
3	Eggs (000)	457	457	1219.2	-762.2
C	Acute Shortage				
1	Potato/tubers	606.6	455.0	2539.9	-2085.0
2	Milk (Catt, Buff )	986	986	2311.3	-1325.3
3	Vegetables	1958	1468.5	2539.9	-1071.4
4	Pulses	156	117.0	660.4	-543.4
5	Fruits	317.2	237.9	762	-524.1
6	Sugar	0	0.0	406.4	-406.4
7	Oilseed/Ghee	14.85	5.6	406.4	-400.8
D	Other				
1	Tea	0	0.0	NA	NA
2	Coffee	6	4.5	NA	NA
3	Fish	NA	NA	279.4	NA
4	Wool	2.5	2.5	NA	NA
5	Lokta	0.75	0.75	NA	NA

\*source: AKC Gorkha, 2019; MoALD, 2019.

## 6.4 Ajirkot Rural Municipality

Ajirkot is also a high-hill municipality in Gorkha located near the epicenter of Barpak earthquake, 2015. It is recently connected by road. The population of this rural municipality is 15,602. Ajirkot municipality is in serious deficit in vegetable, potato and fruit production by 603.2, 165.1 and 378.7 t/year. Meat and eggs are also in deficit in this district. Ajirkot does not produce sugar and oilseed in a considerable volume. However, Ajirkot is self-sufficient in cereals, pulses, spices and milk production (Table-7).

Timur (*Z. armatum*), white sandalwood (*S. album*), utis (*A. nepalensis*) based agroforestry and the plantation crops like cardamom, tea and coffee are the most feasible commodities for commercial production in Ajirkot. The Chepe Khola watershed area of Ajirkot is already commercialized in terms of cardamom, tea and coffee production. The geographically indicated (GI) organic market of these plantation crops and the product of timur (*Z. armatum*) and white sandalwood (*S. album*) are sound with high value. Fodder and deciduous fruit crops are also highly feasible. However, identification of geography and user group/s, the

establishment of a high-tech bio-safe tissue culture lab, nurseries and resource centres for quality sapling production of timur (*Z. armatum*), white sandal (*S. album*), utis (*A. nepalensis*), cardamom, tea, coffee, fodder and deciduous fruits, together with training and capacity building on production and post-harvest operations, establishment of drying, processing, packaging and storage units for cereal grains and other commodities, including cardamom, tea and coffee, and input management (saplings, irrigation, storage, organic manure, soft loan, technology, transportation, etc.) are very important to enhance the income of the people. Goat production, kiwi, deciduous fruits, trout production, etc., can be alternative activities to generate additional income and employment.

Table-7: Food/fiber production, requirement and balance in Ajirkot, 2019

SN	Commodity	Gross production (t/yr) *	Quantity for table use (t/yr)	Requirement (t/yr)	Balance (t/yr)
A	Sufficient				
1	Cereals	11807	8855.3	2855.2	6000.1
2	Milk (Cattle/Buffalo)	2098	2098	1419.8	678.2
3	Spices	418.7	314.0	46.8	267.2
4	Pulses	834	625.5	405.7	219.8
B	Shortage				
1	Honey	3	2.3	7.8	-5.6
2	Meat	253	189.8	218.4	-28.7
3	Potato/tubers	1860.2	1395.2	1560.2	-165.1
4	Eggs (000)	482	482	748.9	-266.9
C	Acute Shortage				
1	Sugar	0	0.0	249.6	-249.6
2	Oilseed/Ghee	26.73	10.2	249.6	-239.4
3	Fruits	119.14	89.4	468.1	-378.7
4	Vegetables	1276	957.0	1560.2	-603.2
D	Other				
1	Tea	1	0.8	NA	NA
2	Coffee	48	36.0	NA	NA
3	Fish	NA	NA	171.6	NA
4	Wool	2.8	2.8	NA	NA
5	Lokta	0.1	0.1	NA	NA

\*source: AKC Gorkha, 2019; MoALD, 2019.

## 6.5 Siranchok Rural Municipality

Siranchok is a mid-hill rural municipality in southwest Gorkha near Barpak. Siranchok is connected by an all-weather blacktopped road. The population of this rural municipality is 23666. Siranchok municipality is in serious deficit in milled pulses, table vegetables, fruits and meat production by 430.8, 1891.9, 551.3 and 178.3t/year. Eggs are also in deficit by 723000 pieces/year. Siranchok does not produce sugar, and the production of oil/fat is minimal. In contrast, honey and milk production in the municipality is almost at the self-sufficient level.

Siranchok is self-sufficient in cereals, potato and spices production (3424.9, 430.8 & 266.7 t/year respectively) (Table-8).

Goat production is the most appropriate business in Siranchok. It has sufficient forest areas, agro-forestry products and fodder. Goat meat has a good market demand and is an importing commodity in Nepal as a whole. Dairy goat is another demanding business. For commercial goat production in Siranchok, it needs to identify geography and user group/s, establish high tech breeding centre/resource centre for quality breeding stock production, and establish fodder nurseries, fodder tree planting, forage seed production and pasture management. Training and capacity building on husbandry management, input management (goat shades, drinking water, feed, soft loan, technology, transportation, health care and veterinary services, etc.) and the establishment of an organic manure factory are also equally important. In addition, rice/rice seed (Daraudi-Bhusunde) production, cerana beekeeping, cardamom/tea/coffee, kiwi, hill maize/maize seed production with agro-tourism can earn an additional income. The expected output can enhance local food and nutrition security and contribute to employment and income generation.

Table-8: Food/fiber production, requirement and balance in Siranchok, 2019

SN	Commodity	Gross production (t/yr) *	Quantity for table use (t/yr)	Requirement (t/yr)	Balance (t/yr)
A	Sufficient				
1	Cereals	10341	7755.8	4330.9	3424.9
2	Spices	450.3	337.7	71	266.7
3	Potato/tubers	3285.8	2464.4	2366.6	97.8
B	Shortage				
1	Honey	0.5	0.4	11.8	-11.4
2	Milk (Cattle/Buffalo)	2082	2082	2153.6	-71.6
3	Meat	204	153.0	331.3	-178.3
4	Eggs (000)	413	413	1136	-723.0
C	Acute shortage				
1	Sugar	0	0.0	378.7	-378.7
2	Oilseed/Ghee	49.5	18.8	378.7	-359.9
3	Pulses	246	184.5	615.3	-430.8
4	Fruits	211.54	158.7	710	-551.3
5	Vegetables	633	474.8	2366.6	-1891.9
D	Other				
1	Tea	0.5	0.4	NA	NA
2	Coffee	10	7.5	NA	NA
3	Fish	NA	NA	260.3	NA
4	Wool	1	1	NA	NA

\*source: AKC Gorkha, 2019; MoALD, 2019.

## 6.6 Arughat Rural Municipality

Arughat is a mid-hill rural municipality in southeast Gorkha. It is connected with road transportation. The population of this rural municipality is 23915. Arughat is in deficit in pulses, table vegetables, fruits meat and milk production (438.8, 2031.5, 576.5, 192.3 and 315.3 t/year). Eggs are also in deficit by 726900 pieces/year. Arughat does not produce sugar at all while oil/fat is produced in minimal quantity. However, Arughat is self-sufficient in cereals, potato and spices production (5946.6, 2158 and 194.9 t/year respectively) (Table-9).

Arughat is also highly feasible for commercial goat farming. As in Siranchok, sufficient forest areas, fodder availability and proximity to NARC-promoted farm and market accessibility are supportive to goat keeping in Arughat too. Arughat is well connected by road. However, for commercial goat production, identification of geography and user group/s, the establishment of high-tech breeding centre/resource centre for quality breeding stock production, the establishment of fodder nurseries, forage seed production, fodder tree planting and pasture management, need to be ensured. Training and capacity building on husbandry management, input management (goat shades, drinking water, feed, soft loan, technology, transportation, health care and veterinary services, etc.) and the establishment of an organic manure factory are also necessary. Hill maize seed production in a block/pocket/cluster with Barpak Sulikot can be the alternative activity to goat farming. Cardamom/coffee and organic vegetable production, together with agro-tourism, can also earn an additional income. All this can enhance local food and nutrition security, generate employment and income from goat kids, meat, milk, manure and got-dairy related tourism. Hill maize seed/grain, cardamom/coffee, organic vegetable production can also support agro-tourism, livelihood recovery and economic resilience of the earthquake victims.

Table-9: Food/fiber production, requirement and balance in Arughat, 2019

SN	Commodity	Gross production (t/yr)	Quantity for table use (t/yr)	Requirement (t/yr)	Balance (t/yr)
A	Sufficient				
1	Cereals	13764	10323	4376.4	5946.6
2	Potato/tubers	6066	4549.5	2391.5	2158
3	Spices	355.5	266.6	71.7	194.9
B	Shortage				
1	Honey	0.25	0.2	12	-11.8
2	Meat	190	142.5	334.8	-192.3
3	Milk (Cattle/Buffalo)	1861	1861	2176.3	-315.3
4	Eggs (000)	421	421	1147.9	-726.9
C	Acute shortage				
1	Sugar	0	0	382.6	-382.6
2	Oilseed/Ghee	24.75	9.4	382.6	-373.2
3	Pulses	244	183	621.8	-438.8
4	Fruits	187.95	141.0	717.5	-576.5
5	Vegetables	480	360	2391.5	-2031.5
D	Other				

1	Fish	NA	NA	263.1	NA
2	Tea	0	0	NA	NA
3	Coffee	6	4.5	NA	NA
4	Wool	1	1	NA	NA
5	Lokta	0	0	NA	NA

\*source: AKC Gorkha, 2019; MoALD, 2019.

## 6.7 Bhimsen Rural Municipality

Bhimsen is a mid-hill rural municipality in southeast Gorkha, connected by a black-top, all-weather road. The population of this rural municipality is 22053. Bhimsen is in a deficit of milled cereals, pulses, table potatoes, fruits, meat and milk production (660.7, 467.7, 1902.0, 603.2, 182.0 and 1126.8 t/year). Eggs are also in deficit by 6,55,500 pieces/year. Bhimsen does not produce sugar at all while oil/fat is produced in minimal quantity. However, Bhimsen is self-sufficient in table vegetable and spices production (228.5 and 70.1 t/year respectively) (Table-10).

Avocado could be one of the major commodities for cultivation in Bhimsen rural municipality. IDR of fruits in Nepal is 88.1% (MoALD, 2018) and the market price of avocado currently is about NPR 400/kg, and its demand is very high in cities. Avocado reserves high nutritional and health value. Bhimsen rural municipality holds about 59% of total cultivated areas, which is rain-fed and highly feasible for avocado cultivation. However, for its commercial production, Bhimsen needs to identify geography and user group/s, establish high tech nurseries/resource centres for quality, grafted sapling production, establish avocado orchards and enhance skills in nursery and orchard management. Commercialisation also requires improved post-harvest operation, input management (saplings, irrigation, manure, soft loan, technology, transportation, plant protection, etc.), the establishment of post-harvest centres with grading, packaging and processing facilities, market promotion and marketing of avocado saplings, fruits and fruit products. Agro-forestry with white sandal and coffee, goat production and cerana beekeeping with agro-tourism can be alternative activities for extra income generation. The program can enhance local food and nutrition security, generate employment and income from avocado production and avocado-linked tourism. White sandal, coffee, goat farming and A. cerana beekeeping also can generate an additional income and add to agro-tourism.

Table-10: Food/fiber production, requirement and balance in Bhimsen, 2019

SN	Commodity	Gross production (t/yr)*	Quantity for table use (t/yr)	Requirement (t/yr)	Balance (t/yr)
A	Sufficient				
1	Vegetables	3245	2433.75	2205.3	228.5
2	Spices	181.7	136.275	66.2	70.1
B	Shortage				
1	Honey	0.25	0.25	11	-10.8
2	Meat	169	126.75	308.7	-182.0
3	Eggs (000)	403	403	1058.5	-655.5

C	Acute shortage				
1	Oilseed/Ghee	176.22	67.0	352.8	-285.8
2	Sugar	0	0	352.8	-352.8
3	Pulses	141	105.75	573.4	-467.7
4	Fruits	77.9	58.425	661.6	-603.2
5	Cereals	4500	3375	4035.7	-660.7
6	Milk (Cattle/Buffalo)	880	880	2006.8	-1126.8
7	Potato/tubers	404.4	303.3	2205.3	-1902.0
D	Other				
1	Tea	0	0	NA	NA
2	Coffee	2	1.5	NA	NA
3	Fish	NA	NA	242.6	NA

\*source: AKC Gorkha, 2019; MoALD, 2019.

## 6.8 Sahid Lakhan Rural Municipality

Sahid Lakhan is a mid-hill rural municipality in south-east Gorkha. It is well connected by road transportation. The population of this rural municipality is 27555. Sahid Lakhan is in a deficit of milled cereals, pulses, table vegetables and potato/tubers, meat and milk production (1798.9, 632.4, 226.1 and 2414.3, 232.8 and 310.5 t/year). Eggs are also in deficit by 878600 pieces/year. Sugar production is nil in Sahid Lakhan rural municipality, likewise, the oilseed production and milk fat production is also minimal. However, Sahid Lakhan is self-sufficient in table fruit and spices production (479.4 and 41.7 t/year respectively) (Table-11).

Sahid Lakhan is already declared as a citrus production zone under the Prime Minister Agriculture Modernization Project. The municipality is highly feasible for the commercialization of citrus fruits because of its suitable geography, soil and climate. IDR of fruits in Nepal is about 88.1% (MoALD, 2018) and lemon and oranges are the most demanded and import-potential fruits in Nepal.

Per capita consumption of fruits in Nepal is very low (17 vs 30 kg/yr of ICMR recommendation). For the commercialization of citrus cultivation in Sahid Lakhan rural municipality, it needs to identify geography and user group/s, establish high tech nurseries/resource centres for quality sapling production (nucellar, grafted, tissue culture), establish citrus (lemon/orange) orchards (one family 10 lemon tree can be a slogan and target) and arrange intensive management training and capacity building on nursery and orchard management, post-harvest operation, input management (saplings, irrigation, manure, soft loan, technology, transportation, plant protection, etc.) and market promotion. Avocado production in a block/pocket/cluster, with Bhimsen rural municipality, can be an alternative activity, together with the integration of goat production and cerana beekeeping and agro-tourism to generate employment and income. These activities will enhance local food and nutrition security and contribute to livelihood recovery and economic resilience.

Table-11: Food/fiber production, requirement and balance in Sahid Laxan, 2019

SN	Commodity	Gross production (t/yr)*	Quantity for table use (t/yr)	Requirement (t/yr)	Balance (t/yr)
A	Sufficient				
1	Fruits	1741.44	1306.1	826.7	479.4
2	Spices	165.9	124.4	82.7	41.7
B	Shortage				
1	Honey	0.25	0.3	13.8	-13.6
2	Vegetables	3372.5	2529.4	2755.5	-226.1
3	Meat	204	153.0	385.8	-232.8
4	Milk (Cattle/Buffalo)	2197	2197	2507.5	-310.5
5	Eggs (000)	444	444	1322.6	-878.6
C	Acute shortage				
1	Oilseed/Ghee	44.55	16.9	440.9	-424.0
2	Sugar	0	0.0	440.9	-440.9
3	Pulses	112	84.0	716.4	-632.4
4	Cereals	432.5	3243.8	5042.6	-1798.9
5	Potato/tubers	455	341.3	2755.5	-2414.3
D	Other				
1	Tea	0	0.0	NA	NA
2	Coffee	3	2.3	NA	NA
3	Fish	NA	NA	303.1	NA

\*source: AKC Gorkha, 2019; MoALD, 2019.

## 6.9 Gandaki Rural Municipality

Gandaki is a mid-hill rural municipality in south-east Gorkha. The sites of Gandaki have road access to major cities of Nepal. The population of this rural municipality is 23,262. Gandaki is in deficit in milled cereals, pulses, table potato/tubers and meat production (332.9, 495.3, 695.7 and 181.7 t/year, respectively). Eggs are also in deficit by 683,600 pieces/year. Gandaki rural municipality does not produce sugar at all. Production of oilseeds and milk fat is also insufficient. However, Gandaki municipality is self-sufficient in table vegetables, fruits, spices and milk production (1099.4, 3325.1, 25.0 and 80.2 t/year, respectively) (Table-12).

Organic vegetable production is found to be most feasible for commercialization, livelihood recovery and economic resilience for the earthquake victims in the Gandaki rural municipality. IDR of vegetables in Nepal is about 34.1% (MoALD, 2018) and is an important commodity toward self-sufficiency in the country. The demand for organic vegetables in urban areas is rapidly increasing. Organic vegetables can get premium value and that is feasible in Gandaki. Commercial production of organic vegetables requires identification of geography and user group/s, the establishment of high tech nurseries/resource centres for quality seedling and seed production, the establishment of high tech and ordinary organic vegetable production farms, training and capacity building on nursery and farm management, post-harvest operation, input management (seeds, irrigation, manure, soft loan, technology, transportation, plant protection, cold chain/storage, etc.), the establishment of post-harvest centres with grading, packaging and processing facilities, marketing and market promotion. Goat farming can be an alternative activity, together with milk production, citrus cultivation, *cerana* beekeeping and

agro-tourism for additional income. All these efforts can enhance local food and nutrition security, generate employment and income from organic vegetables, goat, milk, citrus production and *cerana* beekeeping and tourism for livelihood recovery and economic resilience of the earthquake victims in Gandaki rural municipality.

Table-12: Food/fiber production, requirement and balance in Gandaki, 2019

SN	Commodity	Gross production (t/yr)*	Quantity for table use (t/yr)	Requirement (t/yr)	Balance (t/yr)
A	Sufficient				
1	Fruits	5364	4023.0	697.9	3325.1
2	Vegetables	4567.5	3425.6	2326.2	1099.4
3	Milk (Cattle/Buffalo)	2197	2197.0	2116.8	80.2
4	Spices	126.4	94.8	69.8	25.0
B	Shortage				
1	Honey	3.5	3.5	11.6	-8.1
2	Meat	192	144.0	325.7	-181.7
3	Cereals	5232	3924	4256.9	-332.9
4	Eggs (000)	433	433.0	1116.6	-683.6
C	Acute shortage				
1	Oilseed/Ghee	24.75	9.4	372.2	-362.8
2	Sugar	0	0	372.2	-372.2
3	Pulses	146	109.5	604.8	-495.3
4	Potato/tubers	2174	1630.5	2326.2	-695.7
D	Other				
1	Tea	0	0	NA	NA
2	Coffee	3	2.3	NA	NA
3	Fish	NA	NA	255.9	NA
4	Wool	0	0	NA	NA
5	Lokta	0	0	NA	NA

\*source: AKC Gorkha, 2019; MoALD, 2019.

## 6.10 Gorkha Municipality

Gorkha municipality is in the mid-hill of south-west Gorkha. The population of the municipality is 50684. The municipality is in deficit in all food items except cereals. It is seriously in deficit in milled pulses, table vegetables, potato/tubers, fruits, spices, sugar, oilseed/ghee, honey, meat and milk (792.8, 2504.2, 3938.9, 391.8, 81, 810.9, 698.0, 24.3 and 586.6 t/year respectively). Eggs are also in deficit by 2643.200 pieces/year. However, Gorkha is self-sufficient in milled cereal production (707.3 t/year) (Table-13).

Organic vegetable production is highly feasible for commercial business in Gorkha municipality. IDR of vegetables in Nepal is about 34.1% (MoALD, 2018) and is an important commodity to attain self-sufficiency. The demand for organic vegetables in urban areas of Nepal is rapidly increasing and it has premium value. There is road accessibility in Gorkha municipality for vegetable transportation and input supply. Identification of geography and user group/s, the establishment of high tech nurseries/resource centre for quality seedling and seed production,

the establishment of high tech and ordinary organic vegetable production farms, training and capacity building on nursery/farm management and post-harvest operation, input management (seeds, irrigation, manure, soft loan, technology, transportation, plant protection, cold chain, etc.), the establishment of post-harvest centre with collection, grading, packaging and processing facilities, and marketing and market promotion support will contribute to commercial production of organic vegetables. Alternatively, rice/rice seed (Daraudi basin) production in a block/pocket/cluster, with Siranchok, can also be another important commodity to be considered. Milk production in a block/pocket/cluster with Palungtar and fish production tied up with agro-tourism can contribute to additional income. All these efforts can help local communities enhance their local food and nutrition security, generate employment and build economic resilience of the victims in Gorkha municipality.

Table-13: Food/fiber production, requirement and balance in Gorkha, 2019

SN	Commodity	Gross production (t/yr)*	Quantity for table use (t/yr)	Requirement (t/yr)	Balance (t/yr)
A	Sufficient				
1	Cereals	13310	9982.5	9275.2	707.3
B	Shortage				
1	Honey	1	1	25.3	-24.3
2	Spices	94.8	71.1	152.1	-81
3	Fruits	1505	1128.8	1520.5	-391.8
C	Acute shortage				
1	Meat	164	123	709.6	-586.6
2	Oilseed/Ghee	297	112.9	810.9	-698.0
3	Pulses	700	525.0	1317.8	-792.8
4	Sugar	0	0	810.9	-810.9
5	Eggs (000)	422	422	2432.8	-2010.8
6	Vegetables	3419	2564.3	5068.4	-2504.2
7	Milk (Cattle/Buffalo)	1969	1969	4612.2	-2643.2
8	Potato/tubers	1506	1129.5	5068.4	-3938.9
D	Other				
1	Tea	0	0	NA	NA
2	Coffee	12	9	NA	NA
3	Fish	NA	NA	557.5	NA
4	Wool	0	0	NA	NA
5	Lokta	0	0	NA	NA

\*source: AKC Gorkha, 2019; MoALD, 2019.

## 6.11 Palungtar Municipality

Palungtar is a mid-hill municipality located in southwest Gorkha. The municipality is connected by an all-season blacktop road. The population of this municipality is 38244. Palungtar is in deficit in table vegetable, potato/tubers, spices, meat and milk production (422.4, 2876.4, 2.1, 410.9 and 1835.2 t/year respectively). Eggs are also in deficit by 1410700 pieces/year. Production of sugar in Palungtar is nil and oilseed and milk fat productions are also insufficient.

However, Palungtar is self-sufficient in milled cereals, pulses and table fruits (7491.3, 10.7 and 208.8 t/year respectively) (Table-14).

Table-14: Food/fiber production, requirement and balance in Palungtar, 2019

SN	Commodity	Gross production (t/yr)*	Quantity for table use (t/yr)	Requirement (t/yr)	Balance (t/yr)
A	Sufficient				
1	Cereals	19320	14490	6998.7	7491.3
2	Fruits	1808.07	1356.0525	1147.3	208.8
3	Pulses	1340	1005	994.3	10.7
B	Shortage				
1	Spices	150.1	112.575	114.7	-2.1
2	Honey	0.5	0.5	19.1	-18.6
3	Meat	166	124.5	535.4	-410.9
4	Vegetables	4536	3402	3824.4	-422.4
C	Acute shortage				
1	Oilseed/Ghee	198	75.2	611.9	-536.7
2	Sugar	0	0	611.9	-611.9
3	Eggs (000)	425	425	1835.7	-1410.7
4	Milk (Catt, Buff )	1645	1645	3480.2	-1835.2
5	Potato/tubers	1264	948	3824.4	-2876.4
D	Other				
1	Tea	0	0	NA	NA
2	Coffee	6	4.5	NA	NA
3	Fish	NA	NA	420.7	NA
4	Wool	0	0	NA	NA
5	Lokta	0	0	NA	NA

\*source: AKC Gorkha, 2019; MoALD, 2019.

Milk production was found to be the most feasible commodity for commercialization in Palungtar. IDR of Milk in Nepal is about 21.0% (MoALD, 2018) and milk is an important commodity to be self-sufficient. The demand for milk in urban areas is increasing by 8%/year?. (his question mark). Commercial dairy farming requires identification of geography and user group/s, the establishment of high tech fodder nurseries/resource centres for quality fodder seedling and forage seed production and developing pasture. The establishment of high tech buffalo and cattle dairy production farms and management of training and capacity building on milk production and post-harvest operation is equally important for commercial dairy farming. Input (breeding stocks, drinking water, soft loan, technology, transportation) and husbandry management and veterinary services are other important components to be addressed. Infrastructures like milk chilling centres, cattle/buffalo sheds, buffalo wallows, the establishment of organic manure/vermicompost factories, buffalo fattening centres and slaughterhouses are also required for the value chain management. Diversification of milk products for local consumption and market promotion is necessary.

Additionally, litchi and dragon fruit cultivation and citrus production can also be promoted. All these activities should be tied up with agro-tourism. The sale of milk, organic vegetables, litchi, citrus and dragon fruits, goat meat, and the promotion of agro-tourism can enhance

local food and nutrition security and generate local employment for livelihood recovery and economic resilience in Palungtar municipality.

The study found that food availability was not similar across the municipalities during the post-earthquake period. Food exchange among municipalities was possible but not enough. Each municipality needs to have its own focussed programme for livelihood support, as indicated by FAO (2015<sub>b</sub>) with prioritized agricultural recovery programmes in Gorkha. Supporting and promoting resilient livelihood recovery is urgent in Gorkha, as recommended by Risk Nexus (2014) in case of the Karnali flood in Nepal. Disaster-resilient agriculture that covers structural improvement in farm structures like storage houses, livestock and poultry shades, threshing floors, irrigation canals, pump houses, adoption of technologies that control soil erosion and conserve soil carbon and moisture are equally important for earthquake resilience. A diversified agriculture production system that includes an ecological design and adapts to traditional landscape technology and agricultural conservation practices is recommended for the post-disaster response (Lengnick, 2018). Improved institutional and technical capacities of farmer groups, adoption of improved agricultural technologies/practices, livestock, soil and plant health management, increased access of farmers to input and output market and improved rehabilitation work in agriculture infrastructures are important in the post-disaster period as recommended by ADRA (2017). Awareness among women farmers and elderly headed households is also recommended (FAO, 2015<sub>b</sub>).

## **7. Conclusion and recommendation**

Despite the earthquake, Gorkha was in surplus/sufficient in cereals production (49.7 %), fruits (6.2%) and spices (175.7%). It was however in an acute shortage of sugar (100%), fish (99.1%), oilseed/ghee (92.5%), honey (92.7%), poultry eggs (65.0%), meat (54.0%), pulses (53.0%), vegetables (31.5%), potato/tubers (30.0%) and cattle and buffalo milk (29.6%). High hill municipalities (Chun Numbri and the northern part of Darche, Barpak Sulikot and Ajirkot) were self-sufficient in potatoes, spices, vegetables, livestock and meat. However, they were in an acute shortage of cereals and pulses because of lower production and inaccessibility.

Local food production has to be strengthened for self-sufficiency in those municipalities. Mid hills and river basins of foothills are self-sufficient in cereals and fruit production but need other products. Local food exchange systems should be enhanced among the municipalities. The local governments should ensure food security and zero hunger as envisaged by the Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS), 2014; National Agriculture Policy, 2061; Agri-Business Promotion Policy, 2063 and the Right to Food and Food Sovereignty Act, 2018.

They need to strengthen the system of local food production or supply in times of acute shortages and emergencies. However, for economic resilience, each municipality needs to develop a commercial agricultural block/pocket/cluster of selected commodities for high scale production in cooperation with neighbouring municipalities, as indicated by ADS, 2014 and National Agriculture Policy, 2004. Doing this requires a clear-cut division of roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders and well-developed coordination and linkage mechanisms to ensure integrated mobilization of resources for food security, economic growth and prosperity of earthquake victims and other people. Promoting earthquake-resilient agriculture also requires the adoption of measures suggested in the Land Use Policy, 2012; National Agrobiodiversity Policy, 2007 and the Climate Change Policy, 2011.

Based on the findings and the conclusion, the following recommendations are made. These recommendations are aligned with the goal of Agriculture Development Strategy, 2014; National Agriculture Policy, 2004; Agri-Business Promotion Policy, 2006, Right to Food and Food Sovereignty Act, 2018; Land Use Policy, 2012; National Agrobiodiversity Policy, 2007 and the Climate Change Policy, 2011.

- Maintain an emergency buffer stock of pulses, sugar and oil/fats (of at least 25% of annual needs) in Gorkha and keep a buffer stock of cereals (at least 50% of the need) for high hill rural municipalities.
- Establish collection centres for perishable products in each municipality. Gorkha and Palungtar municipalities should additionally develop cold chain/storage facilities.
- Elevate potato farming to commercial production in Chun Numbri and the northern part of Dharche and Barpak Sulikot. Agro-tourism should also be promoted in these areas based on medicinal herbs, deciduous fruits, trout fish, ground apple cultivation and livestock rearing.
- Initiate commercial maize seed production in Barpak Sulikot as well as in southern Dharche and northern Siranchok, together with goat production, agroforestry with white sandalwood (*S. album*) and timur (*Z. armatum*), *cerana* beekeeping and kiwi cultivation.
- Develop a commercial agroforestry and agro-tourism belt in Ajirkot and northern Siranchok based on timur (*Z. armatum*), white sandal wood (*S. album*), utis (*A. nepalensis*), cardamom, tea, coffee and other possible products, such as kiwi, deciduous fruits and trout fish.
- Undertake commercial goat farming in Siranchok and Arughat. Also, explore the possibility of maize seed production in the mid-hills of these municipalities and paddy seed production in the Daraudi-Bhusunde basin.
- Promote Bhimsen and Sahid Lakhan rural municipalities as the fruit-growing belt. Avocado production is recommended in Bhimsen and citrus in Sahid Lakhan.
- Ensure that Gorkha municipality and Gandaki rural municipality are developed into organic vegetable farming sites.
- Promote commercial dairy farming in Palungtar municipality, together with the production of litchi, dragon fruit, rice and citrus.
- Institutionalise a backup system to support the initiatives recommended above. Such a system should include agricultural research, advisory services, infrastructural support for irrigation, collection centres, market centres, community warehouses, cold storage/chain, chilling centres and so on, input supplies (fertilizers, manures and soil amendments, seeds, breeds, saplings, equipment and machinery, etc), farmers' welfare scheme (crop and livestock insurance, soft loan scheme, subsidy support, contributory pension scheme and so on), and regulation and support services (diagnosis/treatment, soil/seed/pesticide testing, field layout, entrepreneurship development and so on).
- Promote earthquake-resilient agriculture practices in a manner that improve farm

structures and adopt conservation technologies with a diversified agriculture production system and ecological design.

Local governments and other actors have a significant role to play to realise the recommendations presented. Local governments should provide financial subsidies, soft loans and human resources. The AKC, veterinary hospitals, CBOs and NGO/INGOs should take care of service delivery and capacity building of farmers. Cooperatives and the private sector should be responsible for post-harvest operation and marketing. NARC should conduct agriculture research in the field, while the user groups should take the responsibility of overall operation.

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Research Article

## Trilateral Engagement in Nepalese Geopolitics: Soft Power Approach in Nepal's Foreign Policy

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### Abstract

The contemporary South Asian geopolitics in general and Nepalese geopolitics, in particular, is a crucial factor to analyze trilateral engagement, and their affairs in Nepal. Geopolitics is one of the major factors of shaping and reshaping bilateral and multilateral relations. It is influenced by the actions and reactions of geopolitical players. They sometimes push their actions broadly to achieve their national and global interests, and sometimes even narrow down their actions. But, whatever their actions, their national and global interests continue to grow. China, India and the USA have been dealing, in one way or the other, to widen, broaden and defend their national and regional interests. Dealing of three super and great powers in Nepal have dealt based on the changing geopolitics which greatly implicates Nepalese domestic affairs and foreign policy. This paper mainly assesses the engagement of the USA, China, and India in Nepal, and how their power play implicates Nepal's foreign policies. It aims to explore Nepal's way of moving forward in the context of the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI), Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), and the newly emerged China-Russia security dialogue platform. The paper adapts interpretivism as the philosophical position and hence method is qualitative. It only focuses on geopolitics, BRI, MCC, and China-Russia security dialogue platform. The conclusion of the paper is that Nepal's foreign policy should be based on soft power discourse to eliminate the issues of any kind of regional and global security alliance with super and great powers.

**Keywords:** geopolitics, belt and road initiatives, millennium challenge corporation (mcc), global and nepalese geopolitical context, Nepal's soft power approach

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## 1. Introduction

The China-India affair is principally not an independent variable. It depends on some of the regional and global political phenomena. On one hand, it impacts their domestic affairs and development, and on other hand, their global relations are polylaterally evolved and developed. Global and regional politics are not static. It changes itself based on the changing interests of actors involved in it. The political actors concentrate in a certain geography to enlarge, widen, and broaden their national and global interests. When every actor makes an effort, even the political battle creating conflict and confrontation between and among the actors, can be resolved. This paper focuses on aspects of examining the issues, and geopolitical situation newly developed in Nepal due to external engagement. It also concentrates on assessing China-India relations in terms of cooperation and confrontation in changing Asian geopolitics, and the US engagement through Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) in Nepal.

It is relevant to study those issues to find out major challenges and opportunities of changing geopolitics of Nepal to formulate and conduct her foreign policy as per the needs and demands. Nepal's foreign policy and the dynamics of its relationship with neighboring states have been conditioned by complexity of factors, of which the political component is one of the most important (Rose, 1971, P. 3). Rose discusses that Nepal's cultural relationship with India and Tibet, for instance, or its role in the trade and economic system between south and East Asia could easily be an important issue for contemporary geopolitics. Cultural and trade relations with both neighbors and other global powers are still quite important, and hence we can experience the emphasis on MCC and the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) of the USA and China, respectively. King Prithvi Narayan Shah's notion of Nepal as a 'yam between two boulders' also clearly indicates Nepal's complex geopolitics in mid 18<sup>th</sup> century which continues consistently in different forms during the last two and half centuries. Since, being encircled by giant neighbors which are far more stronger in military, economy, science and technology, education, innovation and discovery, and level of influence than Nepal, Nepal cannot compete with them in these aspects. Ever since, Nepal has been experiencing great challenges in conducting her foreign policy and diplomacy. Therefore, the paper focuses on finding an appropriate way for Nepal's foreign policy (MoFA, 2020b) in the changed scenario.

In this paper, the Heartland Theory under geopolitics is applied as theoretical perspective to evaluate trilateral engagement in Nepal. Iseri writes:

*"I have considered the US grand strategy as a combination of wartime and peacetime strategies and argued that the Caspian region and its hinterland, where I call the Eurasian Heartland, to use the term of Sir Halford Mackinder"* (Iseri, 2009, p. 26).

Ismailov and Papava defines that Heartland has served as a pivotal of all types of the geopolitical changes and its shift from one discourse to the other of historical dimensions within the World Island. The Heartland is the region where the Eurasian masses were concentrated. Advancement and expansion of Europe were stimulated by the necessity to respond to the pressure coming from the outside world, especially the central Asia. The same situation in the changing world is occurring in South Asia, in general, and in Nepal, in particular. Hence, this paper examines the trilateral external pressure in Nepal via different global projects and their impacts on Nepal's foreign policy (MoFA, 2020b) domain based on the theoretical foundation of Heartland. Nepal's foreign policy (MoFA, 2020b) is still guided by the Yam

doctrine of King Prithvi Narayan Shah as the geopolitics of Nepal in his era is the major foundation of current Nepalese geopolitics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

This paper tries to address and explore Nepal's dilemma about how she should conduct her foreign policy in the context of geopolitical rivalry among the BRI, MCC, and China-Russia Security Dialogue Platform (CRSDP) from the perspective of global actors and initiatives, and among China, the USA, and India. The main objective of this paper is to critically evaluate an impact of trilateral engagement through those three global projects and actors on Nepalese geopolitics - which is the research gap of the paper as well.

## **2. Research Methodology**

This paper borrows the Heartland Theory of Mackinder as the theoretical framework. However, it does not exclude the theory of geopolitics as the heartland theory itself is a part of the geopolitical theory. The whole data are collected and analyzed based on the perspective and worldview of geopolitics. The Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS), the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) and the CRSDP are developed keeping in view the changed and complex global geopolitical circumstances. Nepal cannot be excluded from the influential factors raised by these geopolitics. Therefore, Nepalese politics and foreign policy are obviously influenced by the changed geopolitics and geopolitical actors. Philosophically, this paper tries to investigate the nature of the reality of changing geopolitical developments and their impact on Nepal's foreign policy under ontological aspects of the research. Similarly, this paper tries to investigate the values developed in Heartland and Geopolitical theory and practices as well as its implication on Nepal's foreign policy under Axiology. In addition, this paper also focuses on investigating the difference between knowledge and truth, knowledge and opinion, and truth and falsification under epistemological positions. Hence, this paper is entirely developed by adapting qualitative method under descriptive and analytical approaches. Scholarly journals, textbooks, policy reports, government publications, authentic websites, authentic TV/YouTube debates etc are the sources of secondary data. Text analysis is the basic analytical tool of the collected data in the form of texts for reaching conclusion via critical observation and analysis.

## **3. Issues Debated**

### **3.1 Geopolitics: Perspective, Debate and Discussion**

Heartland, a perspective of the theory of geopolitics, is claimed by Mackinder. The Heartland provides a sufficient physical basis for strategical thinking (Mackinder, 1943, p.598). Strategy is the part of power politics which takes place in certain geography, and can be known as political geography. The political geography is developed as a branch of the discipline of geography, and was in common use until the invention of geopolitics in 1899 (Gokmen, 2010, p.13). When the term 'geopolitics' was coined in 1899 by Rudolf Kjellen (Gokmen, 2010, p.9), it became more popular in the academic discipline. The distinction between political geography and geopolitics is clear: —geopolitics is concerned with the spatial requirements of a state, while political geography examines only its spatial conditions (Goodall, n.d., p.191). Similarly, geopolitics is analysis of the geographic influences on power relationship in international relations. as per Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English geopolitics can be defined as the study of the effect of a country's position, population, etc. on its politics. Moreover,

Rudolf Kjellen who invented the term, defines geopolitics as the theory of the state as a geographical organism or phenomenon in space. It means that the states behave like an organism which expands or grows in nature. Geopolitics deals with such types of characteristics of a state. The definition by Hagan is that geopolitics is a contemporary rationalization of power politics (Hagan, 1942, p. 485). Gokmen elaborates, geopolitics can also be considered to be a combination of history (political process) and geography (Gokmen, 2010, p. 16). He has quoted from Cohen's Geopolitics of the World System about geopolitics which gives a new definition:

*Geopolitics is the analysis of the interaction between, on the one hand, geographical settings and perspectives and, on the other hand, political processes. (...) Both geographical settings and political processes are dynamic, and each influences and is influenced by the other. Geopolitics addresses the consequences of this interaction* (Gokmen, 2010, p. 16).

Therefore, by summarizing all the above discussions and debates of different scholars, geopolitics is all about the power exercised by any influential powers in a certain geography to control or influence over that territory explicitly or implicitly.

As mentioned above, the Heartland is part of geography, which attracts geopolitics, and covers the Eurasian territory. Through his "Heartland" theory, Mackinder argues that any state that was able to control the heartland would control world politics and thus pose the threat of a worldwide empire (Deudney, n.d., Para.4) and explores the idea of Heartland based on the British war in South Africa which was indeed in 1902 and the Russian war in Manchuria around 1904 (Mackinder, 1943, p. 596). The concept of Heartland emerged based on the geographical significance of the pivot position. In history, significance of the territories from the northern part and the interior Euro-Asia, the Arctic coast down to the central deserts, Baltic and Black Seas were vital as Mackinder puts these areas under the area of the Heartland which is quite strategic. In Heartland, there are three aspects of physical geography which reinforce each another. The first is the lowland plain on the face of the globe, the second is some great plain navigable rivers, and the last one is the grassland zone of the Heartland. These all are categorized based on the global politics for power exercise, strategic part for offensive and defensive measures, and ideological influence for global domination. As per the changing world, the Heartland is no more static, it is dynamic and shifting in nature towards the regions of China and India - where Nepal is located in the middle of those countries. For oriental scholars, it can be termed as the 'One of the New Heartland'.

In international politics, everything keeps changing. For example, in 1850, Russia was at the top in terms of military power having 767,423 military personnel followed by France with 450, 651 number (YouTube, 2020). In 1863, the USA reached the top position with 838, 608 numbers, and Russia fell behind the USA with 771,828. In 1872, France reached the top having 862,608 numbers of military personnel followed by Germany having 846,593 (YouTube, 2020). In 1920, Germany reached the top and Russia fell to the second position. In 1932, China reached the top with 1,736,839 military personnel. In 1950, again Germany gained the top position followed by Japan, USSR, China, and then the USA. Such a phenomenon keeps changing as per change in geopolitics. If geopolitics would not be changed, world power and politics would have been unchanged. Since the Heartland theory is part of geopolitics, it keeps changing and shifting from one geography to another based on the priority and concentration

of world powers. Therefore, the Heartland focused on Eurasian land in the 1950s now has significantly been changed based on changing global political actors, their intension, and effort. The author claims that this change in Heartland influences Nepal and its surroundings. Therefore, one of the new Heartlands is now developed in South Asia, in general, and Nepal, in particular.

### 3.2 MCC and other Emerging Geopolitical Factors

Nepal's geopolitics is also part of the world's geopolitics where regional and global actors are concentrated. As Nihar R. Nayak (2014) focuses on his book, Nepal is the central geopolitical actor itself which attracts super and great powers to Nepal (see table of content of *Strategic Himalayas: Republican Nepal and External Powers*). The author not only covers the massive engagement of India and China but also the involvement of the European countries and the USA as well. Similarly, Kumar claims, Nepal has also been drawing the attention of world powers both India and China are taking interest in Nepal mainly because of its natural resource base and for security concern (Kumar, 2017, p. 30). Likewise, Khadka makes clear that Nepal's situation provides an interesting example of how geopolitics has imposed an extremely serious obstacle in harmonizing external relations with aspirations for peace, security, and development (Khadka, 1992, p.134). As Khadka claims, Nepal has been facing critical challenges to expand and diversify her relations in the wider horizon of the global arena basically because of neighbors' contested concerns and some other powers' interest in Nepal. Arvind Gupta states that Nepal is well-known for its strategic location in the Himalayas. It is situated at the meeting point of East Asia and South Asia, and between two big and powerful countries—India and China—who have gone to war with each other in the past (Gupta, 2014, p. xi). Therefore, the regional and global powers are concentrated in Nepal's geopolitics.

The complex geopolitics of Nepal has provided the ground for those concentrated regional and global powers to be engaged under their global interest. The priority given to Nepal in BRI and MCC is the consequence of the strategic importance of Nepal's geopolitics. Nepal is almost 69 times smaller than the USA, 68 times smaller than China, and 23 times smaller than India (Agrawal & Upadhyay, 2006) quoted in (Kumar, 2017, p. 30). However, its strategic importance for those powers is significantly higher than other bigger states in South Asia. China began BRI in 2013 aiming to promote economic engagement and investment along two main routes: the New Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road (The Economic Intelligence Unit, 2015, p. 3). Nepal signed the BRI on 12 May 2017 (The Himalayan Times, 2017, Para. 1). After four months of signing the BRI, Nepal signed an agreement on the USA's MCC project on 14 September 2017 for building 400 KV high voltage transmission line and upgrading roads (Millennium Challenge Corporation, n. d., Para. 3). India and the European Union are other regional and global actors which have long been engaged in Nepal covertly and overtly. Hence, Nepal's geopolitics has been the fertile ground for external actors for a long time.

India's interest in Nepal also needs to be examined. India wants to put her neighbors under her sphere of influence including Nepal. Indian Ambassadors to Nepal think of themselves even above Nepal's Head of State. As quoted by S. D. Muni, B. P. Koirala writes in his *Atmabrittant* (Autobiography) that ... Indian Ambassador behaved as if he was bigger than even the King of Nepal (Muni, 2009, p. 37). Nepal and India both are equally sovereign states, and the value

of their independence are also equal. Ironically, Indian mindset in fact is hegemonic in Nepal and India wants Nepal to ask for permission with her before taking any decisions by Nepal. India imposed an economic blockade in 2015. Ojha reports that the blockade, which the Nepal government blames on India and New Delhi denies its involvement, immediately followed the passage of the new constitution by Nepal on 20 September 2015 (Ojha, 2015, Para. 1). Similarly, Roy reports, Upset over Nepal's newly promulgated Constitution, New Delhi wants Kathmandu to carry out 'seven amendments' to ensure it is acceptable to the Madhesis and Janjatis, South Block sources told The Indian Express Tuesday (Roy, 2015, Para. 1). This is because Nepal did not ask India before the promulgation of the Constitution.

Not only in 2015 but also India's behavior was similar even in 1950s. According to Muni, in a statement in December 1950, Nehru said:

*Our interest in the internal conditions of Nepal has become still more acute and personal, because of the developments across our borders, to be frank, specially those in China and Tibet. Besides our sympathetic interest in Nepal, we were also interested in the security of our own country.*

*From time immemorial, the Himalayan have provided us with a magnificent frontier. Of course they are no longer as impassable as they used to be but are still very effective. We cannot allow that barrier to be penetrated because it is also the principal barrier to India...we cannot allow anything to go wrong in Nepal or permit that barrier to be crossed or weakened... (Muni, 2009, p. 36).*

It is well understood from the above statements that India wants to direct and instruct Nepal in every external and internal matter. Similarly, Chinese communist leader had described this region (Himalayan region of South Asia) as forming China's hand, wherein Tibet was its palm, and Ladakh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh (then called North-East Frontier Agency or NEFA) were its five fingers (Schram, 1963, p. 257) quoted in (Muni, 2009, p. 31). Such types of rivalry between China and India in Nepal threaten Nepalese sovereignty knowingly and unknowingly. Furthermore, both countries included a point in the joint statement to use the Lipulek pass as a bilateral trade pass without taking any consent from Nepal in 2015. Point number 28 of the agreement says that the two sides are agreed for holding negotiation and expanding border trade via Nathu La, Qiangla/Lipu-Lekh Pass and Shipki La (Ministry of External Affairs, 2015, Para. 34). Immediately after this statement, Nepal objected to the India-China trade pact that included the Lipu-Lekh pass as well. The Economic Times reports that Nepal's Parliament raised objection over an agreement made between China and India for boosting border trade at Qiangla/Lipu-Lekh Pass which is close to the area which Nepal claims to be part of its territory. Nepal also asked to both countries for necessary correction of their pact immediately (Economic Times, 2015, Para. 1). Such types of bilateral cooperation between India and China in case of Nepal for their mutual gain will negatively impact on Nepal's China and India policy. It is their underestimation of Nepalese sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and Nepal's diplomatic capability as well as her world affairs.

India published her updated political map on 2 November 2019. It included Nepal's territory Limpiyadhura, Kalapani, and Lipu-Lekh in the far western region of Nepal. It created a huge criticism of India in Nepal against her hegemonic nature particularly towards Nepal. Budhathoki reports that after sparking a regional and worldwide controversy by changing the internal status of Kashmir, India's new official political map is stirring criticism in Nepal,

including from Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) (Budhathoki, 2019, Para. 1). After four days of the map's release, MoFA released a press statement objecting to the inclusion of Kalapani in the Indian map. Nepal government clearly wrote that Kalapani is an integral part of the country and that talks are still on between New Delhi and Kathmandu over this "unresolved" area (Mohan, 2019, Para. 3). The press statement further clarified that the remaining issues related to the border should be resolved in bilateral consensus, and any unilateral actions will be unacceptable to the Nepal government. (Mohan, 2019, Para. 6). India unilaterally inaugurated 'Link Road' on 8 May 2020 connecting to Lipu-Lekh (Nepal), which passes through Nepalese territory, without any consent of Nepal government. On the following day, MoFA released a press statement strongly objecting to the Indian unilateral action in Nepal's territory (MoFA, 2020a). There are so many examples that India exhibits hegemonic behavior towards Nepal but the Nepalese counterparts seem unable to resolve the problem with diplomatic measures and capability. All these Indian activities are related to the geopolitics of Nepal and it attracts the world powers like the USA, China, and the EU countries in Nepalese geopolitics which creates the one of the new Heartland in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Coming to the BRI, after signing it, the way has been opened, even at least theoretically to diversify Nepal's relations with north East Asian nations for Nepal. Chand writes that one of the historic agreements made during Prime Minister Oli's visit to China in 2018 is the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on railway connectivity which is the second milestone in the diversification of Nepal's external affairs (Chand, 2018, Para. 4 and 6). He further argues that both countries considered it as one of the most significant initiatives in the history of bilateral cooperation. They hoped that it would herald a new era of bilateral connectivity affairs. Other key agreements during his visit are: 1) to cooperate for development and prosperity under the framework of Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network, 2) Protocol on the utilization of Highways in Tibet Autonomous Region, China, by Nepal, for cargo transport, 3) MoU on energy cooperation, 4) Agreement on economic and technical cooperation, 5) Deal on human resource development (Chand, 2018). Similarly, China has included the Nepal-China Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network, including Nepal-China cross-border railway in point no. 23 of the annex of Joint Communiqué of the Leaders' Roundtable of the 2nd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (The Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, 2019, Para. 42). Likewise, the Joint Communiqué says that ...we support policy and activities that help land-locked countries to transform into land-linked ones, including by strengthening connectivity and cooperation on transit arrangements and infrastructure (The Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, 2019, Para. 16). Nepal has access to Tianjin port, the Eastern part of China, after the deal of 'Treaty of Transit Transport' made in March 2016. Moreover, China and Nepal are agreed to cooperate for the construction of Koshi Economic Corridor, Gandaki Economic Corridor, and Karnali Economic Corridor which was committed during the state visit of the Chinese president Xi Jinping in 2019 (Bashyal & Chand, 2019, p. 29). On top of that, China has agreed to provide the transit facility to Nepal from four Chinese ports named Tianjin, Shenzhen, Lianyungang, and Zhanjiang and three dry ports named Lanzhou, Lhasa, and Xigatse as well as roads to these facilities (Sharma, 2018, Para. 4 and 5). All those agreements and MoUs are under the BRI cooperation between two countries. Thus, if all the agreements made are implemented, the way of Nepal to access rest part of the world will be opened as Nepal will have the opportunity to use all the seven economic corridors of

BRI being its signatory country. Such types of bilateral activities accelerate the process of changing geopolitics, and Nepal will get benefits from such changed geopolitics due to agreements and engagement of both Nepal and China.

China and the USA are focused on African countries, Latin America, West Asian nations, and Southeast Asian nations. The USA basically invests under MCC in agriculture, education, energy, health, land and property rights, roads and transportation infrastructure, water sanitation, and irrigation (<https://www.mcc.gov/sectors>). Similarly, China invests in agriculture-forestry and fishing, communications, industry-mining-construction, transport-storage, and energy generation and supply (<https://www.aiddata.org/china-official-finance>). The then president of the USA Barack Obama announced 'Pivot Asia' policy which is also termed as re-balancing Asia in 2009 (Manyin, et al., 2012, p. 2). They claim that many countries have encouraged the USA to gear up its activity in the region to provide a balance to China's rising influence (Manyin, et al., 2012, p. ii). It means the American allies in the region have supported the USA to balance China. Likewise, Schiavenza believes that the United States is the only country with enough muscle to check China's rise and many of the smaller countries in East Asia have sought reassurance from Washington that it remains invested in the region (Schiavenza, 2013, Para. 6). When Donald Trump came to power on 20 January 2017 in the USA, he announced the America First policy and initiated Indo Pacific Strategy (IPS) aiming to make free and open Indo Pacific region (Department of State, 2019). In the meantime, China and the USA fought the trade war, and still, there are many bilateral issues between them. Swanson writes that a trade war between the world's two largest economies officially began on Friday morning to impose tariffs on \$34 billion worth of Chinese products (Swanson, 2018, Para. 1). China also has imposed tariffs on US products in China. Thus, the geopolitical rivalry is ongoing between the USA and China.

Not only India, but also the USA and China have been focused on Nepal. Their concentration in Nepal for their strategic and economic interest has created geopolitical rivalries in contemporary world affairs. Four months after Nepal's signing of the BRI, the USA signed an agreement with Nepal on MCC compact project on 14 September 2017. The USA claims that the MCC is an innovative and independent U.S. foreign assistance agency that is helping the fight against global poverty whereas the anti-US bloc considers it as the part of IPS which aims to fight against common security challenges among its member countries. Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov criticized the United States for introducing a new Indo-Pacific concept which aims to contain China. He questioned that why do you need to call Asia-Pacific as Indo-Pacific? The answer is evident – to exclude China (Sharma, 2020, Para. 1&4). The USA has put the MCC under Indo-Pacific Strategy. The report published by the Department of State of the USA mentions that to date, support has included \$2.9 billion through the Department of State and USAID for the economic pillar of the Indo-Pacific strategy...and hundreds of millions more through other agencies, including the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) (Department of State, 2019, p. 13). The MCC became quite controversial in Nepal as many intellectuals have perceived it as a US economic project having strategic interest in its hidden part which aims to balance China in Nepal (Chand & Karki, 2020, Para. 6). The US embassy has been lobbying in Nepal with different power centers to ensure the ratification of the MCC by the parliament of Nepal. Jha argues that the process of ratification of the MCC is getting delayed. One of the major factors that has led to this situation is the rivalry between the US

and China in Nepal (Jha, 2020, Para. 1). In this way, the USA and China are highly concentrated in Nepal and Nepal's geopolitics is becoming more critical. Thus, the BRI and the MCC are the most critical factors affecting Nepal's geopolitics.

### **3.3 Cooperation versus Rivalry of Nepal's Immediate Neighbors**

Various factors do not allow China and India to go to war and confrontation. They share 3488 kilometer long international border. They have large geography i.e. 9,390,784 sq. km. of China and 3,287,263 sq. km. of India. They are first and the second biggest countries in the world in terms of population. China's population is 1.398 billion and India's population is 1.366 billion in April 2021. They have similar and world's fastest economic growth rates. China's targeted growth rate is above 6 % and India's targeted growth rate is above 8%. Similarly, they have good trade relations, and are interdependent to each other. These sort of common variables do not allow China and India to go into the war and confrontation. By 2020, China-India trade could surpass \$409.2 billion that is half of the total projected US-China trade in 2020. (Gupta & Wang, 2009, Para. 1). This shows the greater economic integration between the countries. Recently, the incorporation of Yoga<sup>1</sup> in the daily lifestyle of Chinese people is a new dimension of people's relation between China and India. The relation developed from Yoga can be understood as the constructivist mindset of Chinese people whose effect on the level of inter-dependence between the countries is very positive.

On the other hand, politically, India has become the main geopolitical rival of China along with the decline of Russia and Japan. Pakistan seems quite useful to counterbalance India in the strategic calculations of Beijing. Thus, it seems China wants to pursue a 'classic balance of power strategy' in South Asia based on the relationship with Pakistan. In the meantime, India is not happy with China over this strategic partnership and hence her partnership is with the USA and Japan to counterweight China. In such a situation, the action and the counteraction between India and China will determine the future of Asian dominance in global politics. Despite some strategic competition, the positive signs were developed around 2005 for a good relationship between China and India. The relation between the two countries was normalized by the China-visit of the then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1988. (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1998, Para. 1). During Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to India in April 2005, the two sides signed an agreement entitled "strategic partnership for peace and prosperity." In 2006, the two sides marked "friendship year," and 2007 was declared "year of friendship through tourism." Exchanges of official visits led to diplomatic advances of a symbolic nature such as the reopening on 4 July 2006 of the Nathu La border pass between Sikkim and Tibet after 44 years of closure (Jayaram & Huchet, 2008, p. 2).

In spite of the above agreement made between the countries there is always doubt against each other and about their behavior. New Delhi's views of Chinese policies aim at the strategic encirclement of India whereas Beijing's calculation of India's act to limit China's strategic influence in South Asia and Southeast Asia and its power projection into the Indian Ocean, has overridden their conventional statements of common interests as partners in strengthening a multi-polar world order. Moreover, the new reality of rivalry is evident from the following security issues: (1) the escalation of the Sino-Indian border dispute; (2) the deepening of the

<sup>1</sup> Yoga has been a part of the lives of Chinese people. Most of the Chinese people have been practicing yoga in China based on my direct observation in Sichuan province.

strategic alliance between China and Pakistan; (3) China-India rivalry in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean; and (4) India's "Look East" now "Act East" policy to promote bilateral ties with other countries that have tense relations with China in the region (Frankel, 2011, p. 3). These are the factors affecting the Sino-Indian affairs in the international arena. Therefore, their cooperation in the field of bilateral, multi-lateral, and regional security has been always affecting despite their good trade relations.

One of the most crucial factors affecting Sino-Indian relations is Sino-Indian border dispute. Sino-Indian border disputes are complex historical phenomena as both countries are not agreed on border delimitation, the Sino-Indian border has never been drawn officially. When India came under British rule, it began to advance the two countries' traditional border to the Chinese side (Neville, 2003). Similarly, Zhang and Li write that during the 1913-1914 tripartite conference involving a Tibetan delegate India felt threatened due to Chinese military presence in Tibet and quickly extended administrative and military control in the eastern sector (Zhang & Li, 2013, p. 4). In this way, Sino-Indian border dispute emerged, and they fought 1962 border war. Similarly, Lidarev reports that fifty years ago, on 20 October 1962, with the world's terrified gage Provoked by a territorial dispute over Tibet, the war was brief and eventually China emerged victorious. Similarly, the Doklam Standoff in the summer of 2017 had emerged.

Therefore, China and India time and again go into disputes and border confrontation in the South Asian Himalayan range which tries to affect Nepal's non-alignment and independent foreign policy matters.

On the other hand, these two countries are involved in many international organizations and institutions together. Sajjanhar (2016) writes that there is a memorandum made on commitments of India and Pakistan with the goal of acquisition by them a status of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member-states (Sajjanhar, 2016, Para. 3). Furthermore, India is a founding member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) established by China and the member of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). Both the countries are involved together to establish New Development Bank under the BRICS. In addition, as prominent members of the G-20, their influence will be increased ... in global politics, and in the global security matters. The analysis concludes that the rivalry has taken almost half of the deal (Wolf, Dalal, DaVanzo, Larson, Akhmedjonov, Dogo, Huang, & Montoya, 2011, p. 5)

### **3.4 BRI: Global and Nepalese Context**

The Chinese president, Xi Jinping, announced One Belt, One Road (later Belt and Road Initiative) in 2013. Core objective of the initiatives is building the "*Community of Common Destiny*" which will be a destiny of all South Asian countries and beyond as envisioned by the Chinese President Xi Jinping. The initiative includes two components – the Silk Road Economic Belt (One Belt) and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (One Road).

The BRI has formed a development strategy that focuses on economic integration as well as cooperation among all the countries, primarily in the Eurasian continent. A document entitled "Visions and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road" which was issued by the National Development and Reform Commission on 28 March 2015, outlined the co-operation mechanisms and the areas of co-operation regarding the BRI. According to the conceptual framework, the BRI aims to connect

Asia, Europe and Africa along five routes<sup>2</sup>. The BRI relates six international economic corridors for the vibrant co-operation among the number of countries in multi-region and sub-region. The corridors have been identified as; a) the New Eurasia Land Bridge, b) China-Mongolia-Russia, c) China-Central Asia-West Asia, d) China-Indochina Peninsula, e) China-Pakistan, and f) Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar. (HKTDC RESEARCH, 2016, Para. 4). Thus BRI includes five major routes and six major corridors.

The cooperation between China and India on BRI has been affected by two major routes and one major corridor of BRI. The routes written above in points 3 and 4 and the corridor written above in point (e) are the key components behind India's reluctance to BRI. Sharad Kumar Soni says that India may also take part in China's BRI in the future. But, he more emphasizes on series of dialogue and clarifications on series of misunderstanding about BRI. India views that the BRI brings obviously political and security implications for it. (Saran, 2015, Para. 38). Soni's implicit indication of his statement 'series of misunderstanding' is also related to the political and security implications of BRI in the Indian Ocean Region. China on the other hand rejects allegations that the BRI is its exclusive initiative. Dai Yonghong, during a face-to-face interview held in 2016, says that India should accept China's BRI concept not only in the case of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor but also in the case of the Indian Ocean and beyond for a win-win situation. Therefore, there is no mutual understanding between China and India about how BRI should be implemented regionally.

In the recent times, it seems positive competition between China and India to develop the connectivity with Nepal. China and Nepal signed agreement on some developmental projects under BRI. One of the historic agreements made during Nepal's Prime Minister Mr. KP Sharma Oli's second visit to China as Head of Government is the signing of the MoU on railway connectivity. Both countries underlined the MoU as one of the most significant initiatives in the history for bilateral cooperation (Chand, 2018). Based on this understanding, the Chinese team of experts conducted a preliminary study on railway construction to link Kathmandu with Kerong and they submitted the report to the government of Nepal in December 2018. Similarly, Transit Trade Agreement (TTA) was inked during Prime Minister Oli's first official visit to China conducted from 20 to 27 March 2016. The avenue of sea access of Nepal via the Chinese Tianjin port, which is almost 3500 kilometer away from Nepal, is opened under this agreement theoretically. If the transit trade agreement is fully implemented, Nepal will not only be the gateway for China to South Asia but also China will be the gateway for Nepal to North East Asian Nations.

Dev Raj Dahal opines that rejecting the old concept of buffer status, King Birendra in the 1970s and 1980s, articulated the notion as a gateway between South Asia and Central Asia (Adhikari et. al., 2013). Theoretically, his gateway concept is now on the real ground through transit trade agreement and MoUs of Nepal with China. Li Tao (2017) writes that South Asia

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2 Five routes of the BRI are: (1) linking China to Europe through Central Asia and Russia; (2) connecting China with the Middle East through Central Asia; and (3) bringing together China and Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Indian Ocean. The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, meanwhile, focuses on using Chinese coastal ports; (4) link China with Europe through the South China Sea and Indian Ocean; and (5) connect China with the South Pacific Ocean through the South China Sea.

has important geostrategic position in developing the BRI which will be a gateway for China to promote the initiative westward (Tao, 2017). It means the Chinese scholars analyze Nepal as the gateway for South Asia and at the same time South Asia as the gateway towards the rest of the western world.

China, in recent years, has come up proactively for implementing and partnering the BRI with Nepal and South Asian countries. India did not participate in the B&R summit in May 2017 in Beijing. However, the Global Times has reported that train from Beijing to Bihar will be a reality in the next decade under the BRI. China wants to extend its Nepal rail link to India. The rail network of China, which was expected to be completed by 2020 up to Kerong (Gyirong) near the border of Nepal, will create the environment for Nepal to become a vibrant bridge between the two giants. The discourse of bridge between India and China was reintroduced by Baburam Bhattarai in 2012 so that Nepal could take advantage of the rapid economic development of the two biggest and fast-growing economies. But now the discourse of bridge is shifted towards the Gateway. For Bihar, trade with China through the rail link will be easier along this route than through Kolkata, saving time, cost, and distance. The distance from Rasuwagadhi to Birgunj, which borders Bihar, is only 240 KM. Therefore, to import and export goods and commodities from and to Bihar is viable through Nepal to and from China.

Next argument is that the Himalayan frontier has already been penetrated along with the plan of China's rail link up to Kerong and in the future, up to Kathmandu. The Himalayas as a natural frontier may have become less relevant in an era of nuclear weapons, globalization, technology, and the improvement in the Sino-Indian relationship in recent years (Nayak, 2014). The Chinese technology of railway construction in the Himalaya range has proven his argument. Recently, China has agreed to provide transit facility to Nepal from four Chinese seaports named Tianjin, Shenzhen, Lianyungang, and Zhanjiang and three Chinese dry ports named Lanzhou, Lhasa and Shigatse (My Republica, 2018, Para. 3). All these circumstances claim that China will be connected soon with South Asia via Nepal and Nepal will connect her immediate neighbors through road and rail networks which will be a milestone for Nepal's connectivity with her neighbors in changing geopolitics.

India has also been proactive to develop connectivity facility with Nepal. On April 7, 2018, the two Governments issued a joint statement on expanding rail linkages, agreeing to construct a newly electrified rail line, with India's financial support, connecting the border city of Raxaul in India to Kathmandu in Nepal (Ministry of External Affairs, 2018, Para. 1). In August 2018, exchange of a MoU between the Government of India and the Government of Nepal regarding preliminary engineering-cum-traffic survey of the broad-gauge line between Raxaul and Kathmandu was made which was witnessed by the Prime Ministers of both the countries. If the MoU came into force for constructing the rail link, the breakthrough will happen in neighborhood policy of Nepal, especially to maximize the benefits with lower investment and risk but for that Nepal's domestic policy should be focused on massive production which will be connected with the rail links in the north and south through the export.

Likewise, on 7 April 2018, Nepal and India signed an MoU on inland waterways development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018, Para. 1).

In September 2018, Nepalese technical team visited Varanasi of India on their way to Kolkata for the purpose of a study on the construction of infrastructural development for inland

waterways in India and explored ways to develop waterways up to the Nepal border. There are so many routes to extend the waterways near the Nepal border. India is launching inland waterways in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh soon and has expressed readiness to extend up to the Nepal border via the Narayani River. India has already begun building infrastructure to develop inland waterways from Kolkata to Varanasi via Ganga River. Once completed, Nepal-bound cargos can be transported from Kolkata to Varanasi that can then be brought in to Birgunj and Bhairahawa via rail and roads (Neupane, 2018, Para. 7). Regarding the best option for Nepal to export and import, the Indian officials have proposed that Nepal can export and import using big vessels from Kolkata to Kalughat in Bihar and transport to Nepal border on smaller ships. Likewise, Nepal can export or import goods by using 180 km long Kalughat-Raxual road. They have also proposed Nepal to transport goods on big vessels via Kolkata-Shaibgunj waterway using small ships up to the Nepal border. Then, Nepal can bring goods by road using the 150 km long Shaibgunj-Manihari-Birgunj corridor. India is also positive to use of cross-border railway lines by Nepal which are under construction at various border points. In this way, China and India are focused on Nepal in the context of the BRI in emerging Nepalese geopolitics.

### **3.5 China-Russia Security Dialogue Platform:**

Regional and global platforms emerge along with the changes in the geopolitical arena. After World War II, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed on 4 April 1949. It was an intergovernmental military alliance between 28 European countries and two North American countries at the beginning. Its purpose is to guarantee freedom and security of its members through political and military means, especially to secure democracies from the former USSR. This formation changes global power configuration, and it demanded a parallel military organization. As a result, the former USSR led to establishing the Warsaw Treaty Organization, the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance, commonly known as the Warsaw Pact, on 14 May 1955. It was a collective defense treaty signed in Warsaw, Poland between the former USSR and seven other Eastern Bloc socialist republics of Central and Eastern Europe. These two global military alliances are the result of changing geopolitics after World War II. Rivalry and competition of the USA and former USSR during the Cold War period shifted to the USA-China rivalry after the end of the Cold War. The rapid rise of China motivated the USA to initiate some global security platforms excluding NATO after the end of the Cold War and it materialized only under the Trump administration. The former US President Donald J. Trump announced QUAD in 2017. During the 2017 ASEAN Summits in Manila held on 28-29 April 2017, Head of Governments of the USA, Australia, Japan, and India agreed to revive the quadrilateral alliance in order to counter China in strategic and diplomatic fronts. After this agreement, many scholars and analysts have predicted that the tensions between the QUAD countries and China would led to a new form of Cold War in the region. Jamali and O'connor report that President Donald Trump was pushing to build on increasingly robust partnerships ...in 2017 among four countries. After materializing the partnership among them, security challenge is felt by China (O'connor and Jamali, 2020, Para. 1 and 4).

In March 2021, the major Indo-Pacific powers of Australia, India, Japan, and the USA concluded the first summit of the QUAD group. It was conducted virtually due to global pandemic of Covid-19 and paved the way for a de facto "Asian NATO" amid increasing their concern over China's assertive behavior in recent years (Heydarian, 2021, Para. 1 and 2). The

four countries are united thus to fight against common threats to be raised by China in the South China Sea. Such developments are the result of geopolitical changes and complexity raised.

In the same month of the first-ever summit of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, China and Russia agreed to establish security dialogue platform. Journals of India report that China and Russia have rejected the US calls for a 'rule-based order' (Journals of India, 2021, Para. 1). The proposal came following a meeting between Foreign Ministers of both countries. The Journals of India report about the decisions of the meeting. Key decisions are a) the both countries have proposed the establishment of a regional security dialogue platform, b) they rejected U.S. calls for "a rules-based order", c) all countries should follow the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, d) the US should reflect on the damage it has done to global peace and development (Journals of India, 2021).

Thus, due to the emerging threat posed by the QUAD countries and unexpectedly changed geopolitics, China and Russia proposed to establish such a dialogue platform targeting the threat posed by the QUAD. Nepal, in such a situation, cannot be excluded from its implications on the foreign policy and diplomacy of Nepal.

#### **4. Limitations and Future Scope**

This research paper focuses on trilateral engagement in Nepal's geopolitics in general and in the Belt and Road Initiative, the MCC, and the China-Russia Security Dialogue Platform, in particular. At this time, as the debate over the MCC and the Belt and Road Initiative is intensifying in Nepal's current geopolitics, this article also focuses more on these two issues and includes the China-Russian Security Dialogue Platform as the third focus. Since the MCC was started by the USA and the BRI by China, the engagement of these two countries is more visible in the article, but India's involvement and interference in Nepal's domestic politics, seen in a new form from the early 1950s is even more dangerous. The paper excludes the details of India's such covert and overt involvement and interference. However, the author's future research will be on "India's Involvement in Nepal and Its Impact on Nepal's India Policy". In the next phase research, India's involvement, intervention and cooperation in Nepal will be analyzed in three phases and three dimensions. India's interest, engagement, interference and cooperation in Nepal will be analyzed in three phases from 1950 to 1990, from 1990 to 2015 and after 2015 period. Similarly, India's political, economic and cultural interests and involvement in Nepal will be analyzed as three dimensions. Therefore, in this paper, even though India is the main actor in Nepal's geopolitics, its involvement has been obscured due to MCC and BRI.

#### **5. Implications and Conclusion**

According to Nepal's Constitution promulgated in 2015, Nepal should conduct an independent foreign policy based on the Charter of the United Nations, non-alignment, principles of *Panchsheel*, international law and the norms of world peace safeguarding the sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and national interest of Nepal (Article 51, m, 2) (Nepal Constitution, 2015, p. 41). It is clearly mentioned in the constitution that non-alignment and principles of *Panchsheel* are the core values and principles of Nepal's foreign policy. But this

author analyses that these values and principles are the global principles and values of many member countries of global and regional organizations rather than only being Nepal's own indigenous principles. The geopolitics, as analyzed in detail under the section of Issues debated, definitely impacts on Nepal's geopolitics but the foreign policy has been kept almost the same for more than the last 50 years because the similar provisions of foreign policy of Nepal are frequently repeated in Nepal's earlier constitutions without conducting scientific research. Therefore, provision of Nepal's foreign policy in Nepal's Constitution was only the regularity of the past provisions whereas the geopolitics of Nepal was massively changed during the same period. So, Nepal's foreign policy should be reoriented, redefined, and revisited based on new geopolitics (New Heartland) to defend national interest.

Nepal government brought out its first ever foreign policy document in 2077 B.S. This document is a milestone in the history of Nepal's foreign policy and is the first official comprehensive document as well. It has included numerous issues, sectors, and agendas. However, it seems unable to examine geopolitics and its massive implications for foreign policy. The document is silent about MCC, Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS), China-Russia Security Dialogue Platform and their implications. In addition, the document is lacked on how to deal with the superpower, great powers, and their priorities and interests. Next, it seems entirely descriptive, but not researched and evidence-based. It lacks the whole scientific research process and steps. It is completely silent about the stakeholders, experts, and researchers involved in drafting the document.

The document speaks only in a single sentence about the soft power approach in foreign policy. However, it includes many dimensions of soft power in other ways. So, its framework is quite general. It has not specifically predicted any possible threats posed to Nepal by bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral geopolitical rivalries as explained above. Therefore, though it is a historic and comprehensive one, it is an incomplete and general document. If real and contextual challenges and threats are not well analyzed while implementing the policy, it may be difficult to achieve, defend and expand the country's national interest.

Based on the aforementioned review and analysis, it can be said that Nepal is facing challenges in formulating, implementing and conducting, her appropriate foreign policy in a changing geopolitical context without any external pressure. It is concluded by the fact of pending MCC for a long time and the delayed projects signed with China under the BRI. As the United States, China, and India have moved forward intensively and aggressively in Nepal's geopolitics, the geography of Nepal and its neighbors appears to be in danger of emerging as the new Heartland of the 21st century. Due to the concentration of global political actors in Nepal and the difficulties faced in advancing Nepal's foreign policy without their pressure, Nepal and the South Asian region are also becoming one of the emerging new Heartlands in the global geopolitics. This indicates that the process of creating new Heartlands in the world will accelerate further and that Nepal will face challenges in implementing its foreign policy. Despite being members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), both China's and Russia's proposal of a separate platform to combat the effects of the Indo-Pacific strategy, indicates multi-dimensional interests, equations, and possibilities in the world. When super and great powers pursue security cooperation with security as their primary destination, the impact will surely be felt in a country with sensitive geopolitics like Nepal. Faced with a global and regional power struggle, Nepal may encounter the challenges of preserving the legacy of its

non-aligned foreign policy. To move forward in such a complex situation, Nepal must now incorporate a soft power approach into its foreign policy. If Nepal openly pursues its foreign policy in the concept of soft power, Nepal cannot participate militarily in any external affairs. In such a situation, Nepal will not be involved in any global and regional power and security equation and alliance. Only in such a condition and through the use of soft power, Nepal can pursue its non-aligned foreign policy and move forward on the path of neutralizing the challenges posed by geopolitical power struggles.

## 6. Recommendation:

This paper seeks to recommend the formation of a formal group of experts in international relations by the government. The foreign policy formulated by the Nepalese government in 2077 B.S. is only based on consultation with experts for few hours or few days. But, for scientific research, it is quite insufficient. This document comprises nine different priority areas which comprise: a) Bilateral Relations, b) Multilateral Supports, c) Rule-based World Order, d) Regional Support, e) Economic Diplomacy, f) Protection of the Rights of Natural and Legal Persons, g) Public Diplomacy, h) Track Two Diplomacy, i) Institutional Setup and Building. It has also highlighted the top twenty policies in the document (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2077 B.S.). However, the document is silent about the formation of expert groups for the above nine different areas and twenty priorities. The government is recommended to form nine groups of experts for nine priority areas and twenty sub-groups for highlighted policies. Experts should be mobilized to conduct intensive scientific research for detailed scientific policy drafting. One special group of experts should be composed to scientifically explore the contextual aspects of Nepal's soft power. Nepal has been able to defend her national interest especially during and after the Rana regime based on the soft power approach but it is not scientifically studied so far. All these expert groups should focus on assessing the challenges posed and implications of BRI, MCC, and China-Russia Security Dialogue Platform on Nepal's foreign policy. Therefore, the government is recommended to conduct a detailed scientific research on the soft power approach in Nepal's foreign policy to cope with all the challenges, issues, and threats raised and posed by New Heartland that has emerged in this region.

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Research Article

## Local Government's Tax Practices From A Cooperative Federalism Perspective

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### Abstract

This study analyses intergovernmental revenue policies and its practices in Nepal, specifically focusing on the role of local governments (LGs) in tax administration. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used in this study that concluded LGs are gradually institutionalising internal revenue bases, and rates at the local level. The constitution 2015 has provisioned that the local governments can autonomously execute various functions including legislative, administrative, financial management, tax administration and so on. Nonetheless, imperfect experience, inadequate technical skills, limited legal and procedural grounds, and weak institutional capacity, LGs are collecting tax. Result shows tax enforcement process has been implemented with limited consultation with the taxpayers and minimal coordination with the provincial and federal government. This has created number of criticisms to the LGs about their unaccountability to the taxpaying citizens. Thus, some recommendations such as integration of technical management capacity with local, provincial, and federal level for efficient fiscal administration systems; and digitization and automation of taxation for intergovernmental cooperation have been provided for improving local economic and effective tax administration at the local level.

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**Keywords:** federalism, fiscal governance, tax, revenue, local government, Nepal

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## **1. Introduction**

Tax is an integral source of revenue for the government as it supports to sustain the economy to a large extent (Acharya, 2017). Richard Musgrave in 1959 coined the term fiscal federalism for the first time with an illustration of tax, which is an essential part of fiscal federalism. Under fiscal federalism, firstly, the division of governmental functions and financial relations among different levels of government are defined. Secondly, the governments are qualified to:- legitimately collect taxes from different sources, allocate resources efficiently and effectively, and maintain economic stability. Thirdly, these governments take regional and local differences seriously and enforce public concerns, mainly tax rates into account (Mason, 2011). Shah (2007) illustrates that taxation is an indispensable process to build connections and interactions among the different levels of government for revenue generation, rational distribution and allocation of revenue, equitable sharing of royalties and efficient public finance management among others. In the federal system, both national and sub-national governments function within the boundary of constitutional and legislative frameworks. However, they are interconnected and interdependent and they function in partnership with different levels of the government (Acharya & Zafarullah, 2020). Relevant legislative frameworks, effective human resource management, and commitment of the actors can create an enabling environment for the proper functioning of fiscal federalism. Furthermore, good indicators for tracking the progress and social needs, measuring work responsibilities, and expenditure arrangements are critical because effective taxation is lacking in many instances due to the inability of political and tax officials to take rational choice to go beyond political bargain (Ter-Minassian, 1997).

Nepal's Constitution has adopted cooperative federalism. The Constitution enshrined to have three tiers of governments: federal, state, and local based on coordination, coexistence, and cooperation, which confirms three elements of federalism: administrative, political, and fiscal federalism. The constitution has assigned tax-related responsibilities to the sub-national levels through these elements, including revenue-generation, fiscal transfers, and borrowing. Federal constitution envisions to integrate policies and powers of different levels of government, for example, sharing powers, financial resources, and cooperation among the various levels of government (Burgess, 2006). However, Nepal is continuously struggling to achieve notable results of fiscal federalism with a proper framework that could ensure the right to expenditure responsibility, and revenue assignments of three spheres of government. Looking at the theoretical perspective and international practice of fiscal federalism it seems that the source of revenue will be at the center but the responsibility for expenditure will be at the lower level. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 also provisions the main sources of revenue (namely: fiscal equalization, conditional, special, and matching grants) at the center and the responsibility of expenditure at the province and local level.

Similarly, the roles and responsibilities of the LGs have been envisaged to address the needs of the citizens and provide services to them at their doorsteps. It is necessary to increase the scope, area, and quality of services; increase the investment in services and development works; and create maximum internal revenue to address their needs (Acharya and Zafarullah, 2020). On the one hand, this process leads to transforming the LGs into autonomous bodies. On the other hand, it helps to institutionalize cooperative federalism as a major political system, which is one of the salient features of the Constitution (Chandrika and Acharya, 2020). Based

on this approach, both national and sub-national governments have some primary responsibilities for some policy areas. They also have exclusive and concurrent powers, which are areas of policy that are their own. Additionally, they have shared responsibilities of federal, provincial and LGs. In this context, cooperative federalism is conceptualized in two things, first, it assumes that federal, provinces, and LGs cooperate with each other in order to solve common problems; second, it highlights the principle of proximity (Chandrika & Acharya, 2020).

The Constitution envisaged that the local governments are familiar and functional institutional structures of the government at the local level. These units not only engage in service delivery functions through institutionalization of local governance systems, but also, execute the power and functions of legislative, executive and judiciary as closest and trustworthy agents of grassroots communities (Acharya, 2018). LGs are governed according to people's choice, and local priorities that confirm a sense of good governance for the service delivery process.

Furthermore, the Constitution has introduced the concept of local revenue generation and mobilization through sources and rate of tax. On the one hand, this concept provides local autonomy to the local governments. On the other hand the local governments can generate resources through progressive tax so that LGs can address the public demands at the local level. However, motivating the citizens and properly utilizing taxes is cumbersome. Evidence shows that only about one third of local governments are able to enforce and raise taxes properly and meet the public needs and choices (Shaha, 2020). Although some LGs have conducted studies on the areas and scope of taxable and non-taxable items that allow to determine the areas and rates of taxation, it is yet to be legalised or amended through local fiscal Act. The primary reasons are that many LGs are yet to understand the roles and responsibilities that go together under fiscal federalism because of their weak institutional capacity, political and bureaucratic apathy for rules and regulations, absence of stakeholder consultation, the federal government's mindset to re-c have also rendered LGs policies and laws to be ineffective.

In general, the taxpayers expect simplified tax payment systems that are reliable, transparent, easy to handle online systems, and they also expect information regarding the amount, time and the process of paying taxes. Similarly, they expect the provision of online tax services or service delivery from their closest point such as ward offices. Using cooperative federalism perspective, this paper aims to explain how local levels of government are utilizing their mandate to collect taxes and the challenges they are facing in the process.

## **2. Functioning of Tax Administration**

Fiscal federalism is a devolved function of fiscal authority or a process of granting independence and autonomy to the sub-national governments. It transfers the expenditure responsibility and assignments in generating revenue to the lower levels of governments (Shah, 2020). Many federalized countries have managed financial relations between national and sub-national units, enhanced economic growth and efficiency of public expenditures, and maintained horizontal fiscal equality and macro-economic stability under fiscal federalism framework (Martinez-Vazquet and McNab, 2005). Shrestha (2019) explains that such achievements are cooperative and coordination function of different tiers of the government. These functions bring substantial results in public finance management, resources allocation and resource generation and economic growth. In developing countries, many governments have prepared a variety of strategies to achieve effective and efficient fiscal federalism mainly on the allocation of

resources, stabilization of the economy, formulation of monetary policies, taxation, regulation of customs and value added tax (VAT) (Ter-Minassian, 1997).

Nepal has constitutionally divided the power and resources not only between the federal and provinces, but also shared them with the local levels. Moreover, it has enshrined cooperation, coordination and coexistence among three levels of the government. From cooperative federalism standpoint, it is expected that the governance system will be functioning autonomously. In the process partnership among the three tiers of the government is expected to develop, whereby all partners would equally participate in the governance system, engage in maximum public welfare mechanism, and be responsible and accountable to the citizens' concerns. To institutionalize fiscal federalism, the Constitution has provisioned four areas, namely: (i) distribution of expenditure responsibilities (including to which level of government), (ii) revenue assignment (which tax and non-tax revenue to pay to which level of government), (iii) intergovernmental fiscal transfers (which grants to allocate to either state or local levels) (iv) and internal debt (Which level of government can get how much loan). It is important that the Constitution has granted the rights to all levels of governments to levy taxes as a source of internal revenue.

Among all, the local governments are considered instrumental in bringing efficacy on fiscal federalism because they are closer to the citizens. This makes the local governments responsible for a variety of service delivery. Similarly, LGs have also been collecting two types of resources. The first is various forms of tax revenues (wealth tax, house rent, house land registration fee, motor vehicle tax, land revenue, entertainment tax, advertisement tax, and business tax etc). The Second is non-tax revenues (service charge, tourism fee, and penalty and fine etc.) (GoN, 2017b) revenue. LGs are also liable to collect taxes on roads and consumption of water, electricity and public libraries, public toilets, parks, ponds, bus parks, drainages, bridges, or any other public properties.

According to global practice, tax enforcement should be based on two principles in particular: the taxpayer's ability to pay taxes and the benefits/facilities that taxpayers can receive from the government; however such enforcement practices could be beyond the constitutional spirit, for example in the case of South Africa (Fritz, 2017). In addition to that, the Constitutional provisions of two methods of fiscal transfer from federal and provincial governments to the LGs are also in practice. The first is the distribution of revenue and the second is in the form of grant. After the implementations of federalism, the local levels have received the responsibility of identifying the areas of taxation and determine the rates of taxation with the broader participation of a wide range of stakeholders (Ter-Minassian, 1997). However, in practice the local governments do not have significant tax collection power. The government of Nepal, nevertheless, has devolved the power and functions in terms of revenue assignments (Shah, 2007). Similarly, the legislative practice of federalism indicates that each level of government tries to control taxation related assignments under its own regulation and shift the liabilities to other levels (Peterson, 1995). Although the local governments are considered efficient in their allocation function, the collected funds are not used effectively and efficiently to address the needs of the citizens, specifically the needs of marginalised communities.

## **2.1 Federalizing the Fiscal Authorities in Nepal**

Nepal has a long standing history of decentralisation and devolution of power from national to the sub-national levels, The first attempt of decentralization initiative in Nepal started in

1954 through the creation of local government called *Panchayat*. The *Panchayat* governments were created at the district, municipal and village levels. The country was divided into 75 districts. In the 1980s, the Decentralization Act 1982 and Regulation 1984 were promulgated to decentralise the planning and implementation of development activities (Acharya, 2014). However, the tax collection and revenue generation at the local level was centralized. For example, the land registration was collected by the district land registration office under the central government. After restoration of democracy in 1990, the Local Self Governance Act (LSGA) 1999 and Local Self Governance Legislation 2000 were promulgated that devolved the rights and responsibilities of various types of expenditure and revenue collection responsibilities to the local levels (Acharya, 2018).

Before promulgation of the Constitution 2015, the LSGA 1999, LSGR 2000 and LSGFR 2007 defined the local revenue assignment and its operational details. The local bodies were assigned to collect house and land taxes, land revenue (*Malpot*), local market tax/shop tax (*HaatBazsar* tax), vehicle tax (registration, renewal and lump sum), entertainment tax, *BahalBitauri* tax based on rent, tenancy and advertisement, business tax, commercial video tax, natural resource utilization tax and other taxes like collection and savings tax (ADB, 2009). From 2001- 2002, the government piloted the full devolution of some services for example: sub-health posts, primary education, agriculture extension including livestock services, small rural infrastructure and postal services at the local levels. However, the expenditure responsibilities handed over to the local bodies has become lip service. Only a few of them were implemented due to the lack of political will and resources. Similarly, the allocation of public expenditure between regions and districts was highly influenced by political forces. Political forces influence the provision of LSGA, and the control of central authority has been continuing.

Since establishment of federalism in 2015, Nepal has been practicing the power devolution system through constitutional provision, which was limited to delegation and deconcentration mechanisms in the past (GoN, 2015). Nonetheless, post enactment of the 2015 Constitution and the completion of local elections, the practice of financial federalism and local autonomy in Nepal have moved forward intensively in which locally elected representatives and current institutional frameworks have immensely enhanced the LGs authorities in fiscal governance. In order to expedite the federalizing fiscal authorities, the Constitution has instructed to prepare number of laws such as Local Government Operation Act 2017, which defines functions of various components of local bodies; the Intergovernmental Fiscal Management Act 2017, which spells out ways to provide grants to subnational governments and distribute the proceeds generated from the use of natural resources among the three tiers of the government.

The National Natural Resource and Fiscal Commission (NNRFC) Act 2017 enables the devising a formula for the distribution of revenues and royalties among the three tiers of government in an equitable manner. The mandates of the NNRFC are expenditure responsibility, revenue authority/responsibility, intergovernmental finance transfer, internal credit rights, and the proper dissemination of royalties/revenue of the natural resources (GoN, 2017c). These provisions indicates that Nepal's fiscal federalism is moving towards cooperation, coexistence, and coordination. Which in turn focuses on revenue-raising power through taxation among the governments. Further, with the exception of their role of enriching the constitutional authorities and some other exclusive mandates, the LGs are considered

autonomous institution closer to the people in terms of decision making and service delivery point of view.

The purpose of Intergovernmental Fiscal Management Act 2017 is to maintain relationship between three levels of government under the federalisation processes: structures, rules, and institutions (GoN, 2017a). Through this concept, the local governments are allowed to collect property, house rent, real estate registration, vehicle, land, entertainment, advertisement, business and hoarding board taxes (GoN, 2015) so that they are provided necessary funds along with the constitutional functions such as the Constitution empowered the LGs with 22 exclusive functions/rights in the Schedule 8. In order to increase local revenues the LGs have the authority to levy fees on tourism activities, vehicle parking, rental services, collection of herbs and scrap, and operation of carts, rickshaws, cable cars and boats. The Constitution of Nepal has assigned tax rights to three tiers of the government through revenue assignment. Similarly, the federal government has the right to collect custom duty, VAT, excise duty, corporate income tax, and personal income tax, the major sources of revenue. Entertainment tax, advertisement tax, vehicle tax, house and land registration fee are concurrent rights of provincial and local governments. Similarly, local governments are mandated to collect property/land tax, business tax, house rental tax, and local natural resource taxes. Based on constitutional provision, LGs have powers to choose the tax base, assess the tax base, decide the rate, collect the tax, and retain the tax proceeds (Shrestha & Vanik, 2019).

Despite the fact that LGs are provided tax administration roles on the basis of the Constitution and laws, the grants transfer system in Nepal is yet to be scientific as it is dominated by the federal ministries on the basis of their judgment and *ad-hoc* analysis Devkota (2021b). Currently, fiscal transfer from federal and provincial governments has been based on development status, population, and the gap between expenditure needs and revenue potential, which is insufficient and intuitive. Subedi (2013) adds that intergovernmental fiscal transfer is yet unpredictable in Nepal. Similarly, the province and local levels are less active in widening the scope of revenue rights due to limited legislation and capacity on tax administration.

Despite having low capacity at the local level, devolving power related to tax administration at the LGs positively contributes to effectiveness of municipalities than the devolving expenditure responsibilities to municipalities through fiscal transfers (Khanal, 2016). Hence, it is positive that the Constitutional mandate of distributing revenue administration among the three tiers of the government is a step towards the right direction. However, the best results can't be reaped unless this is done for the best interest of the taxpayers and large population. Further, tax system is expected to be positively contributing to the overall human development of the population. Therefore, it is essential to assess how far the LGs are executing their revenue administration related function for the best interest of their constituencies and cooperating with other levels of governments.

Birch (1995) argues that cooperation is constructive, fruitful and ensures good services to citizens and it creates an enabling environment for flexible relationships between the national and sub-national governments in which both work together on a variety of issues and programs. In addition to defining the local governments as key agents of the fiscal decision-making process, fiscal federalism Thapa & Sharma (2011) also establishes LGs as the responsible institutions to involve local citizens in prioritization of needs related to economic prosperity and social inclusion, and also engage them to prepare plans and projects to spend tax payers

money on. This normative understanding of federalism is functional when all the levels of government cooperate keeping their citizens at the centre stage and the LGs, the bottom tier of the government, has financial independence with tax authorities.

## **2.2 Tax Administration at the Local Levels in Nepal**

Nepal's decentralisation efforts began by setting up the Royal Commission on Decentralisation in 1963 with bureaucratic de-concentration (Kafle, 1987). Currently, many LGs have been preparing the fiscal act proposing various tax rates based on federal laws. However, there are ample examples of legal mismatch between federal and local laws and provincial and local laws. This tendency has created an additional tax burden to the citizens on one hand while on the other hand some LGs are not initiating tax related acts and regulations as they lack capacity of tax administration, and they don't want to be unpopular among the citizens. Thus, most of the LGs are largely dependent upon the fiscal transfers being received from the federal levels. It shows that the local governments are reluctant to exercise their tax related rights and to overcome these challenges, it is important to assess how the LGs are generating local revenue, the justifications of the various tax rates, tax coverage as well as the cost-effectiveness of the tax administration at the LGs.

For the administration and management of the local revenue including taxes, the LG Operation Act 2017 has made a provision of a seven-member Revenue Advisory Program and Budget Formulation Committee (RAPBFC) chaired by the Deputy Mayor of the LGs. The Committee is mandated to formulate necessary policies, laws, review the revenue rate, source, and bases of taxation (GoN, 2017b). Through these references as well as wider consultation of the local people, LGs have prepared the plan for revenue improvement. It is essential that this committee is active, competent, and capable to have effective revenue management at the LGs. However most of the LGs give less priority to revenue administration functions due to conflict between the Mayor/chair and the deputy mayor/vice chair. The unholy relationship between Mayor/chair and chief administrative officer is also affecting the work of the revenue administration. Generally, the RAPBFC meetings are usually held once a year. They have a number of responsibilities such as (i) Projection of the internal resources such as revenue sharing, fiscal transfer of internal debt and other incomes from Government of Nepal and provincial government, (ii) Preparation of an outline for balanced development: considering the national and provincial priorities and local needs. For example: Population – 70 %, Geography- 15 %, Human Development Index- 5 %, Under Development Index – 10 % are in use (GoN, 2017c), (iii) Finalize the total ceiling of the LGs, (iv) Determining the sectoral budget ceiling at the LG, (v) Carrying out other tasks in relation to the resources estimation and determination of budget ceiling (GoN, 2017b).

Nevertheless, the practice shows the RAPBFC is not in the position to take concrete decisions because there is no guarantee of implementation of such decisions by the LGs. Likewise, most LGs do not have a focal person to run the revenue administration competently and proficiently. Some LGs have delegated the responsibility of revenue administration to junior staff, who are regulated by the chief administrative officer. Only a limited number of LGs have prepared a Revenue Reform Action Plan (RIAP) because the capacity and willingness to implement the RIAP is rather weak (Devkota, 2021b). Due to its mandate and scope, the role of RAPBCF is critical to take high quality discussions on the local tax rates, tax base and revenue projection

for effective planning. It is essential that the open discussion should be organised with relevant stakeholders in the LG and it is equally important that such discussions also take place among the LGs of similar nature, in close collaboration with the provincial and federal level tax administration authorities. The intergovernmental coordination in tax administration is very challenging and weak in Nepal because the provincial level government is comparatively very new in the tax administration system while federal tax administration has no or very limited mandate and capacity to collaborate and engage with provincial and local tax administration authorities. Economic Survey FY 2011 to 2018 shows that Nepal's tax revenue covers 83.84 percent of the total revenue to the government in Nepal while such sources might be changing due to newly initiated federal tax systems introduced after the establishment of new LG governments. The tax can be enforced by consideration of national economic policy, transportation of goods and services, capital and labor markets, and laws made by neighboring provinces and LGs. As for the non-tax Revenue, LGs can determine the rate of non-tax revenue based on the cost of goods and services and the cost of operation and maintenance costs (Devkota, 2021a). However, the LGs cannot collect taxes on any goods being supplied by the federal government, provincial governments and any other government-owned agencies for projects being developed under foreign aid or domestic sources itself. LGs also cannot collect taxes under any other heading that are envisioned tax-free by the federal and provincial policies. Considering the varied tax practices and confusions related to tax authorities at the LGs, the Ministry of Federal Affairs (MOFAGA) has provided guidance to the LGs related to revenue administration and tax collection rights.

Regardless of such practices, tax enforcement at the local level is a new practice. It has been found that taxes have been collected without adequate discussions with local people and stakeholders. The local governments have exercised the prevailing legal tax rights based on their own understanding of tax collection. Some have imposed taxes outside the purview of the law, while others have not started practicing it despite the possibility of taxation. When enforcing taxes to citizens' income and property, LG must be sought to regarding its effective use and sustainability, so that it can contribute to governance, development, and economic prosperity. The range of taxation can be increased, not the rate of taxation. Increasing the tax rate without study or without any base might bring forth negative consequences.

### **3. Research Method**

This study is situated in the context of fiscal federalization in Nepal. In the course of this study a focus group discussion was conducted with LG Officials and the officials in the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration. Likewise relevant quantitative data was collected from three municipalities. In addition, the policy documents such as the Constitution of 2015, the LG Operation Act 2017, the Intergovernmental Fiscal Transfer Act 2017 (GoN, 2017a) and several related Acts and regulations were reviewed.

The data was collected purposively from three LGs: Biratnagar Metropolitan City, Nepalganj Sub metropolitan City and Resunga Municipality. The selected LGs have represented range of Metropolitan, Sub-metropolitan and municipalities. In general, it is found that the selected LGs exercised tax related activities in a better way compared to other LGs in Nepal. Focus group discussion was held with mayors and other concerned LG officials.

During the data collection period, the authors were physically present to observe LG's capacity in service delivery. After collection of the primary data, descriptive analysis was prepared,

which included a presentation capturing relevant tables and figures. Data collected through interviews was presented and the data was supplemented with participants' quotes in the results and finding section.

#### 4. Results and Discussions

This section presents various tax practices of local governments in Nepal for example occupational tax, vehicle entry tax, vehicle tax, vital registration tax, service fee and charges, land and house rental tax. LGs are collecting these taxes on the basis of constitutional mandates. While collecting these taxes, LGs are facing various issues and challenges. Some of the issues are quite technical whereas a large number of issues and ambiguities are complex and the LGs cannot address these issues without the cooperation and support of provincial and federal governments. See below the observation of a mayor who was interviewed during the course of the study. His view is a reflection of the situation at the local level:

*The areas and rates of tax are determined by the executive board of local governments through their own judgement. The experience and knowledge of staff and people's representatives are basic references for tax enforcement. Finally, it is approved by the annual assembly meeting then tax is enforced on the people. But, there remain many complaints and comments at the grassroots level against taxation. Sometimes the municipality receives threats from people to go to court over local level tax decisions. We are not aware of the crux of creating a gap between LGs and people, even though we follow the rules and regulations.*

Above expression shows that that there were some lapses in current practice of the municipalities to determine the scope and rate of taxation. For example, many LGs did not prepare Fiscal Act and regulations, there was lack of coordination between local communities and LGs about tax enforcement, and no scientific study was conducted for reference. Practice shows that many local level governments have determined the basis and rates of tax and non-tax revenue without any legal and theoretical foundation. There are number of reasons behind such a process. First, this situation has been created due to lack of knowledge about constitutional and legal provisions related to revenue and their rights and duties at the local level. At the same time, some unpopular decisions may have been made due to lack of revenue efficiency and capacity in some of the employees working at the local level and some people are not so serious about tax assessment despite being knowledgeable. The decision seems to have been made due to difference between taxes and service charges, the relationship between taxes and services, lack of knowledge about basic principles of taxation and service charges, pride and ambition to be a local government and motivation to raise more revenue.

Second, there has been a lack of adequate interaction, discussion and consultation with experts and taxpayers to determine the base and rate of revenue. This could be the reason why people feel that their government is trying to collect taxes arbitrarily. Such a drastic step of increasing the rate & range of revenue without studying the needs and terrain of the citizens within their jurisdiction has made the local government unpopular.

Third, there is a wide variation in revenue rates between the local levels. Dissatisfaction has arisen among the citizens in the local levels because different rates of taxes are levied and also different methods of assessment of taxable property and valuation are used in the same tax base at different local levels. The possible inter-sectoral negative impact on local governance is also seen in terms of revenue base/rate determination, which is not fair.

Finally, there is a lack of information and financial capacity. In the new environment of federalism, there is a need for public awareness on issues related to revenues including tax requirements, tax and public service relations. However, such awareness programs are not conducted at many local levels. Due to the growing trend of usage of collected revenue for current expenses rather than capital expenses a lacuna exists in the areas of public infrastructures such as library, parks, good quality schools and hospitals etc.. Likewise, and poor quality exists in the public service domain. This has created dissatisfaction towards LGs, among the citizens. In this context, economic transparency and utilization of the accumulated funds in public infrastructure building and improving quality of services at the local level are the basic expectations from citizens. next section explores major types of taxes being administered by the LGs. .

#### 4.1 Occupational tax

Occupational tax is a form of progressive tax and it is levied on income or benefits from a business or a profession. Such fees are collected as regular incomes of the government. The government collects taxes from people such as businessmen, doctors, and lawyers who are licensed by the government for the income they receive from their professions. Local governments levy taxes on the basis of business and enterprise services, capital investment and economic transactions in trade within their area. It is essential to conduct extensive consultation with all local government stakeholders before enforcement of occupational taxes. Businesses are registered in concerned municipalities for the sole purpose of profit.

The local level seems to pay business tax based on the amount of investment, size and volume of profit of such registered and unregistered businesses. In order to attract businesses in their jurisdiction, the local levels focus on tax exemption. In turn, this type of action motivates taxpayers to comply with tax policies. However, in majority of cases lack of: adequate consultation, information flow, commitment of taxpayers, and the tendency of the taxpayers to collect taxes continuously instead of assessing the business transactions have created dissatisfaction among the citizens at the local level. A federal level representative expressed his view about the existing business and occupational tax collection system as follows:

*There is a tendency for the local level to impose higher taxes on professions, businesses and various services haphazardly without analyzing the profits or transactions of the enterprises and businesses. This has not created enabling environment for new investors to enter, nor are the existing entrepreneurs and professionals encouraged to promote the business with enthusiasm. Its immediate impact is that businesses are increasingly fleeing to next local levels with lower tax rates and a positive business environment. This will have a negative impact on the local level in the long run. In fact, the investment climate is a prerequisite for increasing economic activity, so it must be taken seriously.*

This narrative shows the tendency of setting tax rates without proper study on how tax related decisions are made at the local level affects business environment and investment climate, thereby, undermining longer term consequences of those decisions.

#### 4.2 Vehicle entry tax and vehicle tax

The Clause 3(5) of intergovernmental fiscal arrangement Act 2017 requires that the tax levied by the province and LGs should not be inconsistent with the national economic policy. Moreover, no obstacles should be created in carrying of goods and services and operation of

capital and labor market in neighboring Pradesh (state) and local governments. Based on this principle, every vehicle owner has paid the amount including custom, VAT, fuel related tax, vehicle registration fee and renewal fee. So, charging additional burden of tax on the name of vehicle entry and vehicle tax is not justifiable. Also, this is against the norms of Article 236 of the Constitution, that is related to inter-provincial trade.

The LG or province shall not levy additional taxes or fees or charges on the goods and extended services shipped from the first LG or province. However, the study finds that there was double taxation on local products in some jurisdictions. Whereas, in some other places no tax was levied and, in yet other cases, the federal government had to tell the province and local governments to do this or that. Double taxation was found due to ambiguity in the law. Thus, an immediate action is needed to clarify such ambiguity. The vehicle tax levy goes to the provincial government, which is then distributed among the LGs within the province. Some LGs have also levied vehicle tax within their boundary which is against their legal mandate. A senior official of MoFAGA expressed his view:

*The decision of the federal government, especially concerning vehicle entry tax collection, has not only been lingering by the local levels but has also been neglected. The existing laws clearly explain the issue of vehicle entry tax and even though the federal government has given instructions, this problem is still there. If the local levels are not serious about this, legal action may be taken against it. This will send a negative message to the citizens.*

This verbatim presents the discrepancies between what the federal ministry expects and what has been practiced by the LGs.

### **4.3 Vital registration**

Although local government operation Act 2017 provisions that the vital registration related rights and functions remain to LGs, schedule 9 of the Constitution illustrates that the vital registration related right and functions fall under the concurrent rights of federation, province and LG. To settle the dispute, recommendation has been made that the vital registration process should follow the vital registration Act 1976. This Act has already determined the fees and fines. The LGs are not mandated to charge any fee or fine to the people against the Act.

### **4.4 Service fee and charges**

Some LGs have charged fees for unnerved services, while they are eligible only to charge the fee for available services based on cost. An immediate action is required to stop this kind of fee charging process. Service fees are varied in different LGs within a district or within neighboring districts. So, recommendations have been made to make consistent service fees based on service cost and values, public capacity to pay the fee and rate of neighboring districts. To end this situation, the federal government should enforce a standard guideline for uniformity.

### **4.5 Land, house and rental tax**

Many LGs are unclear about land, house and rental tax as they have not enforced these taxes based on any local level laws and procedures. Thus, LGs need some form of mentoring from the federal level in terms of establishing tax structures at the local level. A model law from the

federal government can serve as a format to institutionalize rate of taxation, classification of taxes, and also to set other standard procedures that can facilitate LG taxation procedures effectively. The mandates of land, house and rental tax Act 1967 is essentially cancelled and the authority is now designated over to the LGs. In the past, 12 percent tax was levied in which 10 percent was utilized by local bodies and 2 percent was set aside for the government of Nepal. In the new context, new analysis is obligatory and LG should consider land, house and rental tax as major sources of internal revenue. Public awareness is essential to distinguish two types of taxes, namely: property tax, and land house and rental tax. An innovative initiative regarding completion of the tax mapping has been embraced by *Nijhgad* municipality . This contributed to bringing all taxpayers under tax circumference. Such best practices could be disseminated to other LG units. Sometimes, acceptance of new ideas and innovation at local level could be an uphill battle. One of the immediate service recipient of sampled municipality expressed that:

*Complaints that the taxes imposed by the local government are excessively high are found at the grassroots level. Last year, I paid Rs 2,900 for the land tax, but this year, the municipality has charged Rs 10,200 in the same amount of land. I sought the reason for increasing the amount of money in similar amounts of land, the answer was that the municipality carried out the property tax.*

This practice indicates that for the citizens who do not have enough income the burden of such a high tax amount for their land could be a huge financial burden. Usually, municipalities do not pay attention to the development of services and infrastructure based on priority. In addition, the federal government has also forced the LGs to raise taxes and has instructed each municipalities' that their annual internal revenue should be at least Rs. 30 million, otherwise there can be some implication to grant amount sent to them.

#### 4.6 Property tax

Fiscal Act 2018 has replaced the provision of Integrated Property Tax, which was enforced by the LGs for a few years. This provision is also carried out by the Local Government Operation Act 2017 as the main revenue source of LGs. The Fiscal Act 2018 is now limited merely for property taxes. Considering the imperative of integrated property tax (IPT), the LGs have demanded to revise the Fiscal Act 2018 and enforced integrated property tax system. As mayor of Nepalganj SMC expressed, "*the integrated property tax system is a progressive tax culture, which was introduced as an alternative to land revenue and real estate tax*". Devekota (2021b) mentioned that the potential of property tax is significantly higher than what has been collected by the LGs in Nepal. For example, large cities like Kuala Lumpur is collecting 93 per cent of the total revenue from property tax while the share of property tax in Nepal is less than 20 percent.

The integrated property tax determines the rate of taxation by assessing land revenue, value of building structure, and other assets included with house and land in an integrated manner. This tax is based on a progressive concept. In the past, local levels had been practicing this tax based on land value and assessment of house structure value. In 2018, the federal government made a financial law and removed the provision of this tax. This tax served two important functions at the local level. First the local levels were able to collect significant internal revenue. Second, they fulfilled the deficiency of resources and carried out economic, social, and infrastructural development works at the local level.

Despite the federal government's decision in 2018, some local levels have closed it down, while others have continued to fall within their jurisdiction. Similarly, some LGs of study area have

revised the clause 63 of the Local Government Operation Act 2017 according to their convenience and exempt to levy tax for government owned properties such as buildings, land, hospital, *Guthi*, non profit educational institutions, religious institutions (such as temples, mosque, churches, and monasteries), drinking water reservoirs, electric powerhouses, airports, bus parks, fun parks, and properties of the diplomatic institutions. Also, LGs have exempted the tax to heritage settlements for certain time and newly developed settlements for integrated land projects that can contribute to integrate the scattered settlements.

#### 4.7 Stone, boulder, sand and construction related tax

At the local level, there is no clear legal procedure for extraction of non-renewal natural resources such as stone, boulder, sand and construction related tax. A recommendation has been made to formulate clear legal procedure for utilization and renewal of natural resources under article 235(1) of the Constitution. Current practice for contracting extraction of natural resources, mainly river-based materials and minerals, are beneficial to the contractor and entrepreneurs, but the province is bearing maximum loss in terms of natural calamities such as floods and landslides. Tax related to mining of sand and boulders is always highlighted by all tiers of governments. The 2018 financial Act, has granted the authority to local levels for levying and charging the tax, however, the authority to determine the rate of taxation was given to provincial governments. In the past, the authority had been given to the LGs.

There exists some confusions among the sub-national governments in fixing the overall rates of taxation and specifically the whereabouts regarding taxation of natural resources which serve as construction materials. These complexities have created adverse effects in revenue generation. A mayor of one of the sub-metros expressed the complexities surrounding the collection of the riverine based resources at the local level as follows:

*Stones, pebbles, sand, and other riverbed materials are good income sources of local governments, which remain the most conflicting issue at the local level. Disputes have arisen between the local governments and inter-governments over the revenue generated and its jurisdiction. On the one hand, it is encouraging unauthorized exploitation of riverine resources, while on the other hand, a legal battle has been started between the District Coordination Committee and the Municipalities over the issue of exercise of rights.*

Nevertheless, Stones, pebbles, sand, and other riverbed materials are considered high value resources for revenue collection. Thus, all tiers of governments have to develop coordination and follow the laws to regulate and extract the resources. A clear-cut federal law needs to be promulgated, and a strong mechanism is essential to benefit the government compared to contractors.

#### 4.8 Trend of Revenue Collection in Local Governments in Nepal

The tax collection data from Biratnagar metropolitan, Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan and Resunga Municipalities shows that tax related revenue collection is increasing each year in general. However, the level of increment is varied among different LGs. The increment in Biratnagar metropolitan is quite significant while the growth in the relatively older municipality like Nepalgunj sub-metropolitan is gradual but slower (See chart 1).

Table 1: Trend of Local Level Tax revenue in Nepal

S.N	Name of the Municipality	Revenue Collection in Tax Related Revenue			Revenue Collection in Non-Tax Related Revenue		
		2075/076	2076/077	2077/078	2075/076	2076/077	2077/078
1.	Nepalganj SMC	47216142.34	55275967.31	87900000.00	50754838.40	99718631.87	85710000.00
2.	Biratnagar Metropolitan City	56195007.83	448065000.00	750254851.00	48338729.03	152250000.00	227180000.00
3.	Resunga Municipality	3841580.00	6050000.00	12550000.00	7595260.00	6150000.00	6150000.00

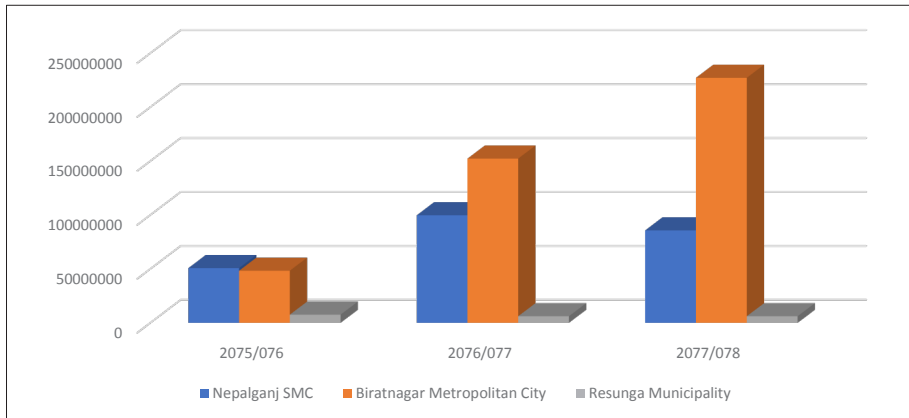


Figure 1: Revenue Collection in Tax Related Revenue

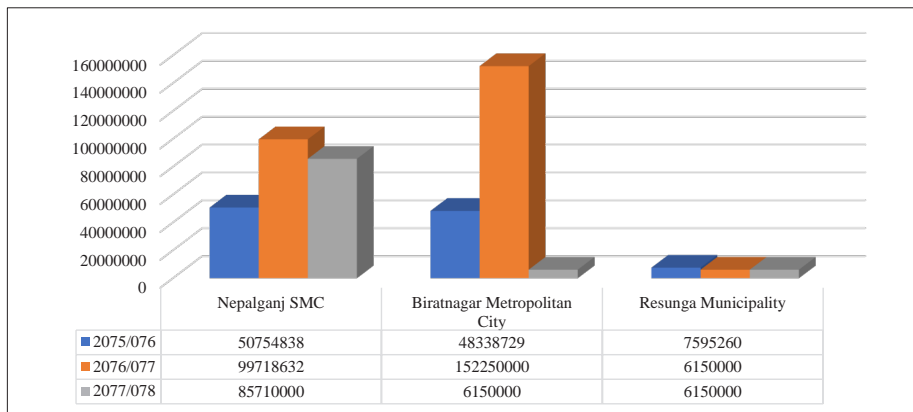


Figure 2: Revenue Collection in Non-Tax Related Revenue

The presented data demonstrates that the LGs are actively using the tax administration authorities and collecting more taxes than before. The growth is quite significant, from 2 to 10 times in three years' time in the sampled municipalities. This data presents that LGs will be able to increase their income by improving their tax administration capacity. Though, such growth will not automatically translate to better utilization of the local revenue or improvement in the quality of lives of taxpayers. The LGs are yet to prioritize :effective and efficient service delivery to the taxpayers; increasing local economic base; and creating more jobs and reducing inequalities.

In the course of revenue collection through taxation, local governments are liable to collect taxes on roads and water consumption, electricity and public libraries or any other public properties. Likewise, the local governments can also collect taxes for various services like public toilets, parks, ponds, bus parks, drainages, bridges, among others. However, the local governments cannot collect taxes on any goods supplied by the central government, provincial governments and any other government-owned agencies for projects implemented under foreign aid or domestic sources. Local governments also cannot collect taxes under any other heading that are envisioned tax-free by the government policies. In some cases local governments have prepared their fiscal act and imposed taxes on such items, such inconsistencies have to be avoided

It is encouraging to see the growing roles ,revenue sources, and capacity of revenue administration of LGs. However, the increased expenditure of the revenue in administration and non-productive or less productive sectors remains a consistent challenge. For example, the gross value added of this sector is expected to rise with the implementation of federalism and rise in administrative and security expenses of state and local levels. The contribution of this sector to GDP was 2.7 percent in fiscal year 2018/19 and grew to 3.2 percent in 2019/2020 (GoN, 2020). For effective revenue management, LGs are to consider tax-payer's capacity, rate of taxation , practices of neighbouring LGs, provincial and federal laws, as well as the interest of local stakeholders. During the 11 months period in the fiscal year 2020/2021, total revenue at the LGs was NPR 5705 million (57 Aarab, 5 Karor) of which Province 1 to Sudurpaschim Province are NPR 775, 1081, 1948, 523, 765, 224 and 386 million respectively. This presents that there is a wide gap in the amount of revenue collection by the LGs. Bagmati Province has collected about 2000 million while Karnali Province has collected only 224 million. The unequal development among different LGs can't be addressed unless the resource distribution and resource utilization are equitable and effective (Shaha, 2020).

#### 4.9 Legal systems and institutions

The federal government has prepared a number of model laws related to the fiscal governance for the provincial and LGs. However, both the governments failed to fully incorporate the spirit of the model laws at their levels. These governments also fall short in coordinating with federal ministries including the Office of the Prime Minister. This is one of the reasons why rate of taxation varies within LGs, provincial governments and between provincial and LGs. To overcome the inconsistencies, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) could prepare a model law and forward it to the provincial and LGs in which these governments could apply the spirit of the MoF. In order to implement the revenue assignments illustrated in the constitutional schedules different laws, Acts, and institutions have been practiced by the federal government.

This could have created cumbersomeness and conflict among others. To overcome these complexities, an integrated federal law is required that may help with coordination at all levels of governments.

#### **4.10 Tax administration capacity of the LGs**

The revenue authority granted to the local bodies in the past and LGs at present is not significantly different. In the past, both municipalities and Village Development Committees did not apply the revenue mobilisation activities, while the present LGs have widely applied revenue practices. The practice of revenue administration in all LGs have several differences due to level of understanding, weak capacity for tax enforcement, less exercise and public interaction, and inadequate preparation. Due to these types of practices citizens could fall under tax trap. Also the LGs are losing their credibility around the public. Therefore an immediate action is required to inform the taxpayers about the rate and area of the taxation.

Tax and revenue related technical support is essential for each LG unit as they have been enforcing tax, and revenues to the people without any technical foundation and research. The Constitution 2015 has granted authority to federal, province and LGs to enforce tax on the basis of approved legal procedures. However, some areas are transferred to non-state actors to enforce the tax, which is not necessarily matched to the constitutional mandate. Currently, various government projects and committees related to tourism are active to administer tax, which also remains in the provincial and LGs' jurisdiction. Tax administration is not a new function for the municipalities established before 2001 as the local self-government act LSGA (GoN, 1999). For example, in a study of taxation in Pokhara Municipality revealed that the municipal tax collection procedures are effective but the taxpayers are not paying their liabilities regularly and thus the municipality is unable to collect the minimum level of potential tax.

#### **4.11 Functioning of Intergovernmental Cooperation**

To bring the efficacy in utilization of LG revenues, practice on concurrent rights, and utilization and sharing of natural resources the provincial coordination council could be an effective mechanism. It is essential to link the revenue administration and taxpayers through rational mechanisms. Among others, logically connecting the tax administration and taxpayers, cultivating a positive attitude towards taxation in the local people, controlling tax leakage by using professional skills and digital technology, instituting the system of awards for best taxpayers, and building scientific and progressive taxation system can help gain trust among citizens.

The question of intergovernmental cooperation is critical to ensure that there is horizontal and vertical equality. Balancing fiscal powers across provincial and local levels is a very important question. The Constitution has given fiscal, legislative, and judicial rights to local governments but the proposed legislation rolls back the share of revenue from sources like forestry, tourism, hydropower, gravel, etc. This will have a serious negative effect on the true implementation of federalism unless these forms of taxes are regulated both from climate and human justice points of views and intergovernmental cooperation is essential for this to happen.

In this process, governments mainly federal government needs to operate effectively according to Federal, province and local government Interrelation Management Act, 2077. Similarly, provincial governments need to form the provincial coordination council. Concurrently,

regular meetings, consultations, and discussions are enormous for the Intergovernmental Fiscal Commission. The Constitution authorizes District Coordination Committee (DCC) in coordination role. However, currently DCCs are engaged in tax related activities which needs to stop immediately. In the past, DDCs charged export tax mainly on stone, boulders, gravel, coal, brick, cement, mineral water, agro and forest-based products. Currently, the Constitution does not allow levying taxes in such a sector. Thus, the federal government instructed all provincial and LGs to stop the charge in such activities.

In addition, modernization and or digitization and automation of taxation system is another important area of intergovernmental cooperation. Digitation process is not effective unless it is integrated in the tax administration system because taxpayers pay taxes at three levels of governments. The federal, the provincial and the local tax systems should communicate with each other and data should be integrated. To maintain uniformity in fiscal administrations at LG, they have used similar types of computer software called Sub-national Treasury Regulatory Application (SuTRA). SuTRA is a financial management system which includes modules on budgeting, accounting and financial reporting to ensure transparency, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness in financial management at the local level. Tax reform is a long-term process, in the case of Nepal the major reforms implemented in 1990s have been paying off in recent years (Bolnick & Singh, 2017). This shows that the present efforts in digitization of tax administration at the LGs will eventually pay off and will help to achieve remarkable improvements in revenue performance.

Similarly, technical management capacity is necessary to integrate the local, provincial, and federal level fiscal administration systems. Some provincial governments charge provincial development fees for industry registration and renewal. Similarly, provinces have been charging natural resources utilization tax to clinker and cement industries. Both scenarios are against Article 60 and schedule 6 of the 2015 Constitution. Thus, it is necessary to make the local level tax systems more practical, scientific, transparent and progressive. An essential action is required to make the tax administration more efficient and transparent based on its contribution to local revenue and economic flexibility. This is likely to bring more taxpayers into the tax range. To enhance overall efficiency there is a need for investment in capacity development at the LG on revenue administration sector. Additionally, federal, provincial and local levels are to timely analyze their revenue rights, capacity, and effectiveness.

In summary, the three tiers of government have been facing challenges to be effective in tax administration and such challenges are more evident at the newly established provincial and local levels. Fiscal federalization process is gradually being implemented with very little or no institutional, legislative and human resources prepared for effective implementation. Challenge remains to effectively lay a foundation of these three essential criteria in order to establish Nepal as a successful fiscal federal republic.

## **5. Conclusions**

Despite poor intergovernmental cooperation, tax collection has been increased and thus the scope of local revenue potential is significantly high. Lack of uniform tax rate and taxation base across local and provincial levels creates confusions among the tax-payers and in turn reduces LGs credibility in tax administration. Local capacity of the LGs new tax administration system weakens the LGs ability to collaborate with provincial and federal levels in tax

administration. This also threatens their independence and limits their ability to fulfill their constitutional mandate for providing effective service delivery.

The LG policies and programs are not yet prioritized to satisfy the taxpayers by investing on building local economic bases, creating more jobs, investing on health security, and reducing economic inequalities. Similarly, there are great gaps in intergovernmental cooperation in the tax administration system. Effective tax administration is impossible in federal Nepal without improved intergovernmental fiscal collaboration and improved taxpayer satisfaction regarding the services they receive from the governments and integrated taxpayer information systems.

It is yet too early to conclude that the fiscal federalisation is unable to address the unjust distribution of public wealth among the citizens and reduce inequalities in Nepal. In the current context poor intergovernmental cooperation exists, tax rate is increasing but the citizens are not at the center of tax administration, and LGs do not have enough capacity to collaborate with federal and local levels. All of these factors present a high possibility that Nepal's fiscal federalizing process is yet to empower LGs to be effective and accountable to the population that they represent. More studies are necessary to explore how far cooperative fiscal federalism has been successful in minimizing economic and social disparities in Nepal.

## **6. Recommendations**

- a. To develop progressive taxation system LGs need to collaborate with federal and provincial. Similarly, the LGs need to build efficient tax administration, expand tax base, and control revenue leakage to effectively mobilize internal resources and strengthen the overall tax administration system.
- b. More effort is necessary to improve the methods and techniques to identify tax loop holes and fraudulent businesses within the tax administration system and promote the use of integrated digital technology.
- c. DCCs are also reportedly engaged in tax related activities, which needs to stop immediately. In the past DDCs charged export tax mainly on stone, boulders, gravel, coal, brick, cement, mineral water, agro and forest-based products which is against the Constitutional provisions. Such practices should be stopped immediately.
- d. Along with the tax system, the LGs should improve their service delivery such as e-Payment, mobile service, provision of tax discount if paid within a fixed period and other services to the citizens.
- e. Further, with urbanization and continuous rise in assessed values of buildings, land and businesses, it is necessary to revise the rates and scope of taxation. Likewise tax administrative system needs to be improved. In doing so, some large municipalities may make unexpected leaps.
- f. The tax system should address the larger questions related to economic growth, just distribution of resources, reduce economic inequalities and social justice. Hence, in-depth studies should be carried out to inform policy makers for making tax policies that promote intergovernmental cooperation in an effective and just tax administration system in Nepal.
- g. All three tiers of the government should come up with strategies to utilize taxation system

as a redistributive tool in order to address existing gaps in education system, land rights, and other socio-economic inequalities.

- h. Tax-breaks could be well formulated at all three tiers of the government to provide incentives to businesses and industries. Thus tax incentives can act as an enzyme for economic transformation.

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## Annex I: Detailed information of Tax and Non Tax Revenue Nepali Fiscal Year 2077, 2076 -2075

Tax Revenue	Nepalganj			Biratnagar			Resunga		
	2077/078 Chaitra	2076/077	2075/076	2077/078 Chaitra	2076/077	2075/076	2077/078 Chaitra	2076/077	2075/076
Integrated Property	28000000	26034539	1965461	250000000	170000000	67133777	2250000	2250000	1500000
Land	200000	864164	664164	50000000	50000000	10891053	0.00	0.00	191580
House rent	30000000	5013708	13706852	219258791	65000000	7074819	1570000	1570000	0.00
Rental	0.00	21004283	16403145	1000000	1000000	612120	0.00	0.00	50000
Business				140000000	85000000	18098605	1930000	1930000	1500000
Vehicle	500000	0.00	500000	1000000	1000000	4881753	0.00	0.00	0.00
Infrastructure service	4000000	0.00	4000000	48865000	48865000	12284207	0.00	0.00	0.00
Entertainment	2500000	1963209	536791	2000000	2000000	0.00	0.00	0.00	100000
Advertisement				0.00	5200000	4364250	0.00	0.00	0.00
Other	4500000	396064.00	4103936	21631060	0.00	5456680	300000	300000	500000
Rent of public property	17500000	0.00	4635794	15000000	15000000	3420473	6500000	0.00	0.00
Income from selling public property	200000	0.00	200000	1500000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Selling of other goods/assets	500000.00	0.00	500000	0.00	5000000.00	2100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total Revenue	87900000	55275967	47216142	750254851	44806500	56195008	12550000	6050000	3841580

## **Author's Bio**

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Raj Kumar Dhungana is development professional with more than 2 decades of experiences in the bilateral, multilateral, government, and civil society organizations in good governance, education, peacebuilding, capacity development, and program management. He holds PhD from Kathmandu University. His research interests are on governance, peace and education. He is currently working in Royal Norwegian Embassy and teaching development policy and planning as a visiting faculty member of Kathmandu University.

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Research Article

## Reducing the plight of migrant workers affected by COVID-19

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### Abstract

Since the start of the pandemic one and a half years ago, a precarious economic crisis has developed in the country due to the fluctuation in remittance, which had once contributed to nearly one-third of the total GDP. In the initial phase of the pandemic, around 1.5 million migrant workers were expected to return home by losing jobs in major destinations – India, the Middle East and Malaysia – which have over one-fifth of the total migrant workers abroad. On this backdrop, this paper highlights the situation of the Nepali migrant people in the destination during the time of the COVID-19 crisis. The paper utilises existing literature collected through various sources and explores possible areas of intervention. It aims to unpack the impact of the pandemic on migrant workers, remittance flows and the livelihoods of the migrant workers and their family members. The paper concludes that the rate of return may further upsurge depending upon the situation of the spread of the pandemic. The impact of the virus is not limited to a national economy. It is felt by every individual who has lost their jobs, their hopes of getting involved in new jobs and is left unattended by state authorities. Those involved in the informal sectors, particularly the women and those from marginalised communities, are left in a state in which they cannot feed their families and pay their rent due to the effect of lockdowns. To reduce the impact of the pandemic on migrant workers, both the government and non-government development partners must involve in the early recovery work aimed at generating information on the impact of COVID 19 and concentrating on the immediate priorities of those impacted. The priorities should be set based on the current living condition, by utilising best practices available and undertaking measures made up of the capsule of identification, awareness, organisation, putting the victims first and uncompromised monitoring for possible areas of intervention in local communities. These strategies should aim for reintegration by adopting the principle of informed choice of the workers.

**Keywords:** COVID, workers, jobs, remittance, priority

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## **1. The outset**

The COVID 19 pandemic has virtually affected everyone around the world and Nepal is not an exception. One of the worst-hit communities is that of migrant workers, who are looking after the most possible alternative as an escape from the fear of the pandemic (ILO, 2020a). Upon arrival in their home country from the destination, they are treated negatively and in many places are even restricted to enter their countries. This leaves them vulnerable to statelessness as well.

Worldwide, nearly 4% of the global population – 281 million – are international migrants (IOM, 2020a). COVID-19 has not only affected those who have been struggling hard in the destination countries but also the aspirants planning for labour migration. According to the Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE), the only authentic body of the government of Nepal, about 115,000 aspirant migrants had to cancel their plans to go abroad due to the lockdown imposed during the first wave of the COVID -19 and the vaccination issue raised by the receiving countries during the second wave. These people had taken labour permits from the government but could not fly out. Similarly, 328,681 aspirant migrants who had taken pre-approvals were also stopped during this period (DOFE, 2020; IOM, 2020b). According to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the coronavirus pandemic has affected migrant workers both inside and in the labour receiving countries. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in both labour supply and labour receiving countries and the expiry of VISA or the lack of work permits, the migrant workers have had to face serious problems. As the governments of both countries stopped the regular service of visa issuance and work permit renewal, many of the workers have turned undocumented. According to the NHRC (2020), some of the undocumented workers engaged in domestic work are in an exploitative situation.

In view of the far-reaching impact of COVID 19 on the migrant populations all over the world, and especially on the poorest of the poor among the migrants in/from Nepal, it is time to think of interventions to reduce the impact of COVID 19 on migrant workers, manage the free flow of remittance that stands as a lifeline for the economy of Nepal, and protect the lives of the workers on their way home from destination countries. This study aims to identify the overall situation of the Nepali migrant people working abroad during the time of the COVID-19 crisis. Based on the review of literature from various sources, the study proposes possible areas of intervention – by both government and non-governmental sectors – to reduce the impact of the pandemic on migrant workers, remittance flow and the livelihoods of the migrant workers and their families.

## **2. Migrant workers employment trend in Nepal**

Nepal faces a poverty challenge despite policies and programmes addressing it since long past. Based on the 2017 data, more than 8.1 million Nepali people are facing multi-dimensional poverty (NPC, 2018). This means they lack access to essential services.

Inequality becomes a major cause of growing unemployment in Nepal, a fact empirically proven (OXFAM, 2019). According to the findings of the Nepal Labour Force Survey (NLFS) 2017/18, among the 20.7 million working-age people, approximately 7.1 million were employed while 908 thousand (11.4%) were unemployed in Nepal. Among them, unemployed females were higher (13.1%) compared to males. The report further highlights that around 500,000

(2.8%) people enter Nepal's labour market annually (CBS, 2019). The 2011 census on population and housing showed that almost 50 per cent of Nepal's households had a member who was either working overseas or had returned (CBS, 2014). While this labour migration has a significant positive effect on Nepal's economy, it also has a series of socio-economic impacts on the welfare of Nepali nationals abroad. The exploitation of migrant workers is rife. Aspiring labour migrants too often find themselves in a situation of irregular migration or trafficking due to unscrupulous agents/brokers, lack of proper contract letter indicating assigned terms and conditions as well as the duration of work and facilities (IOM, 2019).

The DoFE, under the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS), is a key source of information on labour migration. It issues and records labour permits to migrants wishing to emigrate for employment. This data has significant limitations. Firstly, it comprises only the number of labour permits issued by the government; importantly, therefore, the large number of Nepalis who go to India are not recorded. The terms of the 1950 Friendship Treaty do not require labour permits for Nepalis wishing to migrate to India for employment. Secondly, by only indicating the number of permits issued, the figures do not explain whether one individual has received multiple permits or whether the permits issued have been used.

Historically, Nepali migrant workers have searched for wage-earning jobs mainly in India. From the mid-1980s, however, Nepalis also started to migrate to the Gulf States and Malaysia for work which resulted in an increase in migrant workers as well as in a proliferation of labour recruitment agencies and brokers. As a result of this, migrant workers suffered a lot due to the lack of awareness, exorbitant fees from brokers and poor monitoring from the concerned institutions. One of the studies conducted by the Nepal Institute of Development Studies (NIDS) showed an instance of debt-bondage, in which youths were both enticed and forced by brokers to go to the third countries, mainly to the Gulf countries, to earn the money needed to pay the debts their forefathers were said to borrow (NIDS, 2010).

The decentralization of passport issuance in Nepal also facilitated the migration of many unskilled and semi-skilled Nepalis. During the past two decades, Nepal has also witnessed an increase in the number of Nepali women seeking work abroad and being gradually recognized as important economic actors. Out of the 72081 new entries of pre-approval for foreign labour, 7178 (9.96%) were females (DoFE, 2021). The risk of exploitation and abuse of women migrant workers is high, particularly in the largely unregulated sectors such as domestic work.

Before 2010, female migration to the Gulf for low skilled work was restricted. A new restriction was put in place in 2012 preventing women under the age of 30 from migrating to the Arab States for domestic work. In 2014, this restriction was expanded to women of all ages. In 2015, a directive reopening migration for female domestic workers aged 24 years and above was issued (DoFE, 2015; ILO, 2015). These measures have met with limited success. There is evidence of women migrants being in situations of risk. The process for Nepalis to migrate for employment is complex and time-consuming, which has spurred the increase of recruitment agencies. It also means that many migrant workers use irregular channels to access foreign employment, instead of following the normal process of obtaining a labour permit (IOM, 2019).

Some institutions in Nepal – such as CBS, DoFE, Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP), IOM, ILO, universities and research institutes – have initiated and raised the issues of the record-keeping system. However, they lack coordination and integration of data and the system at large is not so effective. Similarly, the Vital Registration Department of the Ministry of General Administration and Federal Affairs has been making effort for regulating migration data. These efforts have not been at the level of use at present. The number of returnee migrant workers due to the COVID-19 pandemic is difficult to figure out in Nepal. Tribhuvan International Airport and the Immigration Office are trying to figure out these data, but have not been able to share the data yet. Nevertheless, some bases can be established to figure out. An estimate made at the end of November 2019 shows that around 500,000 Nepali migrants are in Malaysia, the most popular labour destination for Nepali workers, followed by Qatar (with over 400,000), Saudi Arabia (334,451), the United Arab of Emirates (224,905) and Kuwait (70,000) (DoFE, 2019; IOM, 2019). These five countries alone accommodate over 1.5 million Nepalis.

Due to the fear of COVID-19, more than 700,000 workers have returned from India so far as reported by various media in Nepal and an almost equal number are estimated to return within six months (Kathmandu Post, 2020). Another study by the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) showed that 2.46 % of Nepali workers are completely jobless in Malaysia and Gulf countries. They include the workers with the visa expired, those lacking compliance documents and finally those who have received amnesty. A few of them were also employed or those placed in quarantine as a result of corona infection. Among those with a valid employment contract, around 3 % had not received their wages and nearly 11% had received only partial wages. GEFONT research further concludes that no provision of overtime – nor other conditions – exists in the contract to explain why the income of the workers decreased (GEFONT, 2020). Another study by ILO also indicated the poor quality of quarantine and suggested the Malaysian government to enable migrant workers to access quarantine facilities that permit social distancing, where available, and ensure safe spaces for women migrant workers and privacy, hygiene and sanitation facilities (ILO, 2020b).

### **3. Migrant workers issues in relation to COVID-19 in Nepal**

Workers are equally fearful of the prospect of job loss in the informal sector. If it happens, they cannot feed their families, pay their rent or survive in the city due to the lockdown affecting jobs in construction, manufacturing, restaurants, travel, tourism, and domestic work. When the first phase of the lockdown began on 26 March 2020, people had some money, some food and other items on which to survive. This was also applicable to workers. But now, after more than two months of the complete lockdown during the second wave of the COVID 19 pandemic, they are in a situation in which both the stored food grains and money have been exhausted. This pathetic situation is further precarious for the workers involved in the informal sector who had to remain almost unemployed during the first wave of the pandemic. In many places, having had no savings whatsoever, the economic effects of the crisis were felt immediately by the workers. In Nepal, although the government offered some relief packages during the first wave of the pandemic, they were all in-kind and thus could not meet the necessities felt by the workers. During the second wave of the pandemic, the distribution of the relief package to this sector is said to be less effective. The number of the distributors involved – government and non-government agencies – and the coverage of the supplies did not match the need.

South Asia, particularly India, where millions of Nepalis are residing as workers, is the land movement of migrant labourers who crossed state borders to reach their villages from the initial time of the lockdown. There interstate transit bus terminals (ISBT) across the country remained crumbled as the migrant workers wanted to go home. This created a precarious situation and added to the fear of the spread of the pandemic. People gathered at one place as a huge crowd and created new hotspots for the virus. During the second wave, the spread of the pandemic towards the places of origin of these returnees, especially in Karnali and *sudur paschim* (far west) hills, was observed to a greater extent causing deaths of hundreds of people and thousands being infected. According to The Economic Times, an online portal published from India, hundreds of migrant labourers gathered near Bandra Station, Mumbai on 13 April 2020 while trying to go back home. The crowd gathered for more than an hour added to the fear of the spread of the coronavirus and was finally dispersed by the police (The Economic Times, 2020).

The loss of employment abroad will be a huge impact on the families and economies that were dependent on remittances (Informal, 2020). As the Secretary-General of the United Nations said, on 19 March 2020, the COVID pandemic would impact differently on women, who normally bear the additional burden of unpaid care work, loss of paid work (since they are usually and mostly in the informal sector). Further, lacking awareness of and focus on gender concerns, women are most likely to be bypassed by state-provided support if any at all (News 18.com, 2020).

#### 4. The Policy Setup and response milieu

The Constitution of Nepal outlines some policy areas regarding migration such as utilizing the skill of migrant workers in national development. The Constitution aims to promote agricultural land in order to address the crisis of food and food insecurity. The Constitution focuses on labour with due respect and dignity and seeks to enhance employment within Nepal. The Constitution aims to make foreign employment free from any type of exploitation by guarantying the rights of the migrant workers and members of their families. It also aims to mobilize the capital and skills of returning migrant workers (IOM, 2019).

The National Planning Commission is the authority for overall coordination among line agencies and the preparation of periodic plans for Nepal's development. For a long period of the periodic plan of Nepal, the migration policy was confined to regulatory functions. The Fifteenth Plan, being implemented at present, has for the first time developed a comprehensive policy on migration. The plan seeks to "accelerate economic growth and emphasizes the importance of migration management." The policy ensures that "... Nepalis have the opportunity to benefit from economic opportunities without needing to migrate, as well as to ensure that immigration is well regulated." The plan has set a strategy to establish a database on migration, which will contain overall demographic information, by applying advanced technology (NPC, 2018; IOM, 2019). The database is expected to be useful to both researchers and policymakers.

The Fifteenth Plan plan has further aimed to make foreign employment safe, secure, respectable and free from exploitation in every stage of migration (IOM, 2020b). In order to make the migration process safe and secure, the government of Nepal has also given priority to bilateral agreements with labour receiving countries. So far the government has been able to conduct

such agreements with nine countries (Table 1).

Table 1: List of agreements signed between the government of Nepal and destination countries

<b>Destination Country</b>	<b>Year of agreement</b>	<b>Designation of agreement</b>
Qatar	2005	General Agreement
UAE	2007, 2019	Memorandum of Understanding
Republic of Korea	2007	Memorandum of Understanding
Bahrain	2008	Memorandum of Understanding
Japan	2009	Directive
	2019	Memorandum of Cooperation
Israel	2015	Joint Pilot Program
Jordan	2017	General Agreement
Malaysia	2018	Memorandum of Understanding
Mauritius	2019	Memorandum of Understanding

Source: MoLESS, 2020; IOM, 2019.

These agreements give priority to establishing well-coordinated labour diplomacy by harnessing coordination among all stakeholders, including non-resident Nepali associations. Aware of the impact of an open border with India, the government has given priority to the protection of the migrant workers going to India. By policy, the local governments are mandated to register them for the facilities of insurance and welfare funds (NPC, 2019).

Nepal has two main policies to deal with migrant workers: the National Labour Policy, 2014 and the Foreign Employment Policy, 2012. Both policies aim at the promotion of employment opportunities inside the country to end the compulsion to migrate abroad in search of work. The policies further aim to protect migrant workers in countries of destination, particularly those experiencing risks and vulnerabilities.

The Constitution has paved the way for enacting acts, regulations and necessary laws for the smooth operation of development activities to realise Nepali citizens' aspirations and expectations of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. All three levels of government are governed by their own acts and laws. In this context, the Local Government Operation Act 2017 was enacted to facilitate the development activities of local governments. Regarding migration, this act has created avenues for local governments to collect and manage, among many others, migration data, statistics and records which are available locally. The Act has mandated the maintenance of a civil registry and vital statistics known as births, deaths, marriages, divorces and migration. The Act also mandates the record-keeping of both the domestic and foreign labour force (Nepal Law Commission, 2015). The local governments are "equally responsible for the management and operation of employment information centres which can provide financial literacy and skill training for the labour force going abroad (IOM, 2019).

The sectoral policies like the National Population Policy, 2014 aim to manage internal and

external migration by maximising the engagement of human resources in the productive sector inside the country, by establishing at least one industrial area in every constituency, municipality or district headquarter, by safeguarding Nepalese migrant workers through diplomacy with major countries of destination and by developing sets of information on destination countries' context, language, culture and law (MOPE, 2014).

Targeting the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has thus far conducted some crucial tasks concerning the migrant workers abroad. The government stopped the issuance of labour permits for those seeking to go for foreign employment from 23 February 2020. During the first wave of COVID -19, the government developed various guidelines for the repatriation of migrant workers. The guidelines gave priority to the repatriation of migrant workers in vulnerable conditions, including women in special need (IOM, 2020b). Priority was also given to childbearing mothers, people who had lost jobs, sick people, those who had lost family members and the overstayed ones. Among others, they were provided with repatriation assistance (ILO, 2020b).

The repatriation guidelines also have provisions for allocating financial support to the Nepali workers stranded abroad. Such support includes air tickets to return home and other expenses needed to reach home from the Tribhuvan International Airport. The government has also indicated its policy to pay air tickets of the workers willing to return to the companies (in the destination) that laid them off (IOM, 2020b)

Stopping migrant workers from going abroad for work is not a solution. Neither is it in conformity to a human rights perspective. And thus, the government started lifting the ban after witnessing the decline of the first wave of COVID-19. During the initial four months of the first phase of the lockdown – April-July 2020 – none of the migrant workers was found to get permission to go abroad. From the first week of August 2020, the lockdown was gradually lifted, and thus the number of workers going abroad began to increase. Afterwards, the highest flow was witnessed during March/April 2021, when 32,142 Nepali youths went to different labour receiving countries. The female migrant workers were around 7% of them.

Table 2: Outbound labour migrants update, Nepal, July/August 2020 – May/June 2021

Date	Migrant Composition				Total	
	Male	Percent	Female	Percent		
May/June 21	3,868	94.7	218	5.3	4,086	3.0
April/May 21	22,609	92.8	1,754	7.2	24,363	17.8
March/April 21	30,035	93.4	2,107	6.6	32,142	23.4
Feb/March 21	18,436	93.1	1,372	6.9	19,808	14.5
Jan/Feb 21	8,542	95.8	379	4.2	8,921	6.5
Dec 20/Jan 21	13,397	90.8	1,356	9.2	14,753	10.8
Nov/Dec 20	11,321	91.1	1,110	8.9	12,431	9.1
Oct/Nov 20	7,486	96.0	311	4.0	7,797	5.7

Sep/Oct 20	7,676	94.8	421	5.2	8,097	5.9
Aug/Sep 20	1,418	93.0	107	7.0	1,525	1.1
July/Aug 20	2,974	94.4	178	5.6	3,152	2.3
Total	127,762	93.2	9,313	6.8	137,075	100.0

Source: DoFE (2021).

During the past 11 months, a total of 137,075 migrant workers got approval from the receiving countries. Out of them, nearly 7% were females and 93 % were males. Since mid-April 2021, the second wave of COVID-19 began to spread rapidly in Nepal. As a result, the number of workers going abroad decreased sharply to, for example, 4086 during May/June 2021 (Table 2).

During the crisis, the government has the main responsibility to accommodate both the returnees and aspirant migrant workers through policies and programmes. The first and foremost option is the promotion and expansion of agriculture targeting the returnee migrant workers. This also requires giving due attention to the voice and the psychology of the youths planning for foreign migration. An option for them is to support them to start the entrepreneurship of their choice. The government during the 2019/20 budget speech announced that "... youths returning from foreign employment with skills in agriculture will be encouraged to undertake organic farming as a business" (MoF, 2020). How the implementation of this policy went was not reviewed by this fiscal year's budget speech, neither by any other bureaucratic institutions from the local to the central level. As such, there is no knowledge or feedback in terms of the effectiveness of the policy. This year's budget too has announced that youths, women and returned persons from foreign employment will have the opportunity to involve in small and medium enterprises and commercial agriculture (MoF, 2021).

The interested returnee migrant workers need to be encouraged for subsistence agriculture without destroying the principle of 'subsistence.' It should aim to transform 'household subsistence' to 'national subsistence. Equally important is to make agriculture work prestigious by diversifying agriculture into food grains, vegetables, medicinal plants, animals and meats, forest products, etc.

## 5. Conclusion

Given the far-reaching impact of COVID 19 on migrant populations all over the world and especially on the poorest of the poor among the migrants in/from Nepal, we need to think of interventions to reduce the impact of the pandemic on workers, remittances and their livelihoods. The Ministry of Labour Employment and Social Security must be involved in the early recovery work by generating information on the impact of COVID -19 on foreign migrant workers. Information can be generated from the review of media clips, news broadcasts and online portals based on a brief questionnaire or checklist. The information should provide situational updates and analyses of the difficulties encountered by workers so that it becomes clear early on what immediate, medium-term and long-term interventions should be made to support and protect the workers.

Since this pandemic is striking every single citizen challenging the existing disaster management framework (News 18.com, 2020), there is an urgent need to develop a system to understand and foresee the overall effects and impacts of the pandemic, which are not clear yet. Every disaster has its own features and devastating potential, both immediate and long-term. A framework that has been useful to deal with one disaster, such as the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, may not work for the other. As of now, no one knows the scale and real intensity of the effect of the pandemic. What we are talking about are only the early signs.

Every one of the returning migrant workers is the potential carrier of the virus to their places of origin (Firstpost, 2020). As they return to remote areas that severely lack tracing, testing and hospital facilities, the migrants risk being the cause to worsen the entire COVID-19 scenario in the country (News18.com, 2020). The disaster has already crossed all inter-state/province borders and spread into every nook and corner of the country. Coordination among all institutions at national, subnational and local levels is essential to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and halt it. No one actor or institution – whatever well off or resourceful – can solve the problem alone.

## **6. Recommendations**

The government of Nepal should create an enabling environment to undertake the following capsule of activities in an integrated manner.

- 1. Identify the migrant workers:** State authorities, particularly, the MOLESS should concentrate on Immediate priorities of returned workers. The priorities should focus on personal and demographic identification of the workers and their current living condition (mixed up with family or self-isolated, quarantined or in other special conditions).
- 2. Make migrant workers aware and sensitised:** Keep workers sensitised and aware of services and facilities available to them through focused publicity and awareness campaigns and by using public communication systems and services of volunteers and non-government organisations (Informal, 2020). The information of services and other measures taken by the government should reach down to ward levels and communities.
- 3. Organise quality transit and medical facilities:** Quarantine or self-isolation shelters should be organised keeping in view of precautions that should be taken, such as physical or social distancing, case tracing and check-up facilities, quarantine or hospitalisation. This is possible only by implementing related directives issued by the government, such as the quarantine guidelines, and ensuring coordination and cooperation among line government agencies, development partners, local non-governmental organisations as well as the private sector.
- 4. Put the migrant workers and their issues first:** In the profit-oriented mode of production, the value of work is generally ignored during the crisis, such as the one posed by COVID-19. Such crises are instead seen as an opportunity to earn extra benefits by laying off employees, reducing payment or forcing the employees to stay on unpaid leaves. Several immigrant labours faced such troubles during the pandemic. To address them requires a specific policy providing for the care and support to those at risk and uncertainty of work. It's good that the government has initiated the repatriation of the migrants from Gulf countries and Malaysia. The budget speech for the fiscal year

2020/21 has the plan to create at least 700,000 employment opportunities many of which are aimed at the returned migrant workers. However, the modality of the employment and the sectors of mobilisation have not been developed. The government should, without delay, identify the sectors that match the needs and skills of migrant workers and develop the modality of employing them

- 5. Put in place a monitoring system:** In order to reduce the risk of exploitation and abuse of migrant workers in general and women migrant workers in particular, a strict mechanism should be in place to regularly monitor the situation of the workers, particularly of those in the unregulated sectors such as domestic work, in the Gulf countries in particular. The outcomes of monitoring should be regularly reviewed and responded to.

Nepal does not have reliable data on workers affected by COVID-19. The main priority should, thus, be on collecting data of COVID-19-affected workers using references from international experiences and emerging trends and experiences in the context of returnee migrants' reintegration and rehabilitation.

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## Policy Commentary

### Nepal's Gender Policies: Achievements and Challenges

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#### Abstract

Nepal has experienced extraordinary political and social changes in the last 25 years. Since the Constituent Assembly (CA) election in 2008, progress has been noted in increasing women's access to literacy, education, and healthcare services. Despite significant gender reforms in policies and strategies, Nepali women continue to experience discrimination and violence mainly because of their gender. Drawing upon six different cases – constitutional and international framework, participation of women, women peace and security, sexual and reproductive health rights, gender-responsive budget and citizenship law – this paper highlights some of the achievements and gaps in the area of gender reform policies and practices. Methodologically, the study adopts document review and personal reflections of authors as the main source of information. The paper concludes with some key recommendations to address existing challenges and gaps of these selected policies/strategies.

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**Keywords:** gender policies; gender based violence; participation of women; sexual and reproductive health

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## **1. Introduction**

Nepal has experienced extraordinary political and social changes in the last 25 years. Following the end of the Maoist insurgency in 2006 significant progress in gender equality has been observed. Since the Constituent Assembly (CA) election in 2008, progress has been noted in increasing access of women to literacy, education, and healthcare services. The wartime turmoil also paved the way for landmark achievements in women's inclusion in politics (Upreti and Kolås, 2016).

The United Nations Charter recognizes the equality of rights for women as fundamental human rights. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life – including the right to vote and to stand for election – as well as education, health and employment (UN Women, n.d.). As a state party to the convention, it is an obligation of the Government of Nepal (GoN) to end all discriminatory laws against women and to create a conducive environment for women to enjoy basic human rights and ensure their security.

This paper aims to analyze some of the selected gender-related policies/strategies while highlighting their achievements and gaps. The paper concludes with some key recommendations to address existing challenges and gaps in these policies. Methodologically, the study adopts document review and personal reflections of authors as the source of information.

Nepal has experienced several popular movements in the last three decades. They include the movement against the absolute monarchy and for multi-party democracy and then a federal democratic republic. The country also witnessed the decade-long armed conflict – between 1996 and 2006 – and the subsequent peaceful people's movement in 2006. As an outcome of these movements, two constituent assemblies were elected which promulgated the Constitution of Nepal in 2015 and established Nepal as an inclusive, just, democratic and federal republic.

## **2. Constitution of Nepal**

The Constitution of Nepal has guaranteed equal rights for every citizen and some special rights for women and disadvantaged groups. It strictly prohibits violence and discrimination against women and girls. It also contains provisions for institutional mechanisms relating to gender equality. Under Article 18 of the Constitution of the Nepal 2015, it guarantees that all citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law without any discrimination on any ground.

Under Part – Fundamental Rights and Duties – the Constitution enlists a comprehensive set of civic, political, social, economic, cultural and other rights.

Some of the rights guaranteed under Article 38 of the Constitution are:

- i. Equal lineage right without gender-based discrimination
- ii. Right to safe motherhood and reproductive health;
- iii. Right to participate in all bodies of the State based on the principle of proportional inclusion;

- iv. Right to obtain special opportunity in education, health, employment and social security based on positive discrimination;
- v. Equal right for the spouse to property and family affairs.

### **3. International Framework**

Nepal has ratified/signed/acceded to 23 international human rights instruments, including seven of the nine core human rights treaties, some important optional protocols, and seven of the eight core ILO Conventions. Nepal ratified CEDAW as far back as 1991. The Government has been implementing the prescribed areas of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) in its domestic processes since 1997 with a multi-stakeholder partnership approach that engages government organizations, international donor partners, NGOs, and the private sector.

Nepal is also a party to regional instruments and mechanisms such as the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution (2002)<sup>1</sup>. It also ratified, in June 2020, the Palermo Protocol to prevent, punish and suppress trafficking in persons, especially women and children. Substantial efforts have been made to domesticate the provisions of the international treaties and implement them. It is important to note Article 9 of the Nepal Treaty Act, 1990, which establishes that international treaty provisions would prevail over domestic laws in case of inconsistencies. This provision of the Nepal Treaty Act has had substantial implications in public interest litigations and subsequent Supreme Court rulings.

Despite these legal guarantees and international commitments for gender equality, the effective implementation of existing laws remains a major challenge. The deep-rooted patriarchal mindset and lack of information on the implementation status of the laws and policies are some other challenges (NAWHRD, 2008). There are numerous policies in the area of gender equality. However, given the limitation of this paper, only some selected strategies and policies have been included.

#### **3.1 Participation of Women**

One of the most visible achievements in the area of gender equality is the political participation of women in all three tiers of the government. The quota provision introduced in the Interim Constitution 2007 not only contributed to increased women's participation in the Constituent Assembly but also paved the way for the future. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) has guaranteed the right of women to participate proportionately in all state bodies as a fundamental right; to have 33 per cent representation in central and federal parliament and 40 per cent in local government. Article 283 states that the appointment to constitutional bodies and agencies shall be made based on the principle of inclusion. Likewise, Article 269 makes it mandatory for all political parties to abide by the policy of inclusion.

The participation of 34 per cent of women in the Federal Parliament is the highest in Asia (Dhital, 2020). Similarly, in provincial assemblies and local level assemblies, women's participation has reached 34 per cent and 41 per cent respectively. Likewise, there has been visible progress in women's participation in civil services as well as in private sectors.

1 SAARC Convention <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/fr/countries/asia/india/2002/south-asian-association-for-regional-cooperation>

the reservation policy, women's participation in civil services has increased to around 24 per cent as of 2020 compared to 11 per cent in 2008 (Dhital, 2020).

Despite favourable legal and policy frameworks, women's representation in higher positions remains low. Most political parties and the bureaucracy are still dominated by high-caste males. Likewise, women politicians continue to face challenges and are often sidelined by their male counterparts. Women's participation in the civil service is limited to non-gazette posts. In cabinets and other state-organs, women's participation is negligible due largely to the existing patriarchal mindset and the lack of political will to promote women in leadership and decision-making roles. Overall, the participation of women in the public sphere is concerningly negligible.

### **3.2 Women Peace and Security**

The Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda makes gender equality, women's empowerment and representation central to conflict processes, conflict-prevention, post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding processes. After ten years of armed conflict (1996-2006) and more than 15 years of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) between the Maoists and the government of Nepal, the execution of the WPS agenda remains crucial in Nepal. Acknowledging the challenges faced by women during and after conflict Nepal became the first country in South Asia to launch the National Action Plan (NAP) to implement UNSCR 1325 in 2011 to achieve sustainable peace and a just society. The NAP is contextualized within a broader set of government politics and initiatives that seek to mainstream gender and implement the WPS agenda in Nepal (Peacewomen, n.d.). Nepal's NAP was globally noted as an exemplary process of extraordinary levels of collaboration between the government and non-governmental organizations (Kaya, 2020).

The implementation of the NAP from 2011 did make some significant progress in terms of greater awareness on WPS, collaborative mechanisms and some relief and recovery programmes under the aegis of the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction. However, the implementation was not as expected mainly due to issues related to costs and budgets and the lack of clarity in addressing conflict-related sexual violence. The second phase of Nepal's NAP has been developed and revised several times through a wide consultative process. However, it is yet to be adopted by the government. The second NAP commits to paying greater attention to conflict-related sexual violence and mainly aims:

- To ensure proportional and meaningful participation of women at all levels,
- To guarantee the direct and meaningful participation of conflict-affected women in the formulation and implementation of relief, recovery and rehabilitation programs
- To address the specific needs of women and girls (Leclerc and Rana, 2017).

### **3.3 Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights**

Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) is related to multiple human rights, including the right to life, bodily autonomy, to be free from coercion and torture, to health, to privacy and to be free from gender discrimination and violence (OHCHR, 2017). Nepal is among the very few countries in Asia-Pacific to have a standalone law on safe motherhood and reproductive health (OHCHR, 2017).

The government has also developed and amended various laws and policies governing child marriage (2016) and *chhaupadi* (2017). The Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Rights Act includes provisions for free abortion care in public health facilities. Under this Act, pregnant women have the right to safe abortion of pregnancy up to twelve weeks (Nepal Law Commission, 2018).<sup>2</sup> Abortion is also permitted up to 28 weeks of gestation in cases of rape or incest if the woman is HIV positive or has an incurable disease or in cases of fetal malformation (Nepal Law Commission, 2018). Despite health policies and plans implemented over the last decade, gains made in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights in Nepal have been uneven. Where services are available, social norms prevent women and adolescent girls from accessing them.

COVID-19 has also had a devastating impact on women's and girls' health. In the coming days, the government needs to ensure adequate financial and human resources to safeguard the lives of the most vulnerable women and girls and pave the way forward to realizing the collective vision of the ICPD Program of Action, of rights and choices, for all women and girls in Nepal.

### 3.4 Gender-based Violence

Gender-based violence is well recognized as a human rights violation. Women, girls and people from gender/sexual minorities in Nepal are exposed to a variety of forms of violence.

While the 2011 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey found that more than one in five (22%) women between 15 and 49 years of age reported experiencing physical violence at some point since the age of 15 years, the actual number is estimated to be larger. Women's lack of autonomy, high economic dependency on their husbands and lack of legal support to women, among others, are all noted to contribute to the risk of violence (IFRC, 2017).

In order to prevent and control gender-based violence and discrimination, several laws have been enacted, some of them are as follows:

- i. The National Penal (Code) Act, 2017,
- ii. The National Civil (Code) Act, 2017,
- iii. Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention) Act, 2014,
- iv. Domestic Violence (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2009,
- v. Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act, 2007.

The National Penal Code is a landmark in the criminal justice system of Nepal and encompasses many facets of crimes including violence against women and girls (VAWG) (Dhital, 2020). It criminalizes acts of violence and willful discrimination, harmful social practices and gender stereotypes perpetrated against women, which include rape, sex-selective and forced abortions, trafficking of women and sexual harassment at the workplace among others. The Act not only penalizes the offenders but also provisions compensation to the victims in many cases.

The National Civil Code prohibits discrimination on any ground in public places and in the use of public services and utilities. It forbids discrimination in wages and social security based on gender. It establishes equal inheritance rights for daughters and sons and equal spousal rights to property (Articles 205 to 220) (Dhital, 2020).

2 <https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Right-to-Safe-Motherhood-and-Reproductive-Health-Act-2075-2018.pdf>

Physical touch with sexual intent, demonstrating sexual objects, expressing sexual motives or showing and displaying of pornographic material by any person in abuse of his/her position, power or by the imposition of any type of coercion, undue influence, or enticement constitutes sexual harassment under Sexual Harassment Prevention Act 2015. The act ensures a secure and dignified working environment for women by protecting them from sexual, physical and psychological harassment at workplaces.

Similarly, domestic violence has been classified as a criminal offence punishable under the law. The complainant can be the victim or anybody who knows about the crime, and the complaint can be lodged at the Nepal Women Commission, local governments or the Police, looking at the situation and severity of the crime.

The Human Trafficking and Transportation Control Act criminalizes trafficking in persons for prostitution, organ extraction and engaging women and girls in prostitution or sexual exploitation. Under Section 3 of the Act, there is a provision of rescue, rehabilitation and reunion of the victims for which mutual legal assistance treaties can be signed with cross-border trafficking destination countries.

There are a wide variety of legal provisions designed to protect and promote women and girls against violence, discrimination and abuse. However, women's access to justice and protection continues to be one of the major challenges. A large number of women still lack crucial knowledge about existing laws against gender-based violence and continue to be the victims of sexual violence and impunity.

### **3.5 Gender Responsive Budget System**

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) contributes to the mainstreaming of gender into macro-economic policy and the national budgeting system to achieving national commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment (Ministry of Health and Population, 2019). The GRB system was put into practice since the FY 2007/08 budget. It is not a budget for women but a budget that works for everyone by ensuring gender-equitable distribution of resources and equal opportunities for all (Ministry of Health and Population, 2019).

In the last 13 years, there has been a three-and-a-half-fold rise in direct gender-responsive budgeting, from 11.03% in 2007/08 to 38.17% in 2019/20. Similarly, there has been indirect gender-responsive budgeting, rising year-on-year, reaching over 48% of the total budget in 2016/17. In the last fiscal year, it stood at 35.56 %, which together with the direct budgeting, amounts to 73.73 %.

Despite mandated gender-responsive budgeting in seven provincial social development ministries, local and district-level gender-responsive budget committees are lying dormant and are unclear about their roles and responsibilities (Climate and Development Knowledge Network, 2021). Within a project's budget, gender responsiveness is largely missing at present and needs to address equity issues manifested in widespread discrimination against women in the form of early marriage, gender-based violence and differential access to infrastructure and livelihood (Climate and Development Knowledge Network, 2021). Ineffective implementation of gender-responsive budgeting at the local level – mainly due to the knowledge gap among policymakers and decision-makers – is another major challenge that needs to be confronted. While the focus of GRB has been on women, it fails to acknowledge the diversity of women in the name of caste, class, religion, sexuality and others.

### **3.6 Citizenship Law**

Article 10 (1) of the Constitution recognizes as a right the acquisition of citizenship by all Nepali citizens. The Constitution also guarantees the equality of rights (under Part 3) and prohibits, through Article 18, gender-based discrimination. Yet, Article 11(5) provides for unequal rights for Nepali men and women in conferring citizenship to their children. According to this article, children born to a Nepali father and a foreign-born mother are eligible for citizenship by descent, while the children of Nepali women married to a foreign man will get only naturalized citizenship, that too, only after producing the proof of them not already being citizens of their father's country. Also, children born to Nepali women in Nepal, and having permanent residence in Nepal, can acquire citizenship by descent only if the father of such children cannot be traced (FWLD, 2016). We argue that this provision is directly contradictory to Article 11(2)(b) as well as Article 18 of the Constitution. Gender-based discriminatory citizenship law also contradicts Article 38(1) of the Constitution which has established equal lineage rights for women and also Article 9 of CEDAW.

During the first phase of the Covid-19 lockdown in June 2020, the ruling Nepal Communist Party tabled a revised Citizenship Bill in the parliament. According to the bill, foreign women are required to spend a minimum of seven years in Nepal before being eligible for naturalized citizenship through their Nepali husbands. However, the bill is quiet on the issue of foreign men marrying Nepali women, ruling out the possibility of Nepali women extending citizenships to husbands of foreign nationalities.

The CEDAW committee along with different organizations and civil society members have expressed deep concern regarding discriminatory laws on Nepal's nationality as provided in the Constitution and Citizenship Act 2006.

### **3.7 CEDAW as a Guiding Framework to End Discrimination against Women**

The role of CEDAW as the principal legal framework for assessing discrimination against women and girls and establishing gender equality is very crucial. Nepal has attached great importance to the CEDAW reporting mechanisms. In fulfilling its agenda the Ministry of Women Children and Senior Citizen has been found to be mainly guided by the CEDAW principles and the concluding observations provided by the CEDAW Committee.

CEDAW Committee's Concluding Observations on the sixth periodic report of Nepal in 2018 provided recommendations on 21 issues. According to the monitoring report of the National Women Commission, of the 84 recommendations, less than five have been fully implemented, while 60 recommendations are in the process of implementation, with steps being actively taken. The remaining 20 recommendations have not been implemented yet. These relate to the formulation of non-discriminatory laws, the amendment of discriminatory laws and the ratification of international treaties (National Women Commission, 2021).

The recommendations of the CEDAW Committee that are in the process of being implemented are mostly about drafting laws and policies; conducting programmes on different gender issues (including eliminating gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices), as well as capacity development and awareness-raising programmes; making institutional arrangements; and allocating an adequate budget and targeted financial support to women facing intersecting and multiple forms of discrimination. Some of the 20 recommendations (National Women

Commission, 2021) which have not been implemented are:

- i. Repeal all remaining constitutional provisions that discriminate against women and girls in the area of nationality
- ii. Adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that includes a definition of discrimination against women – which encompasses elements of direct and indirect discrimination and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in the public and private spheres – and guarantees effective remedies for survivors.
- iii. Repeal all remaining legal provisions that discriminate against women and girls, in particular in the areas of the distribution of marital property upon divorce and access to employment abroad.
- iv. Guarantee all women equal access to employment within and outside the State party, including by repealing discriminatory restrictions imposed on women endeavouring to work abroad and by expediting the ongoing revision of the guidelines on women
- v. Strengthen the mandate and capacities of local governments to address women’s rights and gender equality and reintroduce the allocation of targeted budgets at the local level for women’s leadership.

#### **4. Recommendations**

The analysis of various gender-friendly policies and laws adopted shows that Nepal has taken progressive steps towards gender equality. Important legal provisions have been made to strengthen women’s rights in such areas as politics, health and inheritance, among others. However, despite the provisions of equal rights in the Constitution, the lack of effective implementation and monitoring mechanisms of these provisions poses a great threat to equality.

A majority of women in Nepal continue to be victims of violence and are forced to experience poverty and marginalization mainly because of their gender. Women from ethnic minorities and low-caste groups are further marginalized. On the basis of the review of existing gender-related policies and different studies conducted to evaluate the situation of gender equality, this review paper proposes the following recommendations:

- Provide full and equal citizenship rights for women, including the right to transfer citizenship to their foreign husband and children
- Ensure the effective implementation of existing laws on women’s rights and gender equality through institutionalized monitoring mechanisms
- Prioritize the implementation of the CEDAW Committee’s recommendations to amend discriminatory laws against women and formulate non-discriminatory laws.
- Guarantee proportional and meaningful participation of women at all levels, acknowledging the diversity of women and addressing the concerns of the marginalized community
- Enhance women’s level of knowledge about their rights and increase their agency to act

- Allocate adequate resources to address gender-based violence
- Enhance the capacity of provincial and local governments to formulate and implement a gender-responsive budget with an institutionalized system to assess the impact of the budget on the lives of women and girls
- Improve every woman and girl's access to adequate information and services that protect and promote their reproductive health and rights.

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Ms. Bandana Rana is a member of the UN CEDAW Committee since 2017. Her experience spans three decades of active engagement in promoting women's rights and gender equality through the different organizations and networks she has co-founded and led. She has worked from the grassroots to the national, regional and global level leading advocacy, research, and public outreach and community mobilisation programs. Her many years of dedicated work has been in the area of violence against women, gendered conflict transformation, peace building and engendered media. She is the former chair of the National Women's Commission of Nepal and has worked with Nepal TV as News Editor/Anchor for two decades. She is a Commissioner of the UNFPA High Level Commission on ICPD+25 and Chair of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders.

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## Policy Commentary

### Information and Communication Technology Scenario of Nepal: Assessing Policy Environment and Challenges

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#### Abstract

Advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) offer great opportunities for developing countries to stimulate economic growth. However, Nepal has not been able to harness the full potential of the ICTs and benefit from them to the extent possible because of the general absence of underlying fundamentals including policies and strategies aligned with the technological dynamism of the sector, to address ever evolving needs and fully capitalize on opportunities offered ICTs and digital technologies. To rise to the ICT challenge facing the country requires a thorough review of structural impediments to the transformative potential of ICTs and digital technologies, establishment of the policy environment that promotes innovative harnessing of these technologies by all actors, including the private sector, and a strategic orientation that factors in fast evolving technology landscape, where artificial intelligence, blockchain, analytics and Industry 4.0 are set to play defining roles going forward.

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**Keywords:** IT Policy; transformative technologies; policy challenges; policy gap

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## **1. Background**

Technological advances over the years in information, communication and digital technologies have offered great opportunities for developing countries to stimulate economic growth. These technologies have meaningfully augmented and complemented the public sector efforts aiming to achieve sustainable development goals. Recognizing their growing potential, governments worldwide are putting in place plans and policies to mainstream these technologies into strategies geared towards strengthening the foundations of good governance, achieving service transformation and redefining economic competitiveness. This broadly defines the context within which successive governments of Nepal have tried to accord policy priority for developing the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector in the country and harnessing these technologies for development.

This broadly defines the context within which successive governments of Nepal have tried to accord policy priority for developing the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector in the country and harnessing these technologies for development.

## **2. Overview of Nepal's Information and Communication Technology Sector**

From an overarching policy objective perspective, discussions around emerging information, communication and digital technologies in Nepal are premised on two broad thematic lines: (a) the role of ICTs as general-purpose technologies to help the country achieve a range of policy outcomes and development objectives; and (b) ICTs as the service industry sector in its own right with the potential to boost the export of services and create entrepreneurial growth and employment opportunities.

In terms of a broad telecommunications landscape, the foundational aspect of the ecosystem defining the country's overall scenario of the information and communication technology is that the share of three major voice operators holds 98% of the market out of six licensed operators. The Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have also expanded their reach into urban and semi-urban areas of Nepal with cable and Fiber-to-the-Home (FTTH) deployments. There are 125 registered ISPs and 17 Network Service Providers (NSPs) operating with licenses from the Nepal Telecom Authority – the telecommunication regulatory body of Nepal. ISPs' contribution in this area is extremely important in terms of providing quality and affordable fixed broadband services to the communities. Preliminary observations reveal that most urban centres have ISP Points-of-Presence (POPs), providing citizens in these areas with relatively high-quality connectivity within price-points that a modest number of households and businesses can afford.

Some aspects of the ICT sector in Nepal have indeed registered a relatively robust growth over the years. For example, the telecommunications sector has achieved impressive growth over the past several years, especially in relation to its coverage and penetration. Along those lines, the overall telecom penetration rate, constituting primarily mobile services, currently stands at 130.75% (NTA 2021). Similarly, the penetration of broadband services currently stands at 91.55%, which consists primarily of wireless mobile broadband. The share of fixed broadband currently stands at 25.27% (NTA, 20201) of the total broadband penetration.

In terms of the type of broadband technologies deployed, mobile broadband consists mainly of 3G, covering around 40% of the population while 4G networks are also being expanded rapidly covering in excess of 27.27% of the population of Nepal, a trend that continues to grow as of this writing (NTA, 2021). The coverage of 4G networks has been expanded to more than 615 local governments (out of 752) in Nepal. There are clear indications that there will be significant growth in the expansion of 4G coverage in the coming months as telecommunications companies continue to aggressively expand such networks driven by a surge in demand for data to move away from predominantly voice-based business models.

As to the issue of bridging the digital divide, it is important to note the presence of the Rural Telecom Development Fund (RTDF) which serves as the universal access fund created and managed by the Nepal Telecom Authority as per the provision of the Telecommunications Act, 2053 (1997). The fund is created, pursuant to section 30 of the Act, by depositing two per cent of the gross adjusted revenue of each licence. The fund is to be mobilized for the development, extension and operation of telecommunications services in rural areas.

The RTDF has gained significant traction from the year 2018. It is being currently mobilized in two major activities supporting the connectivity divide:

- a. **Broadband Backbone Network:** Under it, a Fibre Optic (FO) backbone network is to be laid along the mid-hill highway to provide connectivity to district headquarters. The ongoing pandemic has severely hampered progress on this front. So far, only 308 km of FO backbone has been laid along the mid-hill highway out of the plan of 6,331 km (NTA 2021). The NTA hopes to expedite the process significantly once the situation stabilizes.
- b. **Broadband Access Network:** under this network, connections will be established among local government offices, community schools and community health centres.

As of October 2020, a total of 4783 community schools and 3809 community health centres in rural areas have been connected to the broadband network.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, a total of 5428 local government ward offices have also been connected by mobilizing the RTDF. There are issues though with regards to the quality and overall usability of some of these connections.

As for the demand-side drivers, there is a huge demand for quality and affordable telecommunication services, including broadband, throughout Nepal. The pandemic has significantly stimulated demand for online services, especially in the area of online education, telemedicine, e-commerce and digital payments. This has resulted in significantly enhanced demand for broadband connections. To be fair, all this has brought to the fore the gaps between digital “haves” and “have-nots,” a gap that has become more pronounced in the area of online education, where both access to affordable and quality broadband and devices have become major challenges among students, especially in rural areas.

Despite headways made on the front of connectivity footprint, however, Nepal’s ICT journey, on the whole, continues to be beset with and characterized by a host of challenges and missed opportunities. For example, while wireless broadband offers prospects of significant expansion in the reach of broadband services in Nepal, given its topography, there are issues relating to the quality and affordability of such services. Measured against Nepal’s GNI per capita,

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1 <https://nta.gov.np/en/press-release-20210829/>

consumer wireless and fixed broadband prices in Nepal are still very high, impacting the abilities of communities to harness mobile internet connectivity effectively. Given the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the need to afford and use distance education and telemedicine-related services has been highly felt. On this account, Nepal seems to be way off the SDG target for making entry-level broadband affordable by bringing its price point below 2% of GNI per capita (ITU, 2020).

An acceptable level of internet access is needed to satisfy the ever-increasing demand for data. Fixed broadband networks serve the purpose as they are robust enough to ensure scalability, resilience and quality. In terms of policy priority, there is, therefore, an urgent need to move away from over-reliance on mobile networks towards promoting investments in robust high-capacity, fibre-optic-based fixed broadband networks. Such investment is needed to build ‘future-proof’ connectivity infrastructure that can cope with an ever-increasing demand for quality connection and bandwidth.

Nepal’s wholesale (i.e., backhaul) market for telecommunications services also remains relatively underdeveloped. As a consequence, operators have deployed their own east-west backhaul networks running across the length of the country. Nepal Telecom and Ncell now own two complete east-west networks. A third east-west backbone is owned and operated by the Nepal Electricity Authority. Smaller providers operate their own, smaller backhaul networks.

In terms of backbone infrastructure, an east-west highway Synchronous Digital Hierarchy (SDH) optical network runs across the country providing a crucial backbone to build additional infrastructure. The main route consists of STM-4, while some routes use STM-16. Between the main route and major cities are STM-1 links. They provide the provinces with the fibre optic backbone infrastructure to build their networks. An additional fibre optic backbone network needs to be built to connect major urban centres and local governments within provinces.

Nepal’s current backbone infrastructure consists of three east-west, Kathmandu-Hetauda, and Kathmandu-Pokhara-Butwal Optical Fibre Cable (OFC) lines. Work is currently underway to lay a fiber optic backbone along the mid-hill highway running from the eastern part of Nepal to the western part. The total length of the highway is 1776 km. The fibre optic backbone along this highway is expected to serve many of the hinterland areas and enable the deployment of fixed broadband networks covering several peri-urban and rural communities.

One of the major issues that needs to be addressed going forward is no direct connectivity from Nepal to any submarine cable landing point, which has, resulted in high IP transit costs for Nepal. Currently, telecom operators and internet service providers in Nepal purchase internet bandwidth from India. Cross border fibre was introduced in Nepal in 2008 from India, before which all international traffic was routed through VSAT. Nepal Telecom and Ncell have optical fibre connectivity with India via Biratnagar-Jogbeni, Birgunj-Raxual and Bhairahawa-Sunaulin. Similarly, Nepal Telecom has connectivity with China via Rasuwagadhi and Tatopani.

Even though the Nepal-China Optical Fibre Link Project began commercial operation on January 12, 2018, connectivity through these transit points with China is beset with challenges. It is of low capacity and is frequently broken primarily because of the difficult terrain these

networks run through. Moreover, these bilateral networks are typically closed-access networks designed primarily for the use of investing operators. Nepal, therefore, continues to have a dependency on India in the area of access to the global internet.

Apart from a robust policy infrastructure, Nepal's telecommunications and the broadband sector is a low prioritised sector with limited resources available. The ICT sector is, thus, not able to effectively harness information and communication technologies that are necessary to stimulate growth and development and strengthen governance and service delivery. In addition, the sector also faces the following specific constraints concerning productive positioning of ICTs and digital technologies within Nepal's overall development and growth agenda:

### **2.1 Lack of a coherent and comprehensive national strategy**

The Government of Nepal has yet to develop and implement a coherent and comprehensive strategic framework to effectively harness the potentials offered by ICTs and digital technologies to catalyze efforts aimed at improving governance, building capacity to capitalize on opportunities afforded by emerging digital technologies and strengthening and enhancing service delivery capabilities of federal, provincial and local governments.

Even though the government announced a comprehensive Digital Nepal framework outlining a broad set of activities across a number of domains, a lot of work still remains to be done for the framework to be completely and realistically implementable. For one, proper institutional arrangements are yet to be in place to spearhead the Digital Nepal initiative. Similarly, concrete investment proposals supporting each of the 80 activities listed in the framework are yet to be formulated in order for the framework to be wholly implementable. More importantly, given the record of largely ineffective implementation of a similar framework – such as the e-Government Masterplan – in the past, a thorough assessment of capacity will be needed to ensure that the Digital Nepal framework is grounded on an effective implementation arrangement.

### **2.2 Inadequate mapping of federal digital initiatives at provincial and local government levels:**

As things stand now, infrastructure and services created at the federal level are not being fully shared and utilized by provincial and local governments despite the fact that there is a sizable scope for building upon the federal digital initiatives in a number of areas. For example, the country already has a government integrated data centre (GIDC) that could be scaled up and strengthened further to be shared by all federal, provincial and local government agencies to host their systems and help mitigate their technology management challenges. Similarly, the government enterprise architecture (GEA) and the Nepal government interoperability framework (NeGIF) developed at the federal level can be used to guide, standardize and facilitate the development and deployment of digital solutions for a more inclusive and connected government at the local, provincial and federal levels.

The fact remains, however, in terms of strategic orientation, these resources have not been favourably positioned to support their use across all government agencies. The public sector at large has yet to effectively share and harness key infrastructure and services created at the central level, such as the national data centre and the government cloud and national disaster

recovery centre. The factors hindering the effective appropriation of these resources are poor governance and concerns around the efficacy of management arrangements that are currently in place to oversee the sustained operation of these resources. These issues need to be addressed properly going forward to lower barriers for provincial and local governments and enable them to launch their digital initiatives and achieve a quick system development and deployment turnaround time.

### **2.3 Limited use of new technologies for public service delivery:**

Nepal lags behind other countries in the region on using new approaches for developing a connected and participatory government. A very limited number of online services could be accessed and/or allowed transactions by citizens and businesses anytime from anywhere, through their internet and mobile phones. This is also in recent developments in the area, for example, the much-touted *Nagarik App*, which has much room for improvements and scope expansion to meaningfully meet a host of service delivery needs of the citizens. Such technological platforms can bring significant benefits in terms of improved access to public services and information to rural areas or disenfranchised groups in a landlocked and geographically diverse country like Nepal and increase transparency and accountability in government affairs across all three tiers. Despite its impressive coverage, the mobile phone remains a significantly untapped channel for service delivery in the country.

## **3. A brief overview of policy and regulatory environment**

The introduction of Nepal's first Information Technology Policy in the year 2000 marks an important milestone in terms of the expression of priority by the government for the development of the information technology sector and for supporting efforts to achieve a range of policy outcomes harnessing these technologies.

The IT Policy has gone through periodic revisions over the years, backed by a number of regulatory instruments introduced by the government. The following constitutes some of the key federal policy frameworks that are currently in existence in Nepal.

### **3.1 National ICT Policy, 2072**

The National Information and Communication Technology policy is aimed at creating an ecosystem conducive to the growth of the information and communication technology sector in the country. It provides a comprehensive framework covering both the supply and demand sides of a vibrant ICT and digital ecosystem. Among others, the policy highlights the need to (a) strengthen mechanisms to ensure cyber security and protection of ICT resources, (b) to align ICT strategies with developmental priorities especially in the area of provision of important public services, and (c) to develop strategies to stimulate the growth and competitiveness of ICT industry to expand employment opportunities, among others.

### **3.2 Broadband Policy, 2071**

The broadband policy announced by the government in the year 2071 BS aims at promoting the expansion of broadband access and availability throughout the country as a key foundational element of a vibrant ICT and digital ecosystem. The policy stresses the need to focus on both

supply- and demand-side fundamentals shaping the broadband sector and strengthening the sector's competitive intensity. Among others, the Policy lists down strategies aimed at expanding the reach, availability and affordability of broadband to bridge the digital divide in the country. In addition, the Policy stresses the need to factor in the fast-evolving trends shaped by technological convergence and its policy and regulatory ramifications. The need to put in place strategies for ensuring optimum and productive utilization of USO funds in the form of RTDF to address issues relating to financing and viability funding gaps has also been highlighted in the Policy.

### **3.3 Telecommunications Policy, 2060**

The telecommunications policy of Nepal highlights the need to put in place the groundwork necessary to promote the expansion of quality telecom connectivity throughout the country. The policy broadly deals, among others, with spectrum governance issues, strategies for telecom connectivity beyond areas where market demand exists and policy provisions required to stimulate competitive intensity of the sector offering consumers with choices.

In addition to the Policy document mentioned above, the telecommunications sector in Nepal is also governed by the Telecommunications Act 2053 (1997).

### **3.4 Electronic Transaction Act, 2063**

The Electronic Transaction Act framed in 2063 was intended to provide a legal basis for transactions carried out through electronic and digital means. The Act stipulated a trust and authentication framework based on Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) and provides a legal sanction to contract and digitally signed documents. An Office of the Controller of Certification (OCC) was set up pursuant to the Act and certification agencies designated to govern and manage the issuance of digital signatures and digital certificates.

In addition to policy provisions as mentioned above, several legal and regulatory instruments have been framed, including a draft Cyber Security Bylaw, 2077 led by the Nepal Telecom Authority (which is awaiting approval). Other related initiatives have also been undertaken to strengthen the IT ecosystem in the country. Along those lines, a security response apparatus in the form of an NP Cyber Emergency Response Team (CERT) has been formed under the leadership of the Director General of the IT Division of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology. In support of this, the Government has announced, through the budget speech for the year 2020/21, the establishment of a cybersecurity forensic lab.

### **3.5 Policy Issues Facing Nepal's ICT sector**

As hinted earlier, policy frameworks about Nepal's ICT sector need to be analyzed along two dimensions. The first should focus on ICTs for development to harness ICTs and digital technologies to strengthen development, governance and service transformation. The second should concentrate on infrastructure and the digital economy, aimed at creating a conducive investment climate for stimulating investments in communication infrastructure, ICT and ICT-enabled industries and services to secure Nepal's transition into a digital economy.

One of the major challenges facing the ICT policy space in Nepal is the very nature of the evolution of information and communication technologies. As it is, ICTs are cross-cutting

technologies applicable across a range of socio-economic domains and policy jurisdictions. For example, the health and education sectors could be sizable users of ICTs going forward with the implications that policy efficacy in these areas can only be ensured if the roles of agencies active in those sectors and domains are adequately factored in ICT policy formulation. Similarly, increasing IT enablement of commercial and business activities is giving rise to innovative enterprise models in the e-commerce space that call for policy responses that can address a range of technologies as well as non-technical issues that range from intellectual property (IP) protection and consumer to data protection and privacy issues.

This poses a formidable policy implementation challenge in that no single agency can for all practical purposes be realistically designated as the sole agency responsible for furthering ICT and digital agenda. The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology is currently the designated agency for ICT policy development and implementation. Given the cross-cutting nature of ICTs and digital technologies, it is extremely important to ensure that ICT policy development is carried out under a thoroughly participatory process involving all agencies responsible for achieving a range of public policy outcomes where digital technologies could play a role. The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology can still be the focal ministry for furthering the digital agenda but its role should largely be that of a coordinator and facilitator to ensure goal and vision coherence among a diverse set of stakeholders. This imperative has yet to be reflected properly in Nepal's ICT policy-making processes. All this calls for a fundamental rethink of current institutional arrangements vis-a-vis Nepal's digital policy agenda.

In addition, ICT-focused policy clarity is needed to make digital technologies a lever for economic growth. Of late, policy gaps have become all too evident in Nepal in terms of sharing economy-based business models (like Tootle and Pathao). Policy clarity on these and other sharing economy-based services is required urgently going forward. Similarly, the government has yet to firm up its policy and regulatory positions on emerging technologies like the internet of things (I-O-T) and artificial intelligence. Any delay in taking concrete positions on the policy ramifications of services based on new and evolving technologies is bound to further stifle the innovation and development of knowledge-based enterprises.

Policy gaps in the ICT space here in Nepal are also evident in the area of data protection and privacy. Given that data will be more and more the mainstay of a range of user-centred digital activities, it is important to have a concrete policy position on data governance, data protection and privacy. This is one area that leaves much to be desired from policy perspectives in Nepal.

Prevailing policy provisions in Nepal also fail to respond adequately to vulnerabilities in the application of ICTs and digital systems, especially along the lines of online safety and cybersecurity. Given that ICTs and digital systems are increasingly deployed in mission-critical environments where trust and security of systems are of critical importance, effective policy and regulatory interventions are needed to secure critical information technology and digital assets. This includes, among others, actionable policy priorities to be accorded in securing financial infrastructure.

Similarly, policy frameworks currently in force fall short of providing an environment conducive to the growth of start-up ecosystems around digital technologies. Along those lines,

these frameworks need to be redesigned to create a policy environment for promoting innovative enterprises. This includes concrete policy positions on financing and incubation of innovative enterprises in line with fundamentals shaping the digital and knowledge economy sectors.

Nepal also needs to rethink the redundancy and resilience aspects of its access to the global internet. As it is, the country relies heavily on India for its cross-border connectivity for the global internet. Going forward, Nepal needs to look seriously into the prospects of leveraging both of the neighbouring country's large-scale connectivity or transportation projects (e.g., Road Initiatives in India, Railroads in China, and others) and other potential avenues of cross-infrastructure synergies to improve its access and resilience infrastructures connecting it to the global internet.

International IP transit costs also pose a major problem for the country and adversely affect end users' pricing and quality of services. Open access regimes to international gateways offer compelling prospects, as it was seen when Indian operators were forced to lower IP transit prices by nearly 30% when Nepal telecom entered into cross-border connectivity arrangements with China.

Nepal's backhaul infrastructure needs to marked improvement as it is unlikely to be sufficient to meet long-term broadband demands.

#### **4. Conclusion**

As indicated earlier, some aspects of the ICT sector have indeed registered impressive growth over the years in Nepal. Some definite headways have been made in the country on the front of the expansion of the telecommunication infrastructure, especially in relation to cellular networks and the penetration of mobile phones. Broadband penetration has also been increasing and the number of individuals using the internet is growing day by day. Among others, digital payments and e-commerce sectors have registered impressive growth over the years thanks largely to noteworthy private sector activism in the area and also due to pandemic induced digital reliance. However, a lot remains to be done for Nepal to be in a position to meaningfully and more productively harness ICT and digital technologies in ways that render effective contributions to Nepal's sustainable development aspirations and goals. A large swathe of the population still remains unconnected or poorly connected given the slow rate of the expansion of the quality broadband infrastructure. Nepal's overall achievement in the sector has been inadequate at best to match the policy intent at the implementation level. Barring the progress made in the area of expansion of the telecommunications infrastructure in the country by promoting policy measures aimed at stimulating competitive intensity of the telecommunications sector, strategic application of information, communication and digital technologies – in ways that meaningfully strengthen governance, service delivery and sustained growth – is still largely missing in Nepal compared with other countries in the region. There are instances where the government has become more receptive to the ICT and digital enablement of services. However, what is missing is a coordinated and integrated 'whole-of-the-government and economy' approach while pursuing strategies aimed at transforming service delivery and strengthening governance. Concrete policy orientation aimed at strengthening the role of the private sector is also missing, as existing policy provisions fall way

short of accommodating innovative entrepreneurial activities. Also, there is a need to future-proof Nepal's digital agenda by factoring in evolving technology paradigms like AI, blockchain, analytics, Industry 4.0 and the like.

However, a lot remains to be done for Nepal to be in a position to meaningfully and more productively harness ICT and digital technologies in ways that render effective contributions to Nepal's sustainable development aspirations and goals. A large swathe of the population still remains unconnected or poorly connected given the slow rate of the expansion of the quality broadband infrastructure. Nepal's overall achievement in the sector has been inadequate at best to match the policy intent at the implementation level.

Barring the progress made in the area of expansion of the telecommunications infrastructure in the country by promoting policy measures aimed at stimulating competitive intensity of the telecommunications sector, strategic application of information, communication and digital technologies – in ways that meaningfully strengthen governance, service delivery and sustained growth – is still largely missing in Nepal compared with other countries in the region. There are instances where the government has become more receptive to the ICT and digital enablement of services. However, what is missing is a coordinated and integrated 'whole-of-the-government and economy' approach while pursuing strategies aimed at transforming service delivery and strengthening governance. Concrete policy orientation aimed at strengthening the role of the private sector is also missing, as existing policy provisions fall way short of accommodating innovative entrepreneurial activities. Also, there is a need to build a future proof digital journey by factoring in evolving technology paradigms like AI, blockchain, analytics, Industry 4.0 and the like.

Fine-tuning policy instruments to secure alignment with the dynamism of the sector is one key area that needs serious attention going forward. More importantly, a thorough review of structural impediments attributable to policy implementation gaps must be carried out to ensure that discourses around the developmental and transformative potential of ICTs and digital technologies move beyond the level of rhetoric and focus on results that impact the lives of the people. Among others, the announcement of the Digital Nepal framework offers an opportunity to provide much-needed traction to Nepal's digital agenda.

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## **Author's Bio**

Mr. Bhattarai is a leading ICT and information economy expert from Nepal. Until a few years back, he was serving as the Vice-Chair of High Level Commission for Information Technology,

an apex level ICT policy and strategy outfit Chaired by the Prime Minister of Nepal Mr. Bhattarai played a lead role in drafting Nepal's first IT Policy in the year 2000 as part of a team formed by the National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal. In addition to a number of policy formulation initiatives in the ICT and digital technologies space that he has been involved in over the years including revised ICT Policy in the year 2014, Mr. Bhattarai's has also contributed in the formulation of National Broadband Policy and National Broadband Masterplan for the Government of Nepal in the year 2015. Mr. Bhattarai played a key, leadership role in efforts leading to the formulation of eGovernment Masterplan of the Government of Nepal which has since culminated in a comprehensive eGovernment project being executed by the Government of Nepal. Among others, the project envisages to leverage information and communication technologies to promote good governance and improve delivery of public services. Mr. Bhattarai is also credited with the achievement of having provided leadership on delivering on one of the key, foundational components of eGovernment initiative namely the development of Government Enterprise Architecture/ Government interoperability framework. His recent engagement involves helping develop the Digital Nepal framework aimed at securing Nepal's transition to Digital Economy. Mr. Bhattarai maintains deep engagements with academia and civil society in exploring strategies for effectively leveraging technologies to achieve favourable policy outcomes as well as to stimulate economic growth.





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Policy Commentary

## Agricultural and Natural Resources Policies in Nepal: A Review of Formulation and Implementation Processes and Issues

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### Abstract

The government of Nepal has made efforts to formulate and implement the agricultural sector policies since the 1960s. It has formulated dozens of policies and strategies in agriculture, forestry, agro-forestry, climate change, land use, poverty alleviation, irrigation, etc. Some of the policies seem to be targeted to specific groups and communities (poverty alleviation policy), to different sectors and commodities (forest, agriculture, poultry, coffee, etc.), and address international and national concerns and priorities (climate change policy, agrobiodiversity). This study aims to review the implementation of the policy provisions of major agricultural and natural resources policies, explore possible causes for it and suggest measures to effectively implement policy provisions in the future. We have reviewed seven agriculture policies for their provision and implementation and identified some common features and inadequacies. Our recommendations for policy reform include the practice of wider consideration, inter-policy coherence, sufficient institutional framework, periodic policy evaluation, improved accountability, and consideration for national interest.

**Keywords:** agriculture, policy system, policy provision, reformation

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## 1. Background

Public policy is a combination of basic decisions, commitments, and actions made by those who hold authority or affect government decisions (MRSC, 2017). In other words, public policy also refers to the rules, regulations, and guidelines formulated by governments to solve problems that have an impact on society and the public. Public policy over the ages has been a major instrument in the hands of governments for bringing about social welfare and the well-being of the people. Through public policy, the government sets out its plans and programs for the people. The policy-making process weighs and balances public values.

Policy formulation is governed by Policy System. It is the overall institutional pattern within which policies are made, involves interrelationships among three elements: public policies, policy stakeholders, and policy environments.

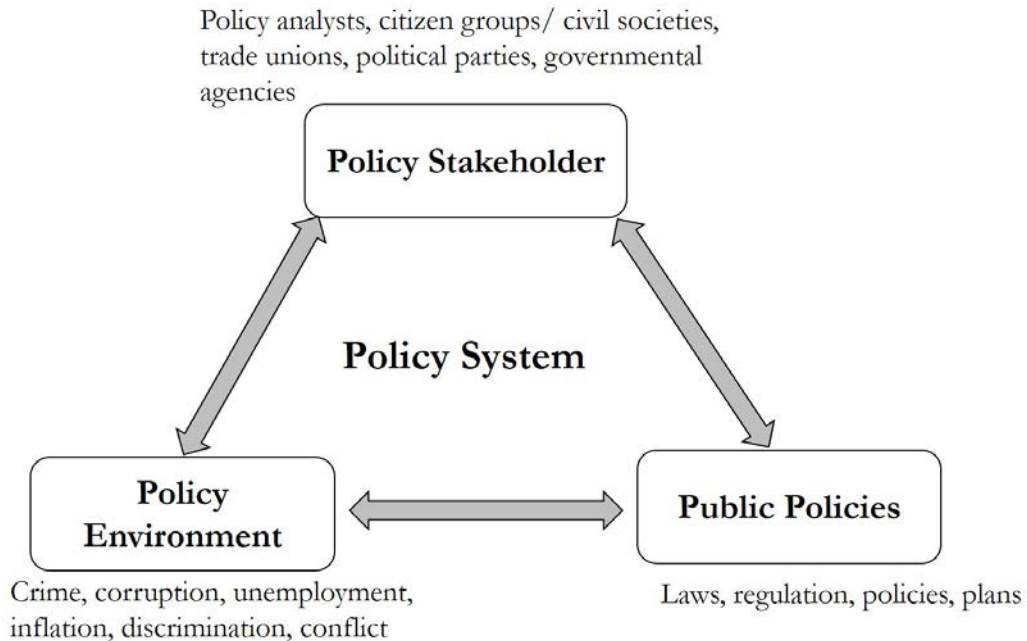


Figure 1. Public Policy System

Policies are formulated through a policy process that engages stakeholders in producing new or revised policies within a particular institutional context. The major stages of policy processes are policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation forming a cyclical pattern with a feedback loop from evaluation to formulation (Miller & McTavish, 2014). The policies are legitimated by the legislature and implemented and evaluated with budgetary provision. An important element of the process is how policy decisions are taken.

## 2. Context in Nepal

The government of Nepal (GON) has made efforts to develop the agricultural sector and

policies since the 1960s. The GON has formulated dozens of policies and strategies in agriculture, forestry, agro-forestry, climate change, land use, poverty alleviation, irrigation, etc. for economic development, environment conservation, and poverty reduction. Under the agricultural sector, there are policies for different commodities, fertilizer, agri-business promotion, agrobiodiversity conservation, mechanization, rangeland management, etc. Agricultural policy is a critical element in determining the rate and pattern of economic growth and societal welfare. One set of policies such as investment in education, health, public infrastructures (transportation, irrigation) science and technology, trade, etc., have a broad impact on agricultural sector productivity, while other sets of policies affect particular agricultural commodities or techniques of production. These policies provide the framework and action plans necessary to achieve certain public goals and also provide the basis for promoting and enforcing certain rights and obligations to groups and individuals. It is argued that effective institutions with adequate investments can improve the living conditions of smallholder farmers and improve the incomes of the poor (Khanal et al., 2020).

Considering agricultural development as an interactive, integrated, interdependent, and multi-dimensional process, accelerated development of this sector is not possible through fragmented efforts. Therefore, for the performance-oriented growth of this sector, it was realized necessary to integrate the essential elements of agricultural development such as irrigation, technology, agricultural finance, improved seed, fertilizer, extension, physical infrastructures like roads, electrification, storage, agricultural marketing, and post-harvest operations through developing policies and strategies. Productivity drive can be enhanced if the factors of production and productivity are delivered as a package in an appropriate area and combination.

Some of the policies seem to be targeted to specific groups and communities (poverty alleviation policy), to different sectors/commodities (forest, agriculture, poultry, coffee, etc.), and address international/national concerns and priorities (climate change policy, agrobiodiversity). Such targeted policies usually are more effective in achieving the objective, they precisely aim to address needs and tailor the measures to achieve a better result. The policies use various kinds of instruments to achieve the result. Instruments are those economic variables that can be manipulated by policymakers and may include taxes, subsidies, regulations, payments for the delivery of a service, or even direct provision of services and products through the government. Policy instruments provide positive and negative incentives that are intended to affect the behavior of producers and consumers in such a way that the target variables are moving in the desired direction. While targeting has scope to improve the efficiency of agricultural policies, not all the issues can be addressed by a single policy.

This paper aims to review the implementation of the policy provisions of major agricultural and natural resources policies, explore possible causes for it and suggest measures to effectively implement policy provisions in the future.

### **3. Major Policies and their Implementation Status**

#### **3.1 National Agricultural Policy 2004**

This Policy was formulated to support the implementation of the Agriculture Perspective Plan (APP) among others. The main objective of the policy is to create an enabling environment for agriculture-led rural development. The policy aimed to divide farmers into two groups – small

and large and aims to provide more resources to the small farmers. The vision of the policy is to bring improvement in the living standard through sustainable agricultural development by transforming the subsistence agricultural system into a commercial and competitive agricultural system. It aims at achieving high and sustainable economic growth through a commercial agricultural system contributing to food security and poverty reduction, increased agricultural production and productivity, making agriculture competitive in regional and world markets with the commercial agricultural system, and conserving, promoting, and utilizing natural resources, environment and bio-diversity. Major policy provisions and their implementation status is summarized in table 1 below.

Table 1 Major National Agriculture Policy provisions and their implementation status

Policy Provisions	Implementation status	Remarks
Discouraging the transformation of fertile land for non-agricultural uses through adopting scientific land use system.	Although, land use policy has this provision, but it is not implemented, as conversion of agricultural land has not stopped.	Needs strong commitments from local governments and stakeholders
Development and extension of irrigation facilities, agriculture roads, rural electrification and appropriate technologies. Intensive and wider use of available technologies in the areas with irrigation, roads and electrification	Pocket-package strategy of APP implementation considered this provision	Other sectoral Ministries/ Departments did not focus their programs for supporting agril. sector
Special facilities for targeted groups on small irrigation infrastructures like traddle pump, roar pump, sprinkler and drip irrigation, water harvest pond construction etc.	This provision is being implemented by MoFAGA(DoLI), MoALD (DoA) and many (I) NGOs.	Need to form strong coordination mechanism
Utilization of increasing production and income increasing possibilities in the food deficit areas . Development of food storage and mobilization network with the participation of local institution if it has to be supplied from outside areas.	Special programs for increasing local food production of indigenous crops such as Foxtail millet, Barley, Finger millet, Buckwheat, Chino etc) in food and nutrition insecure high hills and hill districts, and focus research in such crops  Local comparative advantage has not been fully exploited. Limited storage facilities developed, programs to attain local food self-sufficiency initiated in a limited scale in food deficit areas..	Appropriate technological package has to be developed, effective coordination with NFTC, local bodies and MoALD needed.

Expansion of livestock insurance and gradually initiating the insurance of poultry, selected crops seeds and HVCs.	Expanded in commercial areas in a limited scale, 75% subsidy on insurance premium in order to attract entrepreneurs in agriculture and share the risks.	Yet to be expanded in commercial areas; working procedure to be developed to cover additional crops and commodities
Encourage and support to organic farming (through certification for export)	Supported organic farming (in the form of subsidies and technical backstopping) through annual program and budget (eg. IPM, FFS program). Technical Standard for Prodn & Processing of Organic Products (2007), National Technical Standard for Organic Agriculture System 2008.	Certification in Nepal is not yet institutionalized, integrate with National Trade Integration Strategy for the export of selected organic products

### 3.2 Agro-business Promotion Policy, 2006

The policy highlights diversification, commercialization, and promotion of the agriculture sector with private sector involvement in commercial farming. It emphasized that the living standard of the farmer would not improve unless the agriculture sector is transformed from subsistence level to commercial farming. The policy aims to reduce poverty by encouraging the production of market-oriented and competitive agro-products. It realizes the need of promoting internal and external markets. This policy was prepared in the spirit of National Agriculture Policy 2061 emphasizing business service centers' establishment for quality agriculture inputs and services. The partnership between the private sector and the Government has been emphasized for the export of quality goods. In the context of Nepal's entry into the WTO, developing the market network is its priority. The policy considers infrastructure development as a cornerstone for commercialization. The policy has envisaged the promotion of a partnership approach between the Government and the private sector. Major provisions and their implementation status is summarized in table 2 below.

Table 2 Some provisions of Agro-business Promotion policy provisions and their implementation status

Policy Provisions	Convergence/Implementation status	Remarks
Establishment and development of Growth center based on geographic, economic, and technical potentiality.	Commercial pockets yet to be developed as growth center. This has not been materialized so far.	Common understanding and cooperation among other supportive ministries to MoALD for developing growth centers
Designation and demarcation of three types of production areas, namely commercial crop and commodity production area; organic and pesticide free production area; and agricultural products export area.	The commercial production in certain commodities and location, organic production of selected commodities (like coffee, orthodox tea, spices) started and export (in limited scale) is taking place.	The demarcation of three types of production area is yet to be implemented.

Development of infrastructure (business service centres, markets and collection points, and rural roads and electricity) for post-harvest, marketing and processing.	Collection centers in nearby production pockets developed where there is road facility.	Devt of infrastructures for climate resilient agri-business need to be accelerated, other ministries should consider these aspects
Proposes for 75% tax redemption in the import of machineries and equipments (thresher, sprinkler, harvester, chilling van, cooling vat, milk processor etc) for 10 years.	Some provisions are reflected in annual budget speech (for selected machineries and equipment)	MoALD pursue this matter with MoF before the annual budget preparation.
Avail the rangeland on long term lease with the coordination of concerned authorities for livestock raising in the high hills.	Also mentioned in Rangeland Policy 2012, not implemented yet.	Need a coordinated effort with MoFE and MoFAGA, Local govts.
Encourage the plantation of NTFPs in the public and other lands based on potentialities.	The community forestry and leasehold forestry groups have started NTFPs plantation but in a limited area.	MoFE, MoALD and MoFAGA, provincial government's need to work together.
Proposes for 25% rebate on electricity cost for cold and frozen storage, cold chain, cold chamber and chilling vat and animal slaughterhouses for pvt entrepr. for 10 yrs from the date of establishment.	Limited implementation (for selected enterprise) through annual budget speech	MoALD and FNCCI pursue this matter with MoF before the annual budget.
Promote agro-business by providing certification services for organically produced agril commodities for export.	Technical Standard for Production and Processing of Organic Products and the MoALD s providing required services to the exporters.	The National Organic Certification Authority has not been established. Financial support for organic certification provisioned in budget speech.
Development of system for insurance of commercial crop production, livestock, markets, and agro-industries	The insurance system for livestock and other commercial crops/ commodities initiated with upto 75 percent subsidy on premium (announced in annual budget speech)	Guidelines already prepared by MoALD.

### 3.3 Climate Change Policy, 2011, first amend. 2019

In order to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change, and get the maximum benefit

from the climate change convention, CC policy was formulated. The vision of this policy is to save from the adverse impact of climate change considering climate justice, human development, and maintenance of prosperity through the adoption of the concept of environmental and sustainable development. It considered the importance of the sectors that are vulnerable to climate change and planned to enhance the climate adaptation and resilience capacity of local communities for optimum utilization of natural resources and their efficient management, adopt the low carbon development path by making socio-economic development climate change friendly and resilient, and develop institutional framework for its effective implementation. Major policy provisions and their implementation status is summarized in table 3 below.

**Table 3 Some provisions of Climate Change Policy and their implementation status**

Policy Provisions	Implementation status	Remarks
Climate adaptation, disaster and risk reduction	Different projects are in operation to address NAPA priorities and vulnerabilities such as NCCSP, BCBRN, ASHA etc.	Introduced CC budget code in 2013 to channel Climate finance and track public expenditure, DPs supporting GoN to mainstream DRR into devt planning at national and local levels.
Low carbon development and climate resilience	Draft of NLCED strategy formulated, Climate resilient development planning tools developed, renewable and alternative energy technologies promoted/expanded, REDD strategy prepared (and involved in carbon trade)	Devt and adoption of Low methane emission agricultural technologies
Access to financial resources and utilization	Establishment of Climate change fund and Climate change center are yet to be materialized. Managed the funds available from different sources on climate change, CDM institutionalized and functional.	80% climate finance to be allocated to support local level activities
Capacity building, peoples' participation and empowerment	LAPAs prepared through a participatory and inclusive process and implemented at local level by govt, NGOs and CBOs.	
Technology development, transfer and utilization	NRREP channeling funds through NREF for transfer of renewable energy technologies, Scaling up Renewable Energy Program , NARC conducting agricultural adaptation and resilient building technologies.	Many institutions involved for sectoral technologies development and transfer, a central level mechanism needed to identify gaps and need of the technologies and build synergies.

Establishment of CC Fund and CC Center for implementing programs related to CC adaptation and resilience, and developing and utilizing technologies	This has not been established yet
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### 3.4 Irrigation Policy, 2014

The vision of this policy is to avail sustainable and reliable year-round irrigation facilities to all the agricultural lands so as to contribute to agricultural productivity. This is important in the context of meeting the objectives of increasing agricultural production and reduction of poverty. The policy emphasizes implementing reservoir-based and inter-basin water transfer types of water sector strategy development and integrated water resources management. Further, it aims round the year irrigation facility through effective management of existing water resources; develop the institutional capacity of water users for sustainable management of existing systems; and enhance knowledge, skills, and institutional working capability of technical human resources, water users, and NGOs relating to the development of irrigation sector. The policy provisions related to other organizations and their implementation status are presented in table 4 below.

Table 4 Some provisions of Irrigation Policy and their implementation status

Policy Provisions	Implementation status	Remarks
Preparation of master plan at the national and district level considering integrated development and management of river watershed in order to address challenges of irrigation sector	It will take some time to implement.	Coordinate with MOEWRI, MOSTE, MOFE and provincial agri and forest related agencies.
The GoN will declare irrigation available area as “irrigated area” and should get permission from the government for non-agricultural uses.	Not yet initiated.	Needs to be harmonized with Land use policy and collaboration needed with Local Govts and administration
Based on the differences in geography and topography, consideration will be given for optimum utilization of technology, structure and water sources and studies will be carried out in this respect.	Some programs are ongoing: small and micro irrigation implemented by DOLIDAR and DOA, medium and large scales by the DOI. These are subsidized	STW program in Terai, micro and small irrigation in the hills and terai ongoing. Needs to have a coordination mechanism at the grass root level to avoid the duplication and optimize the potentiality.

	and supported by the government.	Infrastructure devt, water utilization and efficiency mentioned in ADS.
Supplementary irrigation development through rain water harvesting, reservoir development and conservation and utilization of ground water resources	There are ongoing schemes for rainwater harvesting in rainfed areas and groundwater in Terai.	These schemes need to be scaled up and business plan need to be developed in cooperation with MoALD, provincial ministries and local govts.
Implementation of climate risk and disaster risk management programs and adaptation and mitigation programs to address climate change impacts	Peoples' embankment program to control the river and protect from floods (implemented by DOWRI)	Coordinate with MoHA, DCCs and President Chure Conservation Committee (MoFE), local govt. Harmonize with Local Infra. Devt. Policy (2004).
Working policy: Environment Protection and water quality management:	This consideration is valid from the local users' perspective but adopted in limited areas.	
Public hearing, social auditing and minimization of adverse impacts from the irrigation project development.		Need to promote these measures also from transparency, accountability, and integrity.
Conservation of ponds, wetlands, springs available at the local level while developing irrigation schemes.	This is not considered while developing irrigation infrastructures; need to coordinate with local govt./authorities.	DOI need to collaborate with DOA to make coordination mechanism effective and avail the water as per the reqt of the crops.
Each irrigation office will collaborate and manage irrigation with Priority package program of Dept of Agriculture where the water users are active and can provide year round irrigation	A working mechanism at the Director General level exist between DOI and DOA. The delivery is not as expected.	

### 3.5 National Land Use Policy, 2015

This policy was formulated considering the growing concerns about the increasing fragmentation of fertile land and unplanned urbanization. The vision of this policy is to make optimum use of available Land and Land Resources (LLRs) in pursuit of sustainable social, economic, and ecological developments and prosperity of the country as well. This aims at ensuring the optimum use of land and control land fragmentation, helping establish a link between agricultural with industrial sectors. Land use policy 2015 of Nepal included classification of land in the number of zones (11 categories) based on suitability, preparation of federal land-use plan with priority for protection of agricultural land by land consolidation, and commercial farming. It also includes subsidizing tax for agricultural land to promote sustainable agriculture.

Major policy provisions and their implementation status is summarized in table 5 below.

Table 5 Some provisions of national Land Use Policy and their implementation status

Policy Provisions	Implementation status	Remarks
Land use zoning – Land will be classified into 11 different land use zones Working Policy: Encourage to grow agriculture crops in lands having potential/existing irrigation facility while considering soil conservation in the hills.	Land Act 8 <sup>th</sup> amendment (2019) (in collaboration with other concerned Ministries) focused on the implementation part of the land use plan.	Effective coordination and communication among relevant govts and agencies needed
Land Use Plan Prepare and use of Land Use Plan at different levels Ensure development works implemented in accordance with land use plan Working policy: Prepare and implement land use plan at different governmental levels i.e. center, district, municipality level	Classification of land based on utilization started  Land use guidelines revised	Need to establish a separate institution for implementation.  Need to collaborate with province and local levels and concerned ministries.
Include productivity, environmental conservation, social and economic development, and poverty alleviation considerations in land use plans		

### 3.6 Forest Policy, 2015

The vision of this policy is to contribute to local and national prosperity through the sustainable management of forests, biodiversity, and watersheds. It aims to identify the forests that have the potentiality of increasing production and productivity for sustainable management.

The working policies under integrated management of watershed areas for increasing land productivity through protecting land and water include development and transfer of technology on low-cost soil and watershed protection and agroforestry system through action research and implementation of soil conservation program by harmonizing between forest and agricultural system for contributing to food production and food security are mentioned. Similarly, its provisions to create green employment and value addition by involving the private sector in forest development and expansion through forest enterprise promotion, product diversification; marketing; implement the mitigation and adaptation approaches for the negative impacts of climate change; and capacitate the management for good governance, inclusion, and social justice promotion in the forestry sector.

For the implementation of these provisions, these provisions have to be harmonized and make consistent with other sectoral and cross-cutting policies such as agriculture, industry,

trade/industry, poverty alleviation, climate change, etc. The implementation has not taken momentum as restructuring of the agricultural and forestry-related organization took place at different levels which created confusion about the roles and responsibilities. Hence, there needs role clarity and effective coordination to be maintained from the planning stage to implementation among three tiers of governments and multi-stakeholders involved in agriculture, forestry, and research and extension.

### **3.7 National Agroforestry Policy, 2019**

This policy aims to contribute to national prosperity through the development, expansion, and commercialization of the agroforestry system. The objectives are to increase the production of agricultural, livestock, and forest products by increasing the productivity of the land and multipurpose use of the land; to conserve the environment and biological diversity by reducing pressure over the forest, to maintain quality, and to develop climate resilience ecosystem; to create opportunities for livelihood, employment and income generation along with food security of the local communities by widely promoting agroforestry; to contribute to the economy through commercialization and facilitation of investment opportunities in agroforestry, and to conduct study, research, and capacity enhancement in agroforestry subjects. Further, for its implementation, it demands to promote synergies with other policies such as agriculture, forestry, climate change, science and technology, climate change poverty alleviation, biodiversity, and many more. Further, this also requires to develop an institutional mechanism/framework at different tiers for coordination, communication, and collaboration.

## **4. Why do our agricultural and natural resource policies fail to deliver targeted outcomes?**

As many policies have failed to get implemented and failed to generate desired policy outcomes even if they are implemented, the same applies to policies related to Agriculture and Natural Resources. It is well known that policy is a process that involves different actors, at the center of which are issues of power, social relations, and political influence. It is now widely accepted that policy reform for sustainable development is not achieved by adding more new public policies to the already impressive rosters, in the name of rural development and sustainable agriculture, forestry, or natural resources management. It is very important to know the governance in terms of the structures and processes that determine how policy is formulated and implemented. Weak governance within and between the governments, the private sector, and local communities results in bad policy or bad policy implementation, which in turn affects peoples' livelihood and the health of the natural resources. Moreover, policymaking is the result of a bargaining process among actors, who frequently have diverse and even opposing preferences and interests. The bargaining power of those actors differs, derived from a variety of sources such as the existing formal rules, informal norms, their ability to represent and mobilize other groups in society, or their control over resources (World Bank, 2017). The gap between policy on paper and implementation, in reality, seems to be one of the most serious challenges for development in the country. Let us look at the general features or tendencies in policy formulation and implementation in Nepal.

#### **4.1 Consideration of only ideal situation**

A traditional approach is usually adopted, where possible states of the world are listed, given the set of possible choices, assigning a probability to each state, and calculating an expected outcome by considering costs and benefits. This works well in situations, where the choices are well-known and where uncertainty can be quantified as risk. However, public policy often takes place in complex domains where it is not possible to conceive of all the possible states of the world, much less to quantify probabilities and costs or benefits. This often leads to unintended consequences or failure in policy implementation. As per Muller (2020), the features of the public policies are - non-linear and emergent, do not settle in equilibria and hard to predict, evolve and coevolve, subject to cognitive biases, and they suffer from reactivity. Usually, the policy makers have the tendency to underestimate the complexity and challenge inherent in the process of policy making.

#### **4.2 Influence of interest groups**

Interest Groups are associations of individuals or organisations that on the basis of one or more shared concerns, attempt to influence public policy in their favour usually by lobbying members of the government. Interest groups seek to exert influence or pressure on government officials by various ways on key decision making issues in order to have policies that favour their members. There may be wide varieties of interests in agriculture, natural resources including land and forestry, trade and industry and climate governance etc. Interest Groups have been very visible putting pressure on centers of policy making either in the legislative or the executive body. They lobby with these bodies and advocate the policy provisions in their favor. Interest groups exert influence on the policy process from the stage of policy initiation, formulation to implementation. The positive aspect is that these groups help bring government closer to the people by making available to policy makers vital information that could improve their outcome of public policy (Akhakpe, 2014). An example can be cited in terms of influence of interest groups for the eighth amendment of the Land Act. This allowed the industries to relocate in any parts of the country by amending the provision of Land Act. The industries that were enjoying the land ceiling (by relaxing the provisions for industry) can now sell their valuable land and buy cheaper land in other parts of the country. This is against the spirit of land reform as they occupied land for operating industry and planning to sell or use for other purposes (than initially stated).

#### **4.3 Putting all what you have learnt or heard**

Most often, the policy makers or participants/stakeholders try to express and ask to document all the information what they have learnt or heard in the policy or considering their interest (without accounting others' concerns) in the policy making process. This sometimes undermines the ground reality, and needs and aspirations of the beneficiaries, to whom we intend to make policy. Thus, it tends to have inconsistencies and sometime overlap with other strategies and policies. In addition, there is tendency among experts, bureaucrats or even among politicians, that their views are "correct" and should be put in place. The policy making is a context specific, but often the policy makers borrow policy provisions from elsewhere in a national policy document which may not be feasible to implement as conditions may differ. This, though, gives a beauty to the policy document, but lacks practicality for implementation.

The stakeholders/participants sometimes become reactive and formulate policies in response to an existing situation or a problem rather than on need-basis. Due to this tendency of formulating isolated policies, many policies and their provisions are in contradiction with each other and are shelved without any likelihood of implementation.

#### **4.4 Political instability and implementation**

Nepal has adopted many policies that are in line with the national needs and international agreements, but their implementation has been very weak. There is a rich set of documented policies for almost all sectors, but they have not been put into practice. Many a times, policy implementation depends on the individuals and therefore any change in the government usually leads to changes in, how a policy is interpreted and implemented. Nepal has undergone frequent changes in Government administration and the transfer of staff which has meant that institutional memory in the government is very limited. This has often hampered proper implementation of policies. Some of the policies (such as National land policy 2019 and Land use Policy 2015), though are considered important, but could not be implemented because that were not supported by any legislation, and Government instability primarily hindered discussions or passing of laws that would back up the implementation of those policies.

#### **4.5 Undermining inclusion in policy formulation**

One major/basic source of policy formulation is to consider the voice of the concerned stakeholders and needy groups. Inclusive processes are important to give all segments of society access to government decision making in order to better reflect their needs and aspirations, both in policy making and in service delivery. The inclusive processes increase awareness across the policy cycle and help to orient institutions in support of inclusive outcomes (Gent, 2017). Often, the process is supply-driven, inadequate consultation at different levels for securing commitment and consensus from stakeholders and failure to specify appropriate implementation arrangements, often leads to a failure on implementation of policies. But often, a very complicated framework is devised which could not owned by institutions and stakeholders at different levels leading to poor or no implementation.

#### **4.6 Politics shaping policies**

Some countries seem capable of sustaining policies over time, while in other countries, policies are frequently reversed or changed due to change in political and economic conditions. That may provide incentives for politicians and policy makers to deviate from established goal-oriented policies and formulate the new ones. It is considered desirable to adapt policies to changing economic and political conditions and to formulate new ones or revise the existing policies. However, governments sometimes abuse the discretion to adapt policies by adopting opportunistic, one-sided policies that are closer to their own preferences or those of narrow constituencies. And, when the conditions are changed, the politicians make overly optimistic expectations and start a policy process. Usually, the politicians tend not to be held accountable for the outcomes of their policy initiatives - in the event of failure, the likelihood is that that they will have moved on or moved out. They may be easily attracted to the prospect of short-term results. This can lead to the pushing through of policies as quickly as possible, rather than getting involved in the messy, prolonged, and frustrating details of how things might work out

in practice (Hudson et al., 2019). In general, there is evidence to suggest that the political will necessary to drive long-term policy-making tends to dissipate over time (Norris and McCrae, 2013). Hence, the policy-makers including politicians are more likely to get credit for legislation that is passed than for implementation problems that have been avoided.

#### **4.7 Governance system**

Policies formulated at national level may face the challenge of ensuring some degree of consistency in delivery at subnational level, a process that is especially fraught where the subnational level has some separate degree of political authority (Norris et al. 2014). Sausman et al. (2016) mentioned the concept of “local universality” to describe the process whereby general rules, products, or guidelines are customized to fit into local contexts and enacted within practices. In Nepal, the policy making process was more centralized (top-down) and controlled before the federalism. Even now, the hangover persist and the provincial and local governments are reluctant to adopt the policies formulated by the federal government because sometimes they argue that they were not involved in the process. In addition, the policy provisions were put in place without proper assessment of the human resources capacity institutions at different levels and financial resources requirement. That also resulted in poor accountability, ownership, and implementation.

### **5. Way Forward**

The lapses in the existing policy process and policy provisions and poor implementation discussed above suggest for some considerations to improve the exiting process and orientation, which can be as follows:

**a) Wider Consideration:** When developing policies and strategies, wider consultations have to be made with stakeholders at different levels to identify their needs and aspirations and ways to address them. This may reflect the reality on the ground. The consultation will ensure that every stakeholder understands the importance of policies, own it, and facilitate their implementation effectively.

**b) Inter-policy Coherence:** As many policies have some common themes and provisions, it is necessary to assess policy coherence from national to sub-national to local levels (vertically) and across line ministries and sectors (horizontally) to promote synergies and minimize trade-offs. This will be useful to identify the common areas of focus or cross-cutting themes (and approaches adopted) while also improving tracking of the results and/or progress, identification of potential implementation partners, the actors involved, and maximizing local resources.

**c) Sufficient Institutional Framework:** Policy development should be backed by a strong institutional framework for its implementation. Many times policies are formulated without assessing the existing institutions and their capacity at different levels. Different governance systems have to be developed at federal, provincial, and local levels for collaboration and coordination required for its effective implementation. In addition, the capacity of the implementers should also be enhanced through education and training. The policy provisions should also be communicated to all the stakeholders timely at all levels.

**d) Periodic Policy Evaluation:** Once policies are developed and implemented, these are hardly assessed/evaluated in terms of their effectiveness and outcome. The research on several

aspects of policies is essential to provide feedback to the implementers and other stakeholders so that the overall policy process (from agenda-setting to implementation) can be improved.

**e) Increased Accountability:** There is a tendency of policy implementors especially that of bureaucracy to start a new policy with the change in the political condition such as the change in government, without proper consideration of what was done before. Of course, corrections can be made in the ongoing policies based on their merits/evaluation, but a vacuum should not be created at once. The policymakers and implementers should be accountable for creating institutional memory and carry on further even in the context of change in government.

**f) Consideration for National Interest:** The policy-making process is not devoid of the influence of interest groups or unofficial government. Different groups lobby and advocate for their interest to be reflected in the policy provisions. Some groups seek benefits for very specific segments of society while others work for broader causes. In this context, the policy-making process should consider the national interest and welfare of the people at the center while developing any policy.

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## **Author’s Short Bio**

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Ganesh Raj Joshi obtained his PhD degree with specialization in Resource Economics and Policy from UPLB Philippines. He is a former Secretary, who worked in different ministries of Government of Nepal such as forests and soil conservation, environment, tourism, agriculture, and defense. Dr. Joshi has completed his Post-doctoral research as a Research fellow of Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Germany. He is a Visiting Professor (Environmental Science) in TU and Chair of the Center for Green Economy Development Nepal. Dr. Joshi contributed as a Lead Author to Options for Governance Chapter in IPBES Asia Pacific Regional Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and as an Expert in the Scoping of Nexus (Food-Biodiversity-Energy-Water-Health) and Transformative Change Assessments. He has published over 3 dozen papers in the form of book, book chapters, journal article and seminar proceeding.

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Binaya Joshi completed his Master’s degree in Environmental Science from TU Nepal. He worked as a Senior Climate Change Officer in the Third National Communication Project and National Climate Change Support Program implemented by the Ministry of Forests and Environment. He has published half dozen papers in the form of journal article, book chapter and workshop proceeding. Mr. Joshi is pursuing PhD in Environmental Science from TU Nepal.



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## राजनीतिक वित्त व्यवस्थापन: निर्वाचन सुधारको अवसर

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### सारांश

यो छोटो लेखमा राजनीतिक वित्तकाबारेको सामान्य बुझाई र अर्थ, राजनीतिक वित्त व्यवस्थापनको क्रममा अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय र नेपालको अभ्यास, खास गरी निर्वाचनको क्रममा निर्वाचन गराउने निकाय, सरकार, सुरक्षा निकाय एवं दल वा उम्मेदवारबाट हुने खर्चको प्रवृत्ति; दल र निर्वाचनको खर्चका लागि हुने अपारदर्शी आम्दानीका स्रोत तथा खर्चले निम्त्याएका विकृति; यसको व्यवस्थापनका लागि भए-गरेका प्रयास तथा तिनबाट देखिएका चुनौती, आदि विषयकाबारेमा चर्चा गरिनुका अतिरिक्त यसमा सुधारका लागि प्रणाली, प्रक्रिया, संरचना, व्यवस्थापन र क्षमता विस्तारलगायतका क्षेत्रसँग सम्बन्धित केही सुझावहरू प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ।

### Abstract

This short article appraises the general understanding and meaning of political finance and the international and Nepalese practice in the management of political finance, and assess the trends in expenditure incurred by election bodies, government, security agencies and parties or candidates during the election, and perversions caused by opaque sources of income and expenses of political parties and election expenses. It then assesses the efforts made to manage them and the challenges posed by them, and, based on that, suggests reforms in the system, process, structure, management, and capacity expansion for the management of political finance.

**Keywords:** जवाफदेही, निर्वाचन प्रचार-प्रसार खर्च, उमेदवार, निर्वाचन, निर्वाचनको स्वच्छता, निर्वाचन अपराध, निर्वाचन व्यवस्थापन, निर्वाचन सुधार, समान प्रतिस्पर्धी मैदान, राजनीतिक वित्त, राजनीतिक दल, पारदर्शीता, Accountability, Campaign finance, Candidates, Election, Electoral integrity, Election offense, Election management, Election reform, Level playing field, Political Finance, Political party, Transparency

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## १. राजनीतिक वित्त: सामान्य परिचय

राजनीतिक दल र नियमित गरिने निर्वाचन प्रजातन्त्रका मूल आधारस्तम्भ हुन् । राजनीतिक दलहरूलाई आफ्नो नियमित कार्य सञ्चालनका लागि साधन र स्रोतको आवश्यकता हुने नै भयो । त्यसरी नै, निर्वाचन व्यवस्थापन वा दल र उम्मेदवारले आ-आफ्ना नीति, उद्देश्य वा कार्यक्रम मतदातासम्म पुऱ्याउन र मतदाताको व्यापक सहभागिता जुटाउनसमेत तिनलाई साधन र स्रोत चाहिने हुन्छ । राजनीतिक वित्तलाई विभिन्न विद्वान वा संस्थाहरूले विविध रूपमा परिभाषित गरेका छन् । तर ती सबैको मूल केन्द्रबिन्दु चाहिँ दल र निर्वाचनमा हुने वा गरिने आम्दानी, खर्च र तिनको नियमनकै सेरोफेरोभित्र नै रहेको छ ।

Ohman (2012) ले “राजनीतिक वित्त भन्नाले राजनीतिक प्रक्रियामा लाग्ने सबै पैसा बुझिन्छ” (*Political finance refers to all money in the political process*) भनेका छन् भने, International IDEA (IIDEA) ले “दलहरूद्वारा दलीय क्रियाकलाप र चुनाव अभियानमा भएका सबै खर्च” (*The overall spending by political parties on political party activities and election campaigns*) को रूपमा लिएको छ (IIDEA, 2021a) । विश्वका १८० देशको राजनीतिक वित्त सम्बन्धी IIDEA ले नै राखेको डाटाबेसमा यसलाई थप विस्तृत गर्दै “राजनीतिक दलहरूको क्रियाकलाप र चुनावी अभियानका (कानुनी तथा गैरकानुनी) खर्च (खास गरेर उम्मेदवारहरू र राजनीतिक दलले गरेको खर्च र तेस्रो पक्षले गरेको खर्च समेत)” (*Political finance as the (legal and illegal) financing of ongoing political party activities and electoral campaigns (in particular, campaigns by candidates and political parties, but also by the third parties)*) भनी उल्लेख गरेको देखिन्छ (Ohman, 2012) ।

## २. राजनीतिक वित्त: बढ्दो चासो

दलहरूले खेल्ने बहु-आयामिक भूमिका निर्वाह गर्न तथा निर्वाचन व्यवस्थापन, प्रचार-प्रसारमा स्रोत आवश्यक पर्ने कुरामा कसैको विमति छैन । तर, त्यसको स्रोत कस्तो छ, आम्दानी र खर्चको पारदर्शिता छ-छैन, यस्तो स्रोतमा सबैको समान पहुँच छ-छैन भन्नेजस्ता कुरामा आम चासो रहेको छ, किनभने राजनीतिक दलहरू वाञ्छित मात्रामा पारदर्शी नरहेका, राजनीतिक फण्डको नाममा नीतिगतलगायत ठुला भ्रष्टाचारमा मुछिएका वा पैसाकै कारणले आपराधिक तत्वको पकडमा परेका, सत्ता र शक्तिमा रहेकाले गैर कानुनी रूपमा अत्यधिक स्रोत दोहन गर्ने जस्ता आरोपहरू लाग्ने गरेका छन् । त्यस्तै, निर्वाचनमा नागरिकको स्वेच्छाको अभिमत भन्दा पैसाबाट प्रभावमा पार्ने गरेका कुराहरू प्रजातन्त्रको मर्म विपरीत गएका अवस्थाहरू सरोकारवाला सबैको लागि चिन्ताका विषय बनेका छन् । चिन्ताको अर्को विषय भनेको दलहरूको सङ्गठन क्षमतामा तीव्र गतिले ह्रास हुँदै आएको छ । नेपालकै सन्दर्भमा कतिपय राजनितिज्ञसँग कुरा गर्दा २० वर्ष अगाडिसम्म चुनावमा खटिने कार्यकर्ताले गुन्ड्रीमा सुतेर र मकै भटमास खाएर त्यो पनि आ-आफ्नै खर्चमा दलका उम्मेदवारका लागि खट्थे, तर हालैका वर्षयता उम्मेदवारले आफ्नै कार्यकर्ता किन्नुपर्ने, एउटै वासको खानपिनको लाखौंको बिल तिर्नुपर्ने, आदि गुनासो गर्ने गरेका छन् । यसले पनि निर्वाचन खर्च बढाएको तथ्य विभिन्न अध्ययनले देखाएका छन् । राजनीतिक दलहरूले आफ्नो कार्यकर्ताप्रतिको पकड गुमाउँदै गएपछि, उनीहरू वाहिरियाको आर्थिक सहयोगमा परनिर्भर हुने थालेका छन् (Witeley, 2011) । यस क्रममा जसरी पनि पैसा जम्मा गर्ने मनोवृत्ति बढेको छ ।

राजनीतिक वित्तको आवश्यकता र महत्त्वकाबारेमा कोफी आननको अध्यक्षतामा गठित ग्लोबल कमिसनले “लोकतन्त्रमा राजनीतिक वित्तको सकारात्मक भूमिका रहेको छ; यसले राजनीतिक दल र उम्मेदवारहरूलाई बलियो बनाउन मद्दत गर्न सक्दछ, र अधिक समानताको आधारमा प्रतिस्पर्धा गर्ने अवसर प्रदान गर्दछ । निस्सन्देह, शर्त बिना प्रदान गरिएको खर्च लोकतान्त्रिक प्रणालीको समग्र जीवन्तताको लागि महत्त्वपूर्ण छ, किनभने यसले नागरिकहरूलाई राजनीति र राजनीतिकर्मीहरूमा विश्वास (र भर) गर्न मद्दत गर्दछ ।” (*Political finance has a positive role to play in democracies: it can help strengthen political parties and candidates, and provide opportunities to compete on more equal terms. Indeed, sufficient access to funding that is provided with no strings attached is crucial to the overall vibrancy of an electoral and democratic system- which helps citizens believe in (and trust) politics and politicians*) भन्दै कस्तो आधारमा स्रोत प्राप्त हुन्छ, त्यसले महत्त्व राख्ने कुरालाई जोड दिएको छ (Kofi Annan Foundation, 2012) ।

राजनीतिक वित्तप्रतिको चासो नौलो भने होइन । सन् १९३२ मै जेम्स केरले बेलायत, जर्मनी र फ्रान्सको राजनीतिक फण्डसम्बन्धी तुलनात्मक अध्ययनको निष्कर्षमा “लोकतान्त्रिक सरकारको लागि पैसा र राजनीतिको सम्बन्ध एउटा ठुलो समस्याको रूपमा देखा परेको छ । पैसालाई नियन्त्रण नगरेसम्म स्वस्थ राजनीतिक जीवन सम्भव छैन” (*the relation between money and politics has come to be one of the great problems of democratic government. Healthy political life is not possible as long as the use of money is unrestrained*) भनेका हुन् (Pollock, 1932 cited in Sharp, 1993) । आधुनिक शासन प्रणालीमा सत्ता हस्तान्तरण जनताको अभिमतबाट गरिने प्रजातान्त्रिक मूल्यभित्र रहँदा दल र निर्वाचन अनिवार्य भए । तर, हालैका वर्षहरूमा दलहरू पारदर्शी नहुने तथा निर्वाचनमा बेहिसाबले खर्च गर्ने प्रवृत्ति एकदम मौलाएर गएको कुरा औल्याउंदै युएनडिपी ले एउटा प्रसङ्गमा “पैसा नै राजनीतिप्रति जनअविश्वाससँग जोडिएको छ जुन कुरा स्थापित र नयाँ लोकतन्त्र दुवैमा पाईन्छ” (*Money is closely linked to the cynicism about politics that has grown in both established and emerging democracies*) सम्म भन्नु परेको अवस्थाले स्पष्ट गर्दछ (UNDP, 2007) । नाइजेरियाको राजनीतिमा पैसाले पारेको प्रभावका सन्दर्भमा Marcin Walecki ले “भ्रष्ट राजनीतिक खर्चले लोकतान्त्रिक प्रणालीलाई कमजोर बनाउँछ र अरु किसिमका राजनीतिक भ्रष्टाचारसँग मिलेर यसले लोकतान्त्रिक आदर्शहरूमाथि सम्झौता गराउँदछ, मतदाताहरूमा राजनीतिक उदासीनताको वृद्धि र अधिकारीहरूमाथि अविश्वास बढाउँछ र राज्यको अधिनायकवादी प्रवृत्तिलाई मलजल गर्दछ” (*Corrupt political funding undermines the democratic system. Together with other forms of political corruption, it leads to a compromising of democratic ideals, the growth of political apathy among voters and mistrust of the authorities, as well as the consolidation of authoritarian tendencies in the state.*) भनी लेखेका छन् (IFES, 2008) ।

विश्वभर भ्रष्टाचार विरुद्ध काम गर्ने संस्था ट्रान्सपरेन्सी इन्टरनेशनलले राजनीतिक वित्त सम्बन्धी आबद्ध भ्रष्टाचार असल शासनमा प्रमुख बाधकको रूपमा रहेको औल्याएको छ (Walecki, 2004) । भारतमा राजनीतिक फण्डलाई भ्रष्टाचारको प्रमुख स्रोत रहेको मानिएको छ (Kapur and Vaishnav, 2018) । त्यस्तै, त्यहाँका ६ वटा प्रमुख दलहरूको आम्दानीको फन्ड ७५ प्रतिशत हिस्सा अधोषित दाताहरूबाट प्राप्त हुने एक अध्ययनले देखाएको छ (Kapur and Vaishnav, 2018) ।

राज्यको शासन सत्ता सम्हाल्ने र सुशासनको बाटोमा हिँडाउने दायित्व बोकेका राजनीतिक दलहरू र विभिन्न निर्वाचित निकायमा प्रतिनिधित्व गर्ने उम्मेदवारहरू नै पारदर्शी बन्न सकेनन् वा आफैँ सुशासित हुन सकेनन् भने उनीहरूबाट देशमा सुशासन को आशा गर्नु भनेको आफूलाई आफैँले पीडा दिनु सरह हो । Prof. Pippa Norris ले “लोकतन्त्रको प्रधानतामा शायद सबैभन्दा हानिकारक हमलामध्ये एक हो । राजनीतिमा पैसाको बाढीलाई नियमन गर्न प्रतिनिधिमूलक सरकारहरूको असमर्थता” (*perhaps one of the most damaging attacks on the primacy of democracy is the inability of representative governments to regulate the flood of money in politics*) भनेकी छन् (Norris and Abel van Es, 2016)

स्वच्छ मतदान भन्दा बैङ्क नोटबाट निर्वाचनको परिणाम प्राप्त हुने अवस्थाले प्रजातन्त्रको हत्या हुन्छ । खर्चिलो निर्वाचनका अनगिन्ती अप्रत्यक्ष नकारात्मक प्रभावहरू छन् तर प्रत्यक्ष रूपमै दुई नकारात्मक असर देखिन्छ: एउटा, यसले सही प्रतिनिधित्व हुन दिँदैन । दोस्रो, यसले भ्रष्टाचार बढाउँछ । चुनाव लड्न चाहिने खर्चले प्रतिनिधिलाई पैसा-केन्द्रित बनाउँछ र भ्रष्ट बनाउँछ । भ्रष्ट जनप्रतिनिधिले जनतालाई राज्यसँग जोड्न सक्तैन बरु राज्य र जनताबिच खाडल बढाउँछ । एडेलम्यान ट्रस्ट ब्यारोमिटरले संसारका ५ मध्ये ४ जना नागरिकले राज्य प्रणालीले आफ्नो पक्षमा काम नगरेको र उनीहरूको बुझाइमा त्यसको एक प्रमुख कारणमा राजनीतिमा पैसाको संलग्नता पनि रहेको देखाएको छ (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2019) । संयुक्त राष्ट्र सङ्घको भ्रष्टाचार विरुद्धको कन्भेन्सनको धारा ७९.३० ले दलहरू तथा सार्वजनिक जिम्मेवारीको पदमा उम्मेदवार हुनेहरूको फन्डिङको पारदर्शिता राज्यले गर्नुपर्ने कुरा यहाँ स्मरणीय हुन आउँछ (UN, 2004) ।

निर्वाचनको स्वच्छता कायम राख्न गरिएका प्रयासको क्रममै कोफी आननको माथि उल्लिखित प्रतिवेदनले प्रौढ वा नवोदित प्रजातन्त्रमा निर्वाचनको स्वच्छताका लागि राजनीति वित्त व्यवस्थापनमा जोड दिँदै “अनियन्त्रित, अज्ञात र अपारदर्शी राजनीतिक वित्तलाई नियमन गर्नु उदीयमान र परिपक्व प्रजातन्त्रमा निर्वाचनको अक्षुण्णताको लागि एक

प्रमुख चुनौती हो” (*The need to regulate uncontrolled, undisclosed and opaque political finance is a major challenge to the integrity of elections in emerging and matured democracies*) (Kofi Annan Foundation, 2012) भन्ने निष्कर्ष निकाल्दै आफ्नो प्रतिवेदनमा सुधारका क्षेत्रहरू पहिचान गरी सिफारिस गरेको छ ।

सामान्यतया प्रभावकारी राजनीतिक वित्त प्रणालीले खासगरी १) निर्वाचनमा सहभागी हुन र भाग लिन सबैलाई समान अवसर बनाउन, २) राजनीतिज्ञहरूबाट मत किन्ने वा राज्यको स्रोत साधनको एकाधिकार दुरुपयोग गरेर निर्वाचनलाई भ्रष्ट बनाउने कार्यबाट रोक्न, ३) विरोधीहरूको विरुद्धमा पक्षपाती ढङ्गले वा दलीय आधारमा राज्यका निकायको दुरुपयोग रोक्न, ४) दल र उम्मेदवारहरूले आफूले प्राप्त गरेको पैसा कहाँबाट र कसरी प्राप्त र खर्च गरे सोको पारदर्शिताको सुनिश्चित गर्ने जस्ता विषयहरू समावेश हुनु पर्छ, भन्ने यस क्षेत्रका विद्वान र प्रयोगकर्ताहरूको आम धारणा रहेको छ (HIDEA, 2021a) । राजनीतिक वित्त प्रणाली जति सशक्त र प्रभावी हुन सक्थ्यो, त्यति नै राजनीतिक दल र तीनका कार्यकर्तालाई असल शासनको मार्गमा हिँड्न मद्दत पुग्दछ ।

यस क्रममा दल वा निर्वाचन खर्चको आम्दानीका स्रोत वा खर्चका क्षेत्रहरूलाई नियमन गर्नसमेत राष्ट्रिय वा अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय स्तरमा विविध प्रयास भए-गरिएका छन् । राज्यहरूले यस्तो प्रवृत्ति रोक्न कानून, प्रक्रिया, प्रणाली, संरचना बनाएका छन् दण्डात्मक मात्र होइन, पक्षहरूलाई सहज बनाउन सरल रूपले बुझाउनका लागि अनेकौं उपायहरू सुझाएका छन् (California Gubernatorial Recall Election, 2021) । तर, दल र निर्वाचनको पनि खासगरी प्रचार-प्रसार सम्बन्धी आम्दानी खर्चको अनुगमन र कारवाही गर्ने निकायहरू संसारभर नै यसमा कमजोर देखिन्छन् । उदाहरणका लागि, यस मामिलामा पारदर्शी मानिएको संयुक्त राज्य अमेरिकाको सन्दर्भमा पनि त्यहाँ यो काम जिम्मा दिइएको निकाय (निर्वाचन आयोग) कमजोर रहेको अध्ययनले देखाएको छ (OpenSecrets, n.d.) । हाम्रो जस्तो अवस्थाको त कुरै नगरौं ।

### ३. अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय अभ्यास

माथि भनी सक्तियो कि राजनीतिक वित्त व्यवस्थापन (दल सञ्चालन र निर्वाचन खर्च) समकालीन परिवेशमा एउटा प्रमुख चुनौतीको रूपमा देखा परेको छ । यसको सही व्यवस्थापन गर्नबाट चुकेको खण्डमा प्रजातन्त्र नै सङ्कटमा पर्ने आशङ्का उठेको छ । संसारभरका निर्वाचनको *Integrity* मापन गर्दै आएको *Electoral Integrity Project* ले निर्वाचन खर्च (*Campaign Finance*) लाई पनि निर्वाचनको स्वच्छता मापनको एक आधार बनाएको छ । उसको क्याम्पेन फाइनेन्स फ्रेमवर्कमा खासगरी उम्मेदवारले राज्यबाट पाउने अनुदान, राजनीतिक चन्दा उम्मेदवारको पहुँच, आर्थिक कारोबारको पारदर्शिता, दाताको प्रभाव, र राज्यको स्रोतको दुरुपयोग जस्ता पाँचवटा पक्षलाई यसको मापनको आधार बनाएको छ ।

राजनीतिक फण्डको नाममा हुने आम्दानी तथा खर्चको व्यवस्थापन र नियमन गर्ने सन्दर्भमा तलका चार कुराहरूकाबारेमा के कस्तो अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय अभ्यास छ, सोबारे सामान्य चर्चा गरौं ।

#### ३.१ आम्दानीका स्रोत:

दल तथा निर्वाचनको प्रचार प्रसार खर्चलाई चाहिने आम्दानीको विश्वमै दुई प्रमुख स्रोत, १) सरकारी स्रोत- (प्रत्यक्ष वा परोक्ष) र, २) गैर सरकारी स्रोत (सदस्यता शुल्क, लेवी, दलले गरेका व्यवसायबाट प्राप्त प्रतिफल, वैयक्तिक वा निजी (कॉर्पोरेट/गायत) सहयोग, वैदेशिक सहयोग, आदि रहेका छन् ।

##### ३.१.१ सरकारी स्रोत:

राज्यहरूले प्रत्यक्ष र/वा अप्रत्यक्ष वित्तीय सहयोग गरी दुई किसिमले सहयोग गर्ने गरेका छन् । उरुग्वेले सन् १९२० मा राजनीतिक दल सञ्चालनका लागि सरकारी स्रोतबाट सहयोग सुरु गरेकोमा आइडिया इन्टरनेशनलको विश्वभरको राजनीतिक फाइनेन्स सम्बन्धी डाटाबेसका अनुसार हाल ११६ देशहरूले राजनीतिक दलहरूलाई प्रत्यक्ष वित्तीय सहयोग गरेको र यस्तो सहयोगको परिपाटी महादेशअनुसार फरक रहेको छ । उदाहरणका लागि, ओसिनियाका २७ प्रतिशत देशले यस्तो प्रत्यक्ष सहयोग गरेका छन् भने युरोपियन देशहरूमा ८६ प्रतिशतले सहयोग गरेका छन् । ६० वटा देशले सामान्य अवस्थामा समेत सहयोग गर्ने, १९ वटाले चुनावमा मात्र र ३७ वटाले नियमित वा चुनाव दुवैमा सहयोग गर्ने

गरेको पाइन्छ। यस्तो पब्लिक फण्डिङ गर्ने आधार पनि विविध रहेका छन्। जस्तो, ५७ देशले मत चुनावमा निश्चित मत प्राप्त मतलाई आधार मानेको, तर त्यस्तो मतको सङ्ख्यामा पनि विविधता रहेको छ। उदाहरणको लागि, जर्मनीले आम चुनावमा ०.५ प्रतिशत या सो भन्दा बेसी मत प्राप्त गर्ने दललाई तोकिएका आधारमा मतप्रतिशत संग आबद्ध गरी सहयोग गर्ने गरेको छ भने डेनमार्कमा चुनावको प्रकृति हेरी १०० मतबाट सुरु हुन्छ। बेनिन, भुटान, चाड, कोटडिभ्वार र मलावीमा निश्चित चुनावमा १० प्रतिशत मत प्राप्त गरेको हुनुपर्छ। ५८ देशले निर्वाचित निकाय खासगरी केन्द्रीय संसदमा प्राप्त सिटलाई, ९ देशले उम्मेदवारको सङ्ख्यालाई, २ देशले दलको प्रतिबद्ध कार्यकर्ता सङ्ख्यालाई शर्त बनाएका छन्। त्यस्तै, अन्य शर्तमा, कुनैमा चुनावमा भाग लिन अनुमति पाएका सबै दलले बराबर पाउने, कुनैमा जितेको सिटको अनुपातमा वा प्राप्त कूल मतको अनुपातमा पाउने, कतै जति मतदाताले मत हाले तोकिएको दरमा त्यसलाई गुना गरेर आउने रकम, कतै दलले दिएको उम्मेदवारीको अनुपातमा सहयोग गर्ने, आदि विविध आधार अपनाएको देखिन्छ (IIDEA, 2021a)।

युरोपका केही देशमा दल सञ्चालन र निर्वाचन प्रचार समेतको खर्चको ६७% सम्म यस्तै फण्डबाट हुने गरेको छ (IIDEA, 2014) भने युरोपकै स्पेन, बेल्जियम, इटाली, पोर्चुगलमा दलको आम्दानीको ८०% सरकारी कोषबाटै हुने रहेछ। अझ स्लोभेनियामा दलको आम्दानीको सबै स्रोत सरकारी फण्ड हुने गरेको छ (Krašovec & Deželan, 2019)।

यहाँ स्मरणीय कुरा के पनि छ भने, सरकारी अनुदान प्राप्त गर्दैमा दलहरूले गर्ने अवैधानिक आम्दानी र खर्चमा कमी नआएको पनि यस्तो अनुदान रकम दिइएका टर्की, मेक्सिको, आदि मुलुकमा गरिएका अध्ययनले देखाएका छन् (Düşkün, 2018; Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020)।

सामान्यतया राज्यले प्रत्यक्ष सहयोग गर्दा दलहरूलाई पारदर्शी बनाउन मद्दत गर्ने, उम्मेदवारहरूलाई समान प्रतिस्पर्धाको वातावरण बनाउन मद्दत गर्ने, भ्रष्टाचार, आदिमा नियन्त्रण गर्न सघाउ पुऱ्याउँछ, आदि भनिन्छ। यस कथनलाई युएनडिपीको यो भनाइले पनि थप पुऱ्याउँ गर्दछ “सार्वजनिक वित्त प्रायः समान प्रतिस्पर्धा सिर्जना गर्न, चुनावी लागत घटाउन र भ्रष्टाचार न्यूनीकरणको लागि एक उपकरणको रूपमा पाइन्छ (Public financing is often seen as a tool for levelling the playing field, reducing election costs, cutting down corruption) (IIDEA, 2021a)।

राज्यले दलहरूलाई विविध किसिमको अप्रत्यक्ष सहयोग गर्ने गरेका छन्। यस्ता सहयोगमा, रेडियो टेलिभिजनमा निःशुल्क समय, दलहरूलाई चन्दा दिने दातालाई चन्दा राशिमामा कर छुट, प्रचार कार्यक्रमको लागि ठाउँ दिने, पोस्टर छापिदिने, आदि रहेका छन्। यस्तो सहयोगका केही उदाहरण हेरौं: ६४.४ प्रतिशत देशले दलहरूलाई निःशुल्क वा न्यून दरमा मिडियामा समय दिएको, ५३.१ प्रतिशत देशले उम्मेदवारलाई मिडियामा समय दिएको, ३३.३ प्रतिशत देशले राजनीतिक दल वा दललाई चन्दा दिएको रकममा आयकर छुट, १६.१ प्रतिशत देशले क्याम्पेन मिटिङका लागि स्थान उपलब्ध गराएको, १४.४ प्रतिशत देशले प्रचार सामग्री राख्ने स्थान दिएको, ५.६ प्रतिशत ले हुलाक दस्तुरमा छुट दिएको वा ३.३ प्रतिशतले यात्रामा पूर्ण छुट वा सहूलियत दिएको देखिन्छ। भुटान, पपुवा न्युगिनी र जापानमा निर्वाचन गर्ने निकायले दलहरूको पोस्टर छापिदिने, इष्ट टिमोरले अदालतको खर्चमा छुट दिएको जस्ता केही उदाहरण हुन् (UNDP, 2007)।

### ३.१.२ गैरसरकारी स्रोत:

यसमा राज्यहरूले आ-आफ्ना परिवेशअनुसारका विविध स्रोतहरूबाट दल वा उम्मेदवारले सहयोग लिन सक्ने व्यवस्था गरेका छन्। खासगरी, यस्ता प्रमुख स्रोतमा दलका सदस्यबाट उठ्ने लेवी र सदस्यता शुल्क, दलहरूले गरेका व्यापार व्यवसायबाट गरिएका आम्दानी (मलेसिया, म्यानमार, आदि), व्यक्तिगत वा संस्थागत दाताबाट पाउने सहयोगको राशि, आदि रहेका छन्। यस्तो स्रोतकाबारेमा युएनडिपीले आफ्नो एउटा प्रकाशनमा “वित्तको निजी स्रोतमा व्यक्ति वा सङ्गठनहरूद्वारा दिइने दान, पार्टीद्वारा सञ्चालित व्यवसाय वा लगानी र अवैध स्रोत सामेल हुन्छन्” (Private source of financing include donations from individuals and organizations, party-run businesses or investments, and illicit sources) भन्दै अवैधानिक स्रोत तर्फसमेत सङ्केत गरेको छ (UNDP, 2007)।

यतिखेरको सर्वाधिक चासो र चिन्ताको विषय भनेको यही अवैधानिक स्रोतको परिचालन र त्यसले समग्र राजनीति र

अझ बेसी निर्वाचनको स्वच्छतामा पारेको प्रतिकूल प्रभाव रहेका छन्। यस्तो अवैधानिक र अपारदर्शी स्रोत धमिरा जस्तै हो र यसबाट उत्पन्न हुने विकृतिको समूल अन्त्य उच्च प्राथमिकतामा राख्न यसलाई थप व्यवस्थित गर्न ढिला गरि नहुन् ।

सहयोग लिन पाउने-नपाउने- दल वा उम्मेदवारले को संग सहयोग लिन पाउने वा नपाउने भन्नेबारेमा पनि देशहरूको परिवेशअनुसार विविधता पाइन्छ । उदाहरणका लागि- ६७.२ प्रतिशत देशहरूले राजनीतिक दलहरूले विदेशीबाट सहयोग लिन नपाउने व्यवस्था गरेका छन् भने ५५.९ प्रतिशतले उम्मेदवारलाई त्यस्तो सहयोग लिनबाट रोकेका छन् । त्यस्तै, करिब ७० प्रतिशत देशहरूले कर्पोरेट चन्दा लिन पाउने व्यवस्था गरेका छन् । ५६.६ प्रतिशत देशहरूले व्यक्ति वा संस्थाले उम्मेदवारलाई कतिसम्म दिन पाउने भन्ने प्रावधान राखेका छन् भने ५१.७ प्रतिशत देशहरूले दलहरूको हकमा त्यस्तो सीमा तोकेका छैनन् । त्यस्तै, ५६.१ प्रतिशत देशहरूले दलहरूले र ४३.५ देशहरूले उम्मेदवारले अज्ञात स्रोतबाट कुनै सहयोग लिन नपाउने प्रावधान राखेको तथा ११.१ र ९ प्रतिशत देशहरूले दल र उम्मेदवारले त्यस्तो सहयोग लिन सक्ने प्रावधान राखेको देखिन्छ । यसैगरी, ५४.५ प्रतिशत देशहरूले राजनीतिक दलहरूलाई व्यक्तिगत दाताबाट वस्तुगत सहयोग लिन प्रतिबन्ध लगाएका छैनन् भने उम्मेदवारको हकमा यस्तो प्रतिबन्ध नलगाउने देश २६.६ प्रतिशत रहेका छन् । विश्वका करिब-करिब सबै देशले (९१ प्रतिशत) मत खरिद गर्न नपाउने प्रावधान राखेका र त्यस्तो कर्मलाई अपराधको सूचीमा समावेश गरेको पाइन्छ भने निर्वाचनमा तेस्रो पक्षले खर्च गर्न नपाउने प्रावधान १३.३ प्रतिशतले गरेका छन् (IIDEA, 2021b) ।

### ३.२ खर्चको सीमा

सामान्यतया कुनै पनि देशले राजनीतिक दलले दल सञ्चालनका लागि केकति हदसम्म खर्च गर्न पाउँछन् भन्ने सीमा तोकेको देखिन्छ । उनीहरूको आम्दानीको स्रोत र खर्चको पारदर्शितालाई नै जोडिएको पाइन्छ । तर, निर्वाचनका सन्दर्भमा भने कुनै देशले सीमा तोकेका छन् भने कतिपय मुलुकमा यस्तो प्रावधान राखिएको छैन । उदाहरणका लागि, ३१.७ प्रतिशत देशहरूले दलहरूले खर्च गर्न सक्ने सीमाहद तोकेका छन् भने ४६ प्रतिशत भन्दा बढी देशले यस्तो प्रतिबन्ध उम्मेदवारको हकमा लागु गरेका छन् (IIDEA, 2021a) ।

### ३.३ आम्दानी-खर्चको पारदर्शिता

सतहत्तर प्रतिशत देशमा दलहरूले नियमित आर्थिक कारोवारको विवरण नियामक निकायमा बुझाउनु पर्ने व्यवस्था गरेका छन् । यस्ता देशहरूमध्ये ५९.२ प्रतिशतमा दलले मात्र निर्वाचन खर्चको विवरण बुझाउनु पर्ने प्रावधान रहेको छ भने ६६.३ प्रतिशत देशहरूका उम्मेदवारहरूले आम्दानी खर्चको विवरण बुझाउनु पर्ने प्रावधान राखेका छन् । विश्वका ६० प्रतिशत भन्दा बेसी देशले दल तथा उम्मेदवारले आफ्नो आम्दानी खर्चको विवरण अनिवार्य रूपमा सार्वजनिक गर्नु पर्ने प्रावधान राखेका छन्, जसमा युरोपका ९३ प्रतिशत भन्दा बेसी देशले यस्तो व्यवस्था गरेका छन् । त्यस्तै, ५१.१ प्रतिशत देशहरूले दल र उम्मेदवारले कुन कुन दाताबाट के कति सहयोग लिएको हो सो सबै सार्वजनिक गर्नेपर्ने कानुनी व्यवस्था गरेका छन् (IIDEA, 2021c) ।

### ३.४ अनुगमन, नियमन तथा निषेधित व्यवहारको नियन्त्रण

निर्वाचनमा खासगरी तोकिएको सीमा भन्दा बेसी खर्च गर्ने, यस्तो खर्चको लागि प्रयोग हुने आम्दानीको स्रोत र खर्च पारदर्शी नहुने, अवैधानिक स्रोत प्रयोग हुने, मतदातालाई प्रभाव पार्न पैसा वा सामानको प्रयोग गरिने जस्ता समस्या अधिकांश निर्वाचनमा देखिएका छन् । राजनीतिक वित्तको अनुगमन तथा नियमन गर्न र नियम बाहिर गई निषेधित व्यवहार गर्ने उपर कारवाही गर्ने अख्तियारी देशहरूले विविध किसिमका संस्थालाई दिएका छन् । यस्ता निकायमा निर्वाचन आयोग (४७.५ प्रतिशत), लेखा-परीक्षण निकाय (१४.१ प्रतिशत), अदालत (८.५ प्रतिशत), मन्त्रालय (१०.७ प्रतिशत), संसद् (३.४ प्रतिशत) तथा स्वतन्त्र संस्था गठन (१५.३ प्रतिशत) रहेका छन् । संसारका ४०.१ प्रतिशत देशले उक्त संस्थाहरूलाई प्रतिबन्ध (sanction) गर्न सक्ने सम्मको अधिकार दिएका छन् । ८० प्रतिशत देशहरूले जरिवाना गर्न सक्ने प्रावधान राखेको पाइन्छ भने विश्वका आधाजसो देशहरूले कैद देखि अन्य दण्डको व्यवस्था गरेका, सरकारले

सहयोग गर्ने देशहरू मध्ये ३३ प्रतिशत देशहरूले त्यस्तो फन्ड बन्द गर्ने, २३.३ प्रतिशत देशहरूले जफत गर्ने र २९ प्रतिशत देशहरूले दल भङ्ग गर्ने जस्ता दण्ड जरिवानाका प्रावधान राखेका छन् (IIDEA, 2021c)।

पछिल्ला वर्षहरूमा राजनीतिक वित्तले पैदा गरेका अनेकौं विकृतिको अन्त्यका लागि गैर सरकारी क्षेत्र खासगरी मिडियालगायत नागरिक समाजले सक्रिय भूमिका निर्वाह गर्दै आएका छन्। निर्वाचन पर्यवेक्षण संस्थाहरूले पनि यसलाई आफ्नो कार्यक्षेत्रमा समावेश गर्न थालेका छन्। व्यवस्थित नागरिक भूमिकाको उदाहरण लेबनानको निर्वाचन खर्चको अनुगमन गर्न The Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA) ले गरेको अभ्यासलाई लिन सकिन्छ (Monitor's Manual, 2021)।

संसारकै सबैभन्दा ठूलो लोकतन्त्रको अभ्यास गर्ने भारतमा लोक सभा निर्वाचनमा उम्मेदवारका लागि निर्वाचन आयोगले प्रति उम्मेदवार ७० लाख भारुको अधिकतम सीमा तोकेको छ। तर, व्यवहारमा यो खर्च सालाखाला भारु ५ करोड हुने रहेको अनुमान छ (Rawat, 2021)। त्यहाँको निर्वाचनमा अवैधानिक पैसा र सामानको प्रयोग अत्यधिक हुने गरेको कुरा सन् २०१९ को लोक सभा निर्वाचनमा निर्वाचन आयोगले दल उम्मेदवारहरूबाट निर्वाचनमा अवैध रूपमा प्रयोग गर्न लागेको भारु करिब ३५ अरब (नगद, लागु पदार्थ, सुन-चाँदी, मदिरा, आदि) बराबर बरामद गरेको र यो रकम सन् २०१४ को लोक सभा निर्वाचनमा सरकारी स्तरबाट भएको खर्चको ९० प्रतिशतको हाराहारीमा रहेको भनिएको छ (Rawat, 2019)। भारतको निर्वाचन आयोगले पहिलो पटक सन् २०१९ मा तोकिएको भन्दा बेसी खर्च गरिएको भनिएको भेलोरको संसदीय निर्वाचनलाई रद्द गरेको छ।

Magnus Ohman ले राजनीतिक वित्तका प्रमुख सवालका रूपमा राजनीतिक प्रणाली र वित्त व्यवस्थापन सम्बन्धी गरी दुई किसिमका चुनौती रहेको भन्दै त्यसका चुनौतीलाई १२ वटा बुँदामा यसरी समेटेका छन्: राजनीतिक प्रणाली सम्बद्ध चुनौतीमा १) स्रोतमा असमान पहुँच, २) पैसाको बलमा धनाढ्यहरूद्वारा आफ्नो स्वार्थसिद्ध गर्न राजनीतिको प्रयोग, ३) राजनीतिमा अवैध पैसाको चलखेल, ४) व्यवसायको स्वार्थपूर्तिमा राजनीतिको प्रयोग, ५) राज्य स्रोतको दुरुपयोग, र ६) मत खरिदमा व्यापकता पर्दछन् भने, राजनीतिक वित्तको व्यवस्थापन चुनौती अन्तरगत १) अव्यवहारिक कानून, २) राजनीतिमा पैसाको नियन्त्रण गर्न राजनीतिक इच्छाको अभाव, ३) मत बिक्रीलाई आम स्वीकार्य, ४) नियामक निकाय स्वतन्त्र नहुनु, ५) राजनीतिक वित्त सम्बन्धी कानूनको पालनामा पक्षपातपूर्ण व्यवहार गरिनु, र ६) कानून कार्यान्वयन गर्न स्रोतको अभाव जस्ता विषय समावेश गरेका छन् (IIDEA, 2014)।

राजनीतिक वित्त व्यवस्थापनका सन्दर्भमा *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Venice Commission* ले “लागु गर्ने संस्थालाई राजनीतिक दबावबाट स्वतन्त्र र निष्पक्षताप्रति प्रतिबद्ध राख्न कानून र राज्य-अभ्यासमा प्रभावकारी उपायहरू अपनाउनु पर्दछ” (*effective measures should be taken in legislation and in state practice to ensure the enforcing institution's independence from political pressure and commitment to impartiality*) भनेको छ (OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission, 2010)।

International IDEA Database on Political Finance (Political Finance Database) मा समावेश गरिएका सबै देशले कुनै न कुनै रूपमा राजनीतिक वित्त व्यवस्थापनको पाटोलाई कानूनमा समावेश गरेको पाइन्छ। यस्ता केही प्रावधानमा कस्तो स्रोतबाट सहयोग लिन पाउने, नपाउने खर्चको हद तोक्ने, राज्यले फण्ड गर्ने, आदि जस्ता विषय समेटिएका छन् (IIDEA, 2021a)।

तर, कानून कडा भएर मात्र र संस्था गठन गरेर मात्र समस्याको सम्बोधन नहुने र जति राम्रो कानून भए पनि त्यस्को प्रभावकारी कार्यान्वयन भएन भने त्यसको केही महत्त्व रहन्न भन्ने कुरा अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय अभ्यासले देखाएका छन्। खासगरी राजनीतिक वित्तको कुरा गर्दा चन्दा/सहयोग (donation) सम्बन्धी कुराको अनुगमन गर्न असाध्य जटिल हुने गरेको छ। किनकि सहयोगको सीमा तोकिए पनि वा यस्तो सहयोग पारदर्शी हुनुपर्छ भने पनि गोप्य रूपमा हुने कारोबारको अनुगमन अति जटिल हुन्छ। अर्को चाखलाग्दो कुरा के पनि छ भने राजनीतिक वित्तलाई व्यवस्थापन गर्ने सम्बन्धी कानून राजनीतिज्ञहरूले नै पारित गर्नु पर्ने हुन्छ, जुन कुरामा उनीहरूको चासो देखिन्छ। आफ्नो स्रोत जम्मा गर्ने

अधिकार सङ्गठन गर्न राजनीतिक इच्छाशक्ति ज्यादै न्यून पाइन्छ। नेपालकै कुरा गर्दा निर्वाचन आयोगले गरेका कतिपय सिफारिसलाई (चन्द्राको सीमा तोक्ने, सहयोग राशिमा आय कर छुट दिने, आदि) राजनीतिक तहबाट त्यत्तिकै थन्क्याइएका छन् ।

सचेत समुदाय भएको र जनमतको डर मान्ने अवस्था भएको देशमा उल्लङ्घनकर्ता दल वा उम्मेदवारलाई सार्वजनिक रूपमा दिइने चेतावनी वा लज्जाबोध “*Naming and shaming*” का उपायले पनि नियन्त्रण गर्न सहयोगी हुन सक्छ। अभ्यासमा कुनै न कुनै किसिमको दण्ड, जरिवाना, कैद वा निषेध, वा सहयोग रोक्का जस्ता कानुनी प्रावधान प्रयोगमा ल्याइएका छन्। औपचारिक निकायबाट गरिने कारवाहीका अतिरिक्त मिडिया खासगरी उसको खोजपूर्ण पत्रकारिताबाट ल्याइने सूचनाले पक्षहरूलाई जिम्मेवार बनाउन मद्दत पुग्ने गरेको छ। खासगरी, नागरिक समाजले राजनीतिक वित्तलाई पारदर्शी बनाउन महत्त्वपूर्ण भूमिका खेल्न सक्दछ। निर्वाचनसम्बन्धी खर्चको स्वतन्त्रपूर्वक अनुगमन गरी त्यसका बहुआयामिक पाटोलाई सार्वजनिक गरेर पारदर्शी हुन दबाव सिर्जना गर्ने देखि पात्रहरूको व्यवहारमा परिवर्तन गराउन र सुधारका लागि दबाव सिर्जना गर्ने जस्तो भूमिका संसारभर बढ्दै गएको छ।

## ४. नेपालमा राजनीतिक वित्त व्यवस्थित गर्न भएका प्रयास

### ४.१ दलका आय-व्यय

राजनीतिक दल सम्बन्धी ऐन, २०७३ ले दलहरूको आय-व्यय व्यवस्थित र पारदर्शी बनाउन विविध व्यवस्था गरेको छ। दलको कोषमा सदस्यता शुल्क वा नवीकरण शुल्क, स्वैच्छिक आर्थिक सहयोग, दलले कुनै कार्यक्रम आयोजना गरी सङ्गठित रकम, दलको प्रकाशन, आदिको विक्रीबाट प्राप्त आय, बैङ्क मौज्जातबाट प्राप्त व्याज, सदस्यबाट नियमित रूपमा पाउने सहयोग रकम, आदि आम्दानीको स्रोत हुने र यस्तो आम्दानी बैङ्क खातामा जम्मा गरी दलको नामबाट हुने सबै खर्च कोषबाट बेहोरिने व्यवस्था भएको छ (Nepal Law Commission, 2021a)। नेपाली नागरिक वा सङ्गठित संस्थाले स्वेच्छाले आर्थिक सहयोग गर्न सक्ने, तर सरकारी कार्यालय, वा सरकारी लगानी भएका सङ्घ-संस्था वा सर्वसाधारणको शेयर लगानी रहेको पब्लिक लिमिटेड कम्पनी वा सरकारी वा सामुदायिक शैक्षिक वा प्राज्ञिक संस्था वा राष्ट्रिय वा अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय गैरसरकारी सङ्घ संस्था वा विदेशी सरकार वा संस्था वा व्यक्ति, नाम नखुलेको व्यक्ति वा संस्था, आदिबाट आर्थिक सहयोग लिन बन्देज लगाइ कोषबाट लिन पाउने-नपाउने स्पष्ट गरेको छ (ऐनको दफा ३८)। प्राप्त सहयोग र खर्चलाई पारदर्शी बनाउन रु. पच्चीस हजार भन्दा बेसी सहयोग गर्दा बैङ्किङ कारोबार मार्फत गर्नुपर्ने, आयोगले तोकिएको भन्दा बेसी सहयोग लिँदा आयस्रोत खुलाउनु पर्ने, सहयोग लिएको रसिद दिनु पर्ने, सहयोग गरे बापत व्यक्तिगत स्वार्थ पूर्ति गर्ने उद्देश्यबाट समेत सहयोग लिन नहुने जस्ता कुराको व्यवस्था ऐनमा गरिएको छ (Nepal Law Commission, 2021b)।

दलहरूले आय-व्ययको हिसाव राख्ने, आर्थिक वर्ष सकिएको ६ महिनाभित्र लेखा परीक्षण गराई सोको एक महिनाभित्र परीक्षण प्रतिवेदन आयोगमा बुझाउने र त्यस्तो प्रतिवेदन दलले सार्वजनिक गर्नु पर्ने, आयोगले त्यस्तो प्रतिवेदन परीक्षण गर्न सक्ने, दलका केन्द्रीय पदाधिकारीले सम्पत्ति विवरण बुझाउनु पर्ने, भुटा विवरण दिने वा विवरण नै नबुझाउनेको नाम सार्वजनिक गर्नुपर्ने, तोकिएको व्यवस्था पालना नगर्ने दलहरूलाई आयोगले रु. पचास हजार सम्म जरिवाना गर्न सक्ने (ऐनको दफा ५४) समेत जस्ता दण्डात्मक व्यवस्थाहरू कानुनमै गरिएका छन्।

### ४.२ दल वा उम्मेदवारको निर्वाचन खर्च

निर्वाचन आयोग ऐन, २०७३, निर्वाचन (कसुर तथा सजाय) ऐन, २०७३ तथा निर्वाचन आचार संहिताले उम्मेदवारले गर्ने निर्वाचन खर्चलाई वाञ्छित सीमाभित्र राख्न, दल वा उम्मेदवारले पारदर्शिता सुनिश्चित गर्न र अटेर गर्ने उपर दण्डात्मक कारवाही गर्ने सम्मको व्यवस्था गरेका छन्। निर्वाचन आयोग ऐन, २०७३ ले निर्वाचन आयोगलाई निर्वाचनको प्रयोजनमा उम्मेदवारले खर्च गर्न पाउने हद तोक्ने अधिकार, निर्वाचनलाई स्वच्छ बनाउन निर्वाचन आचारसंहिता जारी गर्ने र सो लागु गर्ने तथा शुद्ध आचरण नगर्ने उम्मेदवारको उम्मेदवारी रद्द गर्न समेत सक्ने, त्यस्तै तोकिए भन्दा बेसी खर्च गर्ने, खर्चको विवरण नबुझाउने वा भुटा विवरण बुझाउने दल वा उम्मेदवारलाई रु. पाँच

लाख सम्म जरिवाना देखि ६ वर्ष सम्म निर्वाचनमा भाग लिन नपाउने गरी सजाय गर्न सक्ने र यसरी सजाय पाएको व्यक्ति निर्वाचित भएको अवस्थामा सो निर्वाचन स्वतः रद्द हुने सम्मका दण्ड-सजायको व्यवस्था गरेको छ (Nepal Law Commission, 2021c)।

निर्वाचन आचारसंहितामा पनि निर्वाचन खर्चका लागि अलग्गै खाताको प्रयोग गर्ने, त्यस्तो खाताको रकम खर्च आधिकारिक व्यक्तिबाट मात्र गराउने, पाँच हजार भन्दा बेसीको सहयोग-चन्दा लिँदा बैङ्क मार्फत लिनुपर्ने, रकम लिएको भर्पाई दिनु पर्ने, खर्चका बिल भर्पाई राख्ने, तोकिएको समयमा आयोगमा विवरण बुझाउनु पर्ने, आदि कुरालाई निर्वाचन आचारभित्र समावेश गरेको छ (Election commission, 2017) र यसको पालना नगर्ने उपर प्रचलित कानून बमोजिम दण्ड-जरिवाना हुने व्यवस्था समेत रहेको छ। त्यस्तै, निर्वाचित उम्मेदवारले प्रचलित कानून बमोजिम तोकिएको हदभन्दा बढी खर्च गरेको वा निजले अस्वाभाविक रूपले वा गैरकानुनी प्रयोजनको लागि खर्च गरेको वा गैरकानुनी रूपमा सहयोग प्राप्त गरेको प्रमाणित भएमा अदालतले निर्वाचित उम्मेदवारको निर्वाचन बदर गर्न सक्ने सम्मको कानुनी प्रावधान गरेको छ (Nepal Law commission, 2021c)।

दलहरूले आफ्नो नियमित व्यवस्थापनमा गर्ने खर्चको सीमाबारे नेपालको कानून मौन छ। निर्वाचनको प्रयोजनका लागि भने समानुपातिक तर्फ दलले प्रति उम्मेदवार ५० हजारसम्म खर्च गर्न पाउने सीमा तोकिएको छ। त्यस्तै, उम्मेदवारहरूको हकमा बडा तह देखि सङ्घीय संसद्लगायतको अधिकतम खर्च तोकिएको छ। उदाहरणका लागि २०७४ सालको निर्वाचनमा सङ्घीय संसदको उम्मेदवारले रु २५ लाख सम्म खर्च गर्न पाउने गरी आयोगले तोकेको थियो। राजनीतिक दलहरूको खर्चलाई पारदर्शी बनाउने तथा निर्वाचनको खर्चलाई वाञ्छित सीमाभित्र राख्नका निमित्त नेपालले गरेका उक्त प्रयासहरू अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय परिपाटी अनुरूप नै रहे भएका पाइन्छन्। तर, मूल समस्या तिनको कार्यान्वयनमा देखिएका छन्।

## ५. निर्वाचन खर्च के-केलाई मान्ने ?

निर्वाचन खर्चकाबारेमा थप चर्चा गर्नु अगाडि ककस्ले केमा गरेको खर्चलाई निर्वाचन खर्च मान्ने भन्नेबारेमा सामान्य थप स्पष्टत गरौं। निर्वाचनको व्यवस्थापन र निर्वाचन प्रचार प्रसारमा हुने खर्च नै निर्वाचन खर्च हो भन्ने आम बुझाई रहेको पाइन्छ। तर अरू धेरै खर्चका क्षेत्र हुन्छन्। उदाहरणको लागि, मतदाता नामावली तयारी, मतदाता परिचयपत्र, क्षेत्र निर्धारण, निर्वाचन सञ्चालन, मतदान र व्यवस्थापन, मतगणना र परिणाम व्यवस्थापन, विवाद निरूपण व्यवस्थापन, नागरिक शिक्षा, मतदाता शिक्षा र जानकारी (दल, आयोग, सरकार, गैरसरकारी निकाय सबैबाट हुने), दल तथा उम्मेदवारबाट हुने प्रचार प्रसार र निर्वाचन तयारी खर्च, आन्तरिक वा अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय पर्यवेक्षण, निर्वाचन सुरक्षा खर्च, आदि पर्दछन्। यी सबै क्षेत्रबाट गर्ने वा हुने खर्चको समुच्चा हिसाबबाट मात्र खर्चको सही अनुमान गर्न सकिन्छ। प्रत्यक्ष देखिने यी खर्चभन्दा नदेखिने र अपारदर्शी ढङ्गबाट हुने गरेका अनेकौं अरू निर्वाचन खर्चले निर्वाचनमा प्रभाव पारेको आरोप लाग्ने गरेका छन्। उदाहरणका लागि, उम्मेदवारीको टिकट नै बिक्री हुने, समानुपातिकको सूचीको अग्रभागमा रहन वा छनौटमा पर्न विशेष लगानी गर्नुपर्ने, मतदाताले आफ्नो मत नै पैसा वा जिन्सीमा साट्ने, निर्वाचनको मौन समयमा उम्मेदवारले भित्रभित्रै गर्ने पैसाको लेनदेनबाट अत्यधिक मत प्रभावित हुने, आदि। तर, यस्तो अपारदर्शी ढङ्गबाट हुने खर्चको न त कतै कतै गणना भएको वा हुनसक्ने अवस्था नै छ। निर्वाचन खर्चका सन्दर्भमा सर्वाधिक चासो र चिन्ता भनेकै यस्तो अपारदर्शी खर्च र त्यसको आम्दानीको स्रोतको अन्त्य गर्नु गराउनु रहेको छ।

निर्वाचनसम्बन्धी खर्च गर्ने निकायहरू पनि विविध छन्। जस्तो, निर्वाचन सञ्चालन गर्ने निकाय, दल र उम्मेदवारका अतिरिक्त सरकार (केन्द्र, प्रादेशिक, स्थानीय), सुरक्षा निकाय, न्यायपालिका, गैर सरकारी सङ्घ-संस्था, निजी क्षेत्र, आदिबाट समेत निर्वाचन सम्बद्ध खर्च हुने गरेको छ। अझ कतिपय अवस्थामा दातृ निकायहरूले निर्वाचनका विविध कार्यक्रममा अपारदर्शी हिसाबबाट सिधै सहयोग गर्ने गरेका छन्। त्यसैले, समुच्चा निर्वाचन खर्चको प्रवृत्ति बुझ्न यी सबैतिरका खर्च समावेश गरी गरिएको हिसाबकिताबले मात्र निर्वाचन खर्चको यथार्थ र प्रवृत्ति बुझ्न र बुझाउन सहज हुने हुन्छ।

## ६. निर्वाचन खर्चको प्रवृत्ति (नेपाल बाहिरका केही उदाहरण)

महँगो निर्वाचन संसारभरकै लागि अत्यधिक चासो र चिन्ताको विषय हो, जसले लोकतन्त्रकै भविष्यलाई धरापमा पार्ने डर पसेको छ। संयुक्त राज्य अमेरिकाको जर्जिया राज्यको भखरै (२०२१) सम्पन्न २ वटा सिनेट सिटको दोस्रो चरणको चुनावमै ५०० मिलियन अमेरिकी डलर खर्च भएको अनुमान गरिएको छ। अमेरिकाको निर्वाचन खर्च अनुगमन गर्ने संस्था ओपेन सेक्रेटको अनुमानमा सन् २०२० को अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति निर्वाचनमा उम्मेदवारहरूको करिब ६.६ अरब डलर खर्च भएको अनुमान छ, जबकि सन् २००८, २०१२ र २०१६ मा भएका राष्ट्रपति निर्वाचनहरूमा क्रमशः २.८, २.६, ३.४ अरब डलर खर्च भएको थियो (Opensecrets, 2021)। यसले देखाउँछ सन् २०१६ को तुलनामा चार वर्षको अन्तरालमा सन् २०२० को चुनावमा उम्मेदवारको खर्च फन्डै दोब्बर बढ्यो। त्यस्तै, संसारकै सबै भन्दा ठुलो प्रजातान्त्रिक मुलुक भारतमा सन् २०१९ मा भएको लोक सभा निर्वाचनको खर्च फन्डै ७ अरब डलर बराबर भएको अनुमान गरिएको छ (New Delhi-based Centre for Media Studies) र यो खर्च सन् २०१४ को लोक सभा निर्वाचनमा भएको ५ अरबको तुलनामा ४० प्रतिशत बेसी हो (Chaudhary & Rodrigues, 2019)। भारतकै बम्बई प्रदेश सभा सदस्यको केही स्थानमा उम्मेदवारले गरेको सन् २०१४ को निर्वाचनको क्रममा खर्चको अनुसन्धान गरेका अनुसन्धानकर्ताले प्रति उम्मेदवार भार ३५ लाख सम्म खर्च गर्न पाउने सीमा तोकिएको ठाउँमा भार १ देखि १६ करोडसम्म खर्च गरेका र त्यस्तो खर्चको १९ देखि ६४ प्रतिशत सम्मको खर्च मतदातालाई उपहार दिन प्रयोग भएको देखाएको छ (Chauchard, 2018)। सोही अध्ययनले खर्चको स्वरूप कसरी परिवर्तन हुँदैछ भन्ने क्रममा सन् २०१४ को लोक सभा निर्वाचनमा सोसल मिडियामा भार २.५ अरब खर्च भएकोमा सन् २०१९ मा यो खर्च बढेर भार ५० अरब हुने अनुमान गरेको छ।

त्यस्तै, सन् २०१८ मा पाकिस्तानको आम चुनावमा उम्मेदवारले प्रति मतदाता अधिकतम पाकिस्तानी रुपियाँ जम्मा २१ सम्म खर्च गर्न पाउने हद तोकिएकोमा वास्तविकतामा प्रति मतदाता रु. ४,१५१ सम्म खर्च भएको पर्यवेक्षकहरूको अनुमान रहेको। २०१८ को पाकिस्तानको यो चुनावमा करिब रु. ४ खरब ४० अरब (सरकार तथा दल वा उम्मेदवारबाट) खर्च भएको अनुमान गरिएको छ (Dawn, 2018)। ल्याटिन अमेरिकी मुलुक ब्राजिलको निर्वाचनको प्रचार-प्रसारको खर्च सन् २००२ को तुलनामा सन् २०१४ मा फन्डै दस दोब्बरले बढेको देखिन्छ (OECD, 2016)। यसरी हेर्दा निर्वाचन संसारभरमै अत्यन्त महँगो हुँदै गएको प्रस्ट हुन्छ।

निर्वाचनमा दल वा उम्मेदवारले गर्ने खर्च मात्र बढेको होइन कि निर्वाचन सुरक्षा, निर्वाचन व्यवस्थापन तर्फ पनि बढेको पाइन्छ। उदाहरणका लागि, पाकिस्तानको निर्वाचन आयोगले व्यवस्थापनमा प्रति मतदाता २००८ मा रु. २२ खर्च गरेको मा २०१३ मा रु. ५८ र २०१८ मा रु. १९८ पुँयाएको बताइन्छ (Dawn, 2018)। निर्वाचन व्यवस्थापन तर्फ हाल विश्वको सालाखाला खर्च प्रति मतदाता ३ देखि २०० डलर सम्म हुने गरेको छ। यस्तो खर्चको सीमा निर्वाचन प्रणाली र परिस्थिति, प्रजातन्त्रको प्रौढता, द्वन्द्वको अवस्था, आदि विभिन्न कारणले तलमाथि हुने गरेका छन् (HIDEA, 2017)।

## ७. नेपालमा दल र निर्वाचन खर्चको प्रवृत्ति, र प्रभाव

संसारका अरू देशको जस्तै नेपालको निर्वाचन खर्च पनि उच्च दरले बढेको आम गुनासो छ। निर्वाचनको परिणाम अन्य तत्त्वभन्दा पैसाबाट प्रभावमा परेका टीकाटिप्पणी र गुनासा व्याप्त छन्।

नेपालमा निर्वाचन खर्चको नियमित अनुगमन वा अनुसन्धानात्मक विश्लेषण गर्ने गरिएको देखिन्न। तथापि, २०७४ सालमा सम्पन्न स्थानीय निर्वाचनदेखि प्रादेशिक र राष्ट्रिय संसद्का गरी तीनवटै निर्वाचनमा भएको खर्चको लेखाजोखा गरेको एक अनुसन्धानले दल वा सरकारबाट हुने भन्दा उम्मेदवारबाट धेरै बेसी खर्च हुने तथ्य सार्वजनिक गरेको छ। स्थानीय तहमा उम्मेदवार र दलबाट करिब रु. ५० अरब ९५ करोड र सरकारी तर्फ रु. १८ अरब ४६ करोड गरी जम्मा रु. ६९ अरब ४२ करोड र प्रति मतदाता रु. ४,९२३ खर्च भएको दाबी गरेको छ। त्यस्तै, केन्द्रीय र प्रादेशिक सांसदको चुनावमा दल, उम्मेदवार वा तिनका समर्थकबाट रु. ४५ अरब ९५ करोड, सरकारतिरबाट रु. १६ अरब २६

करोड गरी कुल रु ६२ अरब २१ करोड र प्रति मतदाता रु ४,०४० खर्चको अनुमान छ। यी तीनै चुनावमा माथि भनिएभै, सरकार, दल वा उम्मेदवारको गरी करिब रु. १ खरब ३१ अरब ६३ करोड खर्च भएको अनुमान सो संस्थाले गरेको छ (The Asia Foundation, 2017)। सरकारी वा दल वा उम्मेदवारबाट भएका यी सबै खर्च निर्वाचन अवधिमा भएकाको मात्र गणना भएको छ। निर्वाचनका अरू चरणमा गरिएका अरू खर्चहरू समावेश गर्दा यी रकमको आयतन अझै मोटाउने छ। अझ, अपारदर्शी हिसाबबाट हुने खर्चको लेखाजोखा गर्ने हो भने यी आँकडामा ठुलो परिवर्तन आउने अनुमान सहजै लगाउन सकिन्छ।

निर्वाचन खर्च र निर्वाचन परिणामका बिच अन्तरसम्बन्ध रहेको नेपालकै अर्को एउटा अनुसन्धानले देखाएको छ। २०७४ को संसदीय चुनावको क्रममा काठमाडौंका १० निर्वाचन क्षेत्रका प्रमुख ५ दलका तीस जना उम्मेदवारले गरेको खर्चको एउटा संस्थाले सुक्ष्म अनुगमन गरेको थियो। त्यो अध्ययनले देखायो कि ५७ प्रतिशत उम्मेदवारले सीमाभन्दा ३ देखि १३६ प्रतिशत सम्म बेसी खर्च गरेका छन्। त्यस्तै, बेसी खर्च गर्नेले बढी मत पाएको देखाएको छ। उदाहरणका लागि, आयोगले तोकेको सीमाभन्दा बेसी खर्च गर्ने ले सालाखाला ४१ प्रतिशत मत पाएकाछन् भने सीमाभित्र रही खर्च गर्नेको प्राप्त सालाखाला मत १९ प्रतिशत मात्र रहेकोछ। त्यस्तै, सोही अध्ययनले आयोगमा पेस गरेका खर्चको विवरणमा पेशगर्ने ९० प्रतिशत उम्मेदवार मध्ये धेरैले कम खर्च देखाएर ढाँटेका छन् (Samuhik Abhiyan, 2018)। यसबाट देखिन्छ कि उम्मेदवारले सीमाभन्दा बेसी खर्च गर्ने मात्र होइन कि आफूले गरेको खर्चको विवरण पनि लुकाउँछन् र आयोगलाई भ्रुटो विवरण बुझाउँछन्।

निर्वाचन आयोगबाट खर्च भएका रकमको आधारमा प्रतिनिधि सभाको सन् १९९१, १९९४ र १९९९ मा भएका निर्वाचनमा निर्वाचन व्यवस्थापनमा क्रमशः रु ९.८३, १९.८३ र २६.६८ पैसा प्रति मतदाता खर्च भएको छ भने वि.स. २०६४ को संविधान सभा तथा यसका उप निर्वाचनमा दुई वर्षको अन्तरालमा आयोगको नियमित तथा निर्वाचन तयारी र व्यवस्थापन, सुरक्षा निकाय, दल र उम्मेदवारको प्रचार-प्रसार, आन्तरिक पर्यवेक्षक समेतबाट भएको खर्चका आधारमा प्रति मतदाता रु. २७५.८० सालाखाला खर्च भएको बताइन्छ (Yadav, 2010)।

नेपालको निर्वाचन खर्चको प्रवृत्ति हेर्दा निर्वाचन व्यवस्थापन, सुरक्षा वा दल र उम्मेदवार सबैतिरको खर्चमा अन्यत्रको भै बढोत्तरी नै भएको देखाउँछ। दि हिमालयनले नोभेम्बर १०, २०१७ मा प्रकाशित एक लेखमा नेपालको प्रति मतदाता खर्च सन् २००८ मा रु. २७९, २०१३ मा रु. ९८६ र २०१८ मा रु. ४,००० भनेर उल्लेख गरेको छ (Satyal, 2017)। स्मरणीय छ कि निर्वाचन आयोगबाट हुने खर्चको ठुलो हिस्सा कर्मचारी व्यवस्थापन तथा तिनको भ्रमणमा हुने गरेको छ भने सुरक्षातर्फको सबैभन्दा ठुलो खर्च अस्थायी वा म्यादी प्रहरीसम्बन्धी खर्च रहेको छ।

यी तथ्याङ्क वा विवरणले देखाउँछन् कि सरकार वा दल वा उम्मेदवार सबैको लागि निर्वाचन महँगो हुँदै गएको छ।

सर्वैतिरको खर्च अस्वाभाविक रूपले बढ्नु चिन्ताको विषय हो र त्यसमा पनि खासगरी प्रचार प्रसारमा अपारदर्शी हिसाबले हुने असीमित खर्चले अनेकौं विकृति निम्त्याएको जगजाहेरै छ। उम्मेदवार (विजयी वा पराजित), निर्वाचन व्यवस्थापक, दलका प्रतिनिधि, पर्यवेक्षक, मेडियालगायत नागरिक समाज, आदि सबै को सहभागितामा पटक-पटक म आफैले सन् २०१९ मा देशका करिब १३ स्थानमा गरेको अन्तरक्रियामा चुनाव खर्च बढ्नुका प्रमुख कारण यस प्रकार औल्याइएका थिए:

- पार्टीको टिकट देखि मत सम्म किन्तु पर्ने अवस्था,
- समानुपातिकमा पर्ने प्रमुख आधार नै पैसा र नेतृत्व संग को सामीप्य,
- टिकट पाए देखि विजयी भ्रमणमा समेत कार्यकर्ताको खानपिनलगायत ती उपरको लगानी असीमित रूपले बढ्नु, कार्यकर्ता अति महँगो हुनु,
- स्थानीय तहमा भिजेको र मन पराइएको भन्दा बाहिरबाट टिपेर ल्याइने टुरिस्ट उम्मेदवारबाट हुने अन्धाधुन्ध खर्च,

- उम्मेदवारको बिच भन्दा डन-डन र चन्दादाताहरू बिच आफ्नो पक्षलाई जिताउने बढ्दो प्रतिस्पर्धा,
- दलका उम्मेदवार उपरको अन्तर्घातको व्यापकता,
- राष्ट्रिय स्तरका माथिल्ला नेताका क्षेत्रमा हुने असीमित खर्चको प्रभाव,
- निर्वाचित प्रतिनिधिको निर्वाचनपछिको हैसियत, भूमिका र शक्तिले “जसरी पनि जित्नु पर्छ” भन्ने मनोविज्ञान,
- राजनीति र निर्वाचनमा अपारदर्शी कालो धनको व्यापक प्रयोग,
- दलहरूमा सुशासन र पारदर्शिताको अभाव,
- निर्वाचन व्यवस्थापनलगायत सुरक्षामा खर्चमा व्यापक विस्तार,
- निर्वाचन खर्चको अनुगमन वा गलत गर्ने उपर कारवाही गर्न नसक्ने निर्वाचन आयोगको लाचारी, आदि ।

शायद यी र यस्तै अनेक कारणले हुनुपर्छ, अनौपचारिक कुराकानीमा वडा स्तरकै निर्वाचनमा करोड रूपियाँ भन्दा बेसी र सांसदमा १० करोडसम्म खर्च गर्दा पनि आफू हार्नु परेको गुनासो केही को रह्यो ।

यस्तो असीमित निर्वाचन खर्चले समाजमा धेरै किसिमका नकारात्मक प्रभाव पारेका छन् । यस्ता प्रभावका केही उदाहरणको रूपमा यिनलाई पाएको छुः

- राजनीति, निर्वाचन र प्रणालीप्रति नै आम वितृष्णा बढ्नु,
- खर्च गर्न नसक्ने इमानदार र सत्यनिष्ठ राजनीतिज्ञ पाखा लाग्नु र त्यस्तालाई पैसावाला वा आपराधिक प्रवृत्तिका व्यक्तिले प्रतिस्थापन गर्नु,
- निष्ठाको होइन, पद र पैसाको राजनीति हावी हुनु,
- निर्वाचित निकाय पैसावाला वा आपराधिक प्रवृत्तिकाको नियन्त्रणमा जानु,
- अत्यधिक अपारदर्शी सम्पत्तिको प्रयोगका कारण समुच्चा चुनाव र प्रणाली नै बदनाम हुनु,
- सिद्धान्त, निष्ठा र मर्यादालाई कायम राख्ने भन्दा जसरी पनि जित्नेलाई टिकट दिन दलको प्राथमिकतामा पर्दै जानु,
- राजनीतिक फन्ड र निर्वाचन खर्चका नाममा भ्रष्टाचारले संस्थागत रूप धारण गर्नु,
- निर्वाचित निकायहरू सुशासनमुखी हुनभन्दा इन्ट्रेस्ट ग्रुपको चङ्गलमा पर्नु,
- निर्वाचित पदाधिकारीलाई भएको निर्वाचन खर्च उठाउन र अर्को निर्वाचनका लागि चाहिने स्रोत जुटाउन पर्ने प्रभावले निम्ताउने विकृति, आदि ।

यसैसँग सम्बन्धित एउटा अति मार्मिक प्रसङ्ग कोट्याउँ ।

निर्वाचित एउटा सांसदले आफूलाई टिकाउन के गर्न बाध्य छ भन्ने मार्गदर्शक पनि चुनावमा भएको वा गरिने खर्च नै भई सकेको छ । खर्चले कसरी सांसदको भूमिका निर्देशित गर्छ भन्ने हेर्दा उसका दिनचर्या मुख्य रूपले तीन कुरामा केन्द्रित देखिन्छः १) मन्त्री हुन वा आर्थिक प्रशासनिक भूमिका पाउन नेतालाई खुसी पार्ने, २) मतदाता खुसी पार्न प्रक्रिया बाहिरका विकास कामका प्रयास गर्ने र व्यक्तिगत स्वार्थका काम गर्ने (विधि, प्रक्रिया र पद्धति बाहिर गई निर्वाचन क्षेत्रमा योजना पार्ने, सरुवा, बहुवा वा नियमित प्रक्रियाबाट सम्भव नहुने काम सम्भव बनाउन दबाव दिने), ३) गत निर्वाचनको खर्च उठाउन र अर्को निर्वाचनको लागि चाहिने खर्चको जोहो गर्न र वा दातालाई रिक्काउन । प्रणालीले निर्वाचित प्रतिनिधिमाथि कस्तो दबाव सिर्जना गर्न सक्छ भन्ने यो थौटा उदाहरण हो ।

निर्वाचन आयोग र दलहरूले इमानदार प्रयास गर्दा निर्वाचनलाई कम भड्किलो बनाउन सकिन्छ भन्ने उदाहरण हाम्रो स्थानीय वा संसदीय चुनावमा भएका प्रचार शैलीमा आएको फरक देख्न सकिन्छ । २०६४ को पहिलो संविधान सभा निर्वाचनको क्रममा थालनी गरिएका सुधारका प्रयास तथा २०६५ मा सुरु गरिएको दीर्घकालीन रणनीतिक सोच र सो

को कार्यान्वयनको परिणामस्वरूप हालका चुनावमा ठुला ब्यानर, भन्डा, र पोस्टरको साइज तथा माइकिड, टी-शर्ट, टोपीको प्रयोगमा उल्लेख्य कमी आएका छन्, ठुला आमसभा कम हुँदै गएका छन्, मतदाता नामावलीमा गुणात्मक सुधार हुन सकेको छ, निर्वाचनका विविध पाटोमा प्रविधिको उल्लेख्य प्रयोग हुन सकेको छ। निर्वाचनको क्रममा हुने भौतिक हिंसा कम भएको छ। तर यो विचमा अन्य अनगिन्ती विसङ्गति र विकृति पनि बढेको देखियो जसमा निर्वाचन खर्चमा अस्वाभाविक रूपले वृद्धि हुनु प्रमुख हो।

खर्च वा विकृति नियन्त्रणको कुरा गर्दा हामीले सबै अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय रूपमा प्रयोग गरिएका धेरै विषयलाई हाम्रो कानून र प्रक्रियामा समावेश गरेका छौं। संरचना बनाइएका छन्। तर पनि वाञ्छित प्रतिफल दिन चुकेको अवस्था छ। यसो हुनुमा, मूलतः स्थापित विषयलाई कार्यान्वयन गराउने क्षमता पर्याप्त नभएको, दल वा उम्मेदवारहरू अपारदर्शितामै रमाउने र सो उपर दण्डित हुन नपर्ने, लगायत केही संरचनागत, प्रणाली वा प्रक्रियागत कुराहरूले पनि निर्वाचन अपारदर्शी र महँगो बनाएका छन्। यी विविध परिस्थितिको पृष्ठभूमिमा राजनीतिक वित्तलगायत दलको सुशासन, निर्वाचन खर्चलगायतको क्षेत्रमा सुधार गर्न (वास्तवमा यसलाई निर्वाचन सुधार भने पनि हुन्छ) देहायका कुराले निर्देशित गर्नु पर्ने हुन्छ:

- क) दलहरू विधि-विधान र पद्धति अनुरूप चलनु, र यिनले आफ्नै दलभित्रवाटै सुशासनको नमुना प्रस्तुत गर्न सक्नु,
- ख) दलहरू आम्दानी-खर्चका विषयमा पूर्ण पारदर्शी रहनु, राजनीतिक फण्डको नाममा भ्रष्टाचार र व्यभिचार बढाउने काम नगरनु
- ग) निर्वाचित व्यक्तिहरू आफ्ना निर्वाचन क्षेत्रमा मात्र सीमित नभै राष्ट्रका हुन सक्नु
- घ) प्रत्येक नागरिकले निर्वाचन न्यायको पूर्ण अनुभूत गर्न पाउनु, र मतदाताले कुनै लोभ-लालच वा दबावमा नपरी स्वेच्छाले आफ्नो मत विवेकपूर्वक प्रयोग गर्न सक्नु,
- ङ) राजनीतिक दल र तीनका कार्यकर्ता र उम्मेदवार “जसरी पनि चुनाव जित्ने” मानसिकताबाट माथि उठुनु र आफैले बनाएको खेलको नियम भित्र रहेर आफ्ना निर्वाचनका गतिविधि स्वच्छ हिसाबले सञ्चालन गर्नु,
- च) सरकारमा रहेका दलले वा राज्य पक्षले राज्यको स्रोत, साधन, र शक्ति कसैको पक्ष वा विपक्षमा प्रयोग गरेर मतमा प्रभाव नपारुनु, अर्थात् “Level Playing Field” को नियममा सबै बसुनु,
- छ) मिडिया, नागरिक समाज, निर्वाचन पर्यवेक्षकलगायत सबै हिस्सेदारहरूले साँच्चैको तटस्थ भूमिका निर्वाह गर्न सक्नु,
- ज) निर्वाचनको परिणाम 4M (Money, Muscle, Materials, Media) ले निर्धारण गर्न वा हाइज्याक गर्न नसकोस्,
- झ) निर्वाचन आयोगले कसैको दबाव वा मोलाहिजामा नपरी “स्वतन्त्र, तटस्थ एवं निष्पक्ष” ढङ्गबाट “रेफरी”लगायतको भूमिका निर्वाह गरी “स्वच्छ” तरिकाले निर्वाचनलगायत दलहरू र निर्वाचन खर्चको नियमन गर्न सकोस्,
- ञ) अन्ततोगत्वा, निर्वाचित पदाधिकारी र निकायले जनचाहना बमोजिम जिम्मेवारीपूर्वक भूमिका निर्वाह गर्न सक्नु।

अर्थात्, दल तथा निर्वाचनको स्वच्छताका लागि व्यापक क्षेत्रमा सुधारको खाँचो छ। हामीले विद्यमान कतिपय संरचना, प्रणाली, प्रक्रिया, पद्धति, र कार्यशैलीमा पुनरावलोकन गरी सुधार गर्न जरुरी छ। तीमध्ये खासगरी राजनीतिक वित्तको सेरोफेरोमा रहेर त्यसलाई प्रभाव पार्ने तत्त्वहरूलाई निस्प्रभावी बनाउन गरिनु पर्ने केही सुधारका क्षेत्रकाबारे अधिल्लो परिच्छेदमा उल्लेख गर्नेछु।

## ८. सुधारका लागि प्रस्तावित सुझाव

अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय अभ्यासका प्रमुखजसो प्रावधान हाम्रोमा समेटिएका छन् तर कार्यान्वयनको पाटो अत्यन्त कमजोर रह्यो। यस सन्दर्भमा, हाम्रो आवश्यकता भनेको भई रहेका व्यवस्थाको प्रभावकारी कार्यान्वयन हो। तथापि, अन्य विभिन्न तत्त्वले पनि असर गरिरहेका छन्। त्यसैले, समुच्चा अवस्थामा सुधार गर्न निर्वाचन प्रणाली, संरचना, दल र उम्मेदवारको व्यवहार, निर्वाचन व्यवस्थापन, सुरक्षा, अन्य अभ्यासलगायतका विषयमा केही थप सुधारका बुँदा संक्षिप्त रूपमा प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ:

## ८.१ निर्वाचन प्रणालीमा सुधार

८.१.१ तुलनात्मक रूपमा उम्मेदवार केन्द्रित बहुमतीय प्रणालीले हिंसा र खर्चको मात्रा बढाउने तथ्य अनुसन्धानहरूले देखिएका छन् । यस सन्दर्भमा, हालको निर्वाचन प्रणाली पनि खर्च बढाउन जिम्मेवार छ । त्यसैले, उम्मेदवार-केन्द्रित भन्दा दल-केन्द्रित बनाउन संसद् (केन्द्र र प्रदेश) को निर्वाचनका लागि पूर्ण समानुपातिक वा बहु-सदस्यीय निर्वाचन क्षेत्र प्रणाली विकल्प हुन सक्छन्, यसबारेमा बहस चलाउनु ।

यी दुवै विकल्पले पैसा र प्रतिनिधिमाथिको प्रत्यक्ष दबाव कम गर्न मद्दत गर्छ र प्रतिनिधिलाई क्षेत्रमुखीबाट राष्ट्रमुखी बन्न सहयोगी हुनेछ ।

८.१.२ तत्कालै प्रणाली परिवर्तनको वातावरण बन्न नसक्ने अवस्था भएमा भई रहेको मिश्रित प्रणालीमा देहायका थप सुधार गर्ने,

- प्रत्यक्ष तर्फको उम्मेदवारीलाई समानुपातिक बनाउने,
- समानुपातिक तर्फको सिट वितरण हाल सबैलाई अंशबन्डाको रूपमा वितरण भएकोमा यसलाई वास्तवमै प्रतिनिधित्वमा पछाडि परेको समूहको लागि मात्र छुट्टयाउने,
- सङ्घीय निर्वाचनको समानुपातिक तर्फ राष्ट्रिय (१० प्रतिशत सिट) र प्रादेशिक (बाँकी सिट) निर्वाचन क्षेत्र र सूची कायम गरी सोबाट छनौट गर्ने,
- प्रत्यक्ष तर्फको खासगरी दलित र महिलाको प्रतिनिधित्व बढाउन निश्चित प्रतिशत सिट आरक्षण गर्ने र ती सिटको लागि निर्वाचन क्षेत्रको छनौट पालै-पालो हुने गरी मिलाउने,
- दुवै प्रणालीका लागि एउटै मतपत्र कायम गर्ने (दुइटै मतपत्र राख्दा व्यवस्थापन र सुरक्षा खर्च दोब्बर बढेको छ) ।

८.१.३ निर्वाचित हुने पदाधिकारी खासगरी सांसद सङ्ख्या घटाउने,

८.१.४ जिल्ला समन्वय समितिको कुनै औचित्य देखिन्न, सो व्यवस्था खारेज गर्ने,

८.१.५ स्थानीय तहको निर्वाचन स्वतन्त्र उम्मेदवारको बिच गराउने ।

## ८.२ राजनीतिक दललाई पारदर्शी, जिम्मेवार र व्यवस्थित बनाउन

८.२.१ दलको खर्च व्यवस्थापन कालागि तोकिएका मापदण्डका आधारमा सरकारले अनुदान दिने,

८.२.२ दलहरूको आय-व्ययको लेखापरीक्षण महालेखा परीक्षकले गर्ने,

८.२.३ दलहरूको आम्दानी खर्चको विवरण तत्काल अनलाइनमा राख्ने तथा सोमा नागरिक निगरानी बढाउने,

८.२.४ राजनीतिक दललाई सहयोग गर्ने दाताले सबै दलहरूलाई र एउटै दललाई वर्षभरिमा के कति सम्म सहयोग गर्न सक्ने हो सोको सीमा तोक्ने,

८.२.५ निर्वाचनमा भाग लिने दलले सो निर्वाचनमा आफूले कतिसम्म खर्च गर्ने र त्यस्तो खर्चको स्रोत अग्रिम रूपमा निर्वाचन आयोगमा बुझाउने र आयोग नागरिक समाजले सोही आधारमा समेत उनीहरूको आम्दानी खर्चको अनुगमन गर्ने,

८.२.६ प्रत्येक दाताले एउटा निर्वाचनमा कुल कतिसम्म रकम दल वा उम्मेदवार वा दुवैलाई सहयोग गर्न पाउने हुन् सोको सीमा तोक्ने,

८.२.७ दाताले दल वा उम्मेदवारहरूलाई दिने सहयोग राशिमा आयकर छुट दिने,

८.२.८ दल वा उम्मेदवारलाई सहयोग गर्ने दाताले गरेको सहयोग राशि आफैले तत्काल सार्वजनिक गर्ने र कसलाई के कति दिएको निर्वाचन आयोगलाई जानकारी दिनुपर्ने व्यवस्था गर्ने,

८.२.९ अपारदर्शी हिसाबले कुनै दाताले दल वा उम्मेदवारलाई सहयोग गरेको पाइएमा त्यस्तो कार्यलाई अपराधको परिभाषामा समेट्ने र दण्ड-जरिवाना गर्ने,

- ८.२.१० दलहरूले खासगरी संसद्का उम्मेदवार छनौटमा प्राइमरी चुनाव (Primary election) को परिपाटीमा जाने,
- ८.२.११ उम्मेदवार बनाउने आधार कानूनमै तोक्ने र जुन तहको निर्वाचन हो त्यही तहको पार्टी कमिटीले उम्मेदवार छनौट गर्ने,
- ८.२.१२ दलहरूले आफ्ना कार्यकर्तालाई इमान र नैतिकताकाको राजनीति गराउने दिसामा प्रशिक्षण दिन अनिवार्य गराउने ।
- ८.२.१३ सुरक्षाका लागि चोरको हातमा चाबी दिने भनेभै, निर्वाचन व्यवस्थापन र सुरक्षामा राजनीतिक दलको भूमिका बढाउँदै उनीहरूलाई थप जिम्मेवार बनाउँदै जाने । निर्वाचन आचारसंहिता हातीको देखाउने दाँत मात्र भयो । कानूनमा राख्नु पर्ने दण्डनीय व्यवस्थालाई कानूनमै राख्ने र अन्य विषयको हकमा दलहरूले नै स्वैच्छिक आचारसंहिता तयार गरी लागु गर्ने र उनीहरूले नै अनुगमन गर्ने प्रणालीतर्फ जाने ।

### ८.३ उम्मेदवार र निर्वाचित प्रतिनिधिलाई थप जिम्मेवार बनाउन

- ८.३.१ मतपत्रमा NO VOTE (NATA) को व्यवस्था गर्ने,
- ८.३.२ निर्वाचित प्रतिनिधिलाई थप जिम्मेवार बनाउन प्रत्याह्वानको व्यवस्था राख्ने,
- ८.३.३ संसद्लाई बलियो बनाउन तथा विधायिकी काममा केन्द्रित गराउन सांसदबाट मन्त्री नबनाउने,
- ८.३.४ उम्मेदवारी दिँदै आफ्नो सम्पत्तिको विवरण, योग्यता, अपराधिक पृष्ठभूमि पेस गर्नुपर्ने र निर्वाचन आयोगले सो विवरण सार्वजनिक गर्ने र त्यसका आधारमा मतदाताले आफ्नो धारणा बनाउने वातावरण बनाउने, यस्तो विवरणको सार्वजनिक अनुगमन हुने वातावरण बनाइ जिम्मेवार बनाउने ।
- ८.३.५ उम्मेदवारी दिँदाकै बखतमा निर्वाचन प्रचार-प्रसारमा हुने अनुमानित खर्च र सो को आम्दानीको स्रोत उम्मेदवारले दिनुपर्ने र सोही आधारमा निर्वाचन खर्चको अनुगमन हुने व्यवस्था गर्ने,

### ८.४ निर्वाचन मिति र अन्य व्यवस्थापन:

- ८.४.१ आकस्मिक रूपमा दलको स्वार्थ केन्द्रित गरी तोकिएको निर्वाचन मितिले बढाउने खर्च नियन्त्रणका लागि समेत निर्वाचन हुने मिति कानूनमै तोक्ने (कम्तीमा पदावधि सकिने वर्षको फलाना महिनाको फलानो गते वा हप्ताको फलानो बार भनेर किटन सकिन्छ),
- ८.४.२ उप निर्वाचनको मिति तोकिएको पद रिक्त भएको तीन महिनाभित्र निर्वाचन आयोगले पदपूर्ति गरिसक्नु पर्ने प्रावधान राख्ने,
- ८.४.३ उम्मेदवार वा दलको प्रचार-प्रसारको शैली टाउन-हल परिपाटीमा जाने । भरसक सबै दल वा उम्मेदवारलाई एकै पटक एकै ठाउँमा राखी मतदाताको जिज्ञासा मेट्ने वातावरण बनाउन प्रोत्साहन गर्ने,
- ८.४.४ निर्वाचन प्रचार प्रसारको समय घटाउने । उम्मेदवारहरूले लामो समयको प्रचार अवधि निर्वाचन खर्च बढ्ने कारणको रूपमा हेरेका छन्,
- ८.४.५ अग्रिम मतदानको सम्भावना अध्ययन गर्ने ।

### ८.५ स्थानीय सरकारको भूमिका बढाउने तथा खर्च घटाउन

देश सङ्घात्मक शासन व्यवस्थामा गई सकेको सन्दर्भलाई समेत विचार गरी निर्वाचन व्यवस्थापनलगायत निर्वाचन खर्च साभेदारी गर्ने हिसाबबाट देहायका कामहरू स्थानीय सरकारलाई सुम्पिँदै जाने नीति लिई निर्वाचन आयोगले सहकार्य सुरु गर्ने

- ८.५.१ मतदाता नामावली सङ्कलन, अपडेट, आदि सबै काम,
- ८.५.२ मतदाता तथा नागरिक शिक्षाको काम, उनीहरूले स्थानीय पाठ्यक्रममा पनि राख्न सक्दछन्,
- ८.५.३ निर्वाचन सुरक्षा स्थानीय सरकार र दललाई जिम्मेवार बनाउन उनीहरूको भूमिका बढाउने,

- ८.५.४ निर्वाचन कर्मचारी व्यवस्थापन तर्फ मतदान अधिकृत बाहेकका अरु सबै निर्वाचन सम्बद्ध जनशक्तिको जोहो स्थानीय सरकारले गर्ने । वर्तमान तथा पूर्व राष्ट्रसेवक, स्थानीय स्तरमा निर्वाचनमा सहयोग गर्न चाहने इच्छुक अन्य जनशक्तिको प्रयोग गर्न सकिने,
- ८.५.५ मतदान केन्द्र पहिचान, तिनको स्तरोन्नति, आदि जस्ता कार्यहरू स्थानीय सरकार बाट गराउने,
- ८.५.६ स्थानीय तहमै पाउने निर्वाचन सामानको व्यवस्थापन स्थानीय सरकारबाट गराउने,
- ८.५.७ आफ्नो क्षेत्रको निर्वाचनका विविध पाटोको अनुसन्धान गरी सुधारको नेतृत्व लिने स्थानीय सरकारलाई प्रोत्साहित गर्ने,
- ८.५.८ स्थानीय सरकार र दलहरूको अगुवाइमा निर्वाचनको सम्पूर्ण व्यवस्थापनको नमुना अभ्यास सुरु गर्ने र तीनको मूल्याङ्कनका आधारमा परिमार्जन गर्दै विस्तार गर्दै जाने,
- ८.५.९ मतदान केन्द्रमै मतगणना गर्ने,
- ८.५.१० मतपत्रको छपाई प्रदेश तह वा अझ निर्वाचन क्षेत्र तहमै गर्न सुरु गर्ने । यसले खर्च घटाउन मात्र होइन कि व्यवस्थापन देखि प्रचार प्रसारको समय छोटो बनाउन मद्दत गर्छ । यसमा आयोगले सेक्युरिटी फिचर सहित डिजाइन पठाउने र निर्वाचन अधिकृतले छपाइको व्यवस्था गर्ने ।

#### ८.६ निर्वाचन सुरक्षा

निर्वाचन व्यवस्थापनमा भन्दा निर्वाचन सुरक्षा खर्चमा हुने वृद्धिको रफ्तार बढी छ, यसलाई कम गर्न:

- ८.६.१ निर्वाचन सुरक्षामा राजनीतिक दलहरूलाई समेत जिम्मेवार बनाउने, उनीहरूको संलग्नता सुनिश्चित गर्ने विधि र प्रक्रिया तय गर्ने,
- ८.६.२ अस्थायी प्रहरी, म्यादी प्रहरी राख्ने परम्पराको अन्त्य गर्ने, निर्वाचन सुरक्षाका लागि स्थानीय तहमा उपलब्ध पूर्व सुरक्षाकर्मी, निजी क्षेत्रमा कार्यरत सुरक्षाकर्मी वा स्थानीय स्वयंसेवकको प्रयोग गर्ने ।

#### ८.७ निर्वाचन खर्च र आम्दानीको पारदर्शिता

- ८.७.१ उम्मेदवारले निर्वाचनमा गर्ने खर्चको पूर्वानुमान गरी त्यस्तो खर्चको स्रोत सम्बन्धी विवरण उम्मेदवारीसँगै बुझाउने व्यवस्था गर्ने, र त्यसको अनुगमन र कारवाहीको थप आधार समेत बनाउने,
- ८.७.२ निर्वाचन खर्चको हालको सीमा हटाउने वा व्यावहारिक बनाउने । माथिल्लो सीमा तोकिसकेपछि त्यस भित्रको तपशीलका शीर्षकहरूमा हाल राख्दै आएको खर्चको हद नराख्ने, उम्मेदवारले आफ्नो आवश्यकताअनुसारका शीर्षकमा खर्च गर्ने छुट दिने, साथै, पेस गर्नुपर्ने विवरण पनि सरलीकृत गर्ने, किर्ते बिल भरपाई बनाउने र पेस गर्ने परिस्थितिको अन्त्य गर्ने,
- ८.७.३ निर्वाचन कालागि प्राप्त आम्दानी र भएका खर्चको विवरण अनिवार्य रूपमा अनलाइन राख्ने व्यवस्था मिलाउने,
- ८.७.४ निर्वाचन आम्दानी तथा खर्चको अनुगमन गर्न प्रयोगकर्तालाई सजिलो हुने किसिमका एप्स तयार गरी तीनलाई मोबाइलगायतका प्रविधि एवं सामाजिक सञ्जालको समेत माध्यमबाट आम नागरिकले अनुगमन तथा सूचना गर्ने प्रक्रिया निर्माण गर्ने,

#### ८.८ निर्वाचन जन्य अपराध नियन्त्रण र कारवाही

- ८.८.१ कानूनले तोकेको समयभित्र विवरण नबुझाउने निर्वाचित प्रतिनिधिको पद स्वतः समाप्त हुने र अन्य उम्मेदवार भए स्वतः कालोसूचीमा रहने र यस्तो सूचीमा पर्नेले ६ वर्षसम्म कुनै निर्वाचनमा उम्मेदवार बन्न नपाउने प्रावधान कानूनमै राख्ने, दलको हकमा पनि यस्तै दण्डनीय व्यवस्था गरी कानूनको पालना गराउने वातावरण बनाउने,

- ८.८.२ पेस गरेको विवरण सामान्यतया विवाद परेको अवस्थामा मात्र आयोगले प्रवेश गर्ने परिपाटीको साटो आम्दानी खर्च विवरणको सत्यता बुझ्न आयोगले नियमित अडिट गर्ने (जस्तै, sampling को आधारमा निश्चित प्रतिशतलाई), कारवाहीको हालको जटिल प्रक्रिया सहज र सरल बनाउने, प्रमाणको भार सम्बन्धित दल वा उम्मेदवारको हुने व्यवस्था गर्ने,
- ८.८.३ अहिलेको बेसी फोकस खर्चमा छ, यसमा मात्र होइन कि दल र उम्मेदवारको आम्दानीको नियमित परिक्षण गर्ने र पारदर्शिता तर्फ जोड दिन आवश्यक थप कानुनी आधार तयार गर्ने,
- ८.८.४ हालको निर्वाचन आचारसंहितामा व्यापक परिमार्जनको खाँचो छ। अपराधिक र दण्डनीय कामलाई यसबाट हटाई निर्वाचन अपराध सम्बन्धी कानूनलाई अद्यावधिक गरी दोहोरोपन हटाउने। आचारसंहितालाई स्वैच्छिक बनाउने, दलहरूले नै बनाउने तथा यसको पालना र अनुगमनको जिम्मेवारी स्वयं दलहरूलाई नै दिने,
- ८.८.५ निर्वाचन अपराध सम्बन्धी उल्लङ्घन र अपराधजन्य सबै विषयको कारवाही गर्ने सबै काम अदालतलाई दिने।

## ८.९ प्रविधिको प्रयोग

- ८.९.१ निर्वाचन सहभागिता बढाउन तथा कम खर्चिलो व्यवस्थापनका हिसाबले अनलाइन माध्यमबाट मतदाता नामावली सङ्कलन, मतदान, अनुगमन जस्ता कुरामा प्रविधिको प्रयोग गर्ने,
- ८.९.२ निर्वाचन खर्चको अनुगमनमा ड्रोनलगायतका नयाँ प्रविधि र सोसल मिडियाको उच्च प्रयोगमा जाने,

## ८.१० क्षमता विकास

- ८.१०.१ राजनीतिक वित्त व्यवस्थापन, सोको नियमित अनुगमन, परीक्षणलगायतका काम गर्ने गरी आयोगमा छुट्टै महाशाखा को व्यवस्था गर्ने,
- ८.१०.२ अनुगमन कार्यमा नागरिक समाजको भूमिका र क्षमता विस्तारमा आयोगले प्राथमिकता दिने,
- ८.१०.३ खोज पत्रकारिताबाट निस्कने परिणामबाट दबाव सिर्जना गर्न र व्यवहार परिवर्तन गर्न महत्त्वपूर्ण भूमिका रहने हुँदा त्यस्तो खोज कार्यमा आयोगले स्रोत व्यवस्थापनमा सहयोगी भूमिका खेल्ने।

## ८.११ विविध

- ८.११.१ राजनीति र निर्वाचनमा कालो धनको प्रयोग रोकन समेत, नीतिगत निर्णयको नाममा मन्त्रिपरिषद्बाट यस्ता अज्ञात स्रोतको पक्षमा हुने निर्णय रोकन यस्ता नीतिगत भ्रष्टाचारजन्य कामलाई अख्तियारको कार्यक्षेत्रमा ल्याउने,
- ८.११.२ निर्वाचन खर्च अनुगमनमा नागरिक समाजको सक्रिय सहभागिताको लागि थप स्पेस निर्माण गर्ने,
- ८.११.३ खासगरी निर्वाचनको दौरानमा निर्वाचन खर्चको स्रोत र खर्चको सुक्ष्म निगरानी राख्ने र एकीकृत एवं समन्वयात्मक कारवाहीको रणनीति बनाउन समेत निर्वाचन आयोग, अख्तियार दुरुपयोग अनुसन्धान आयोग, मुद्रा निर्मलीकरण विभाग, राजस्व अनुसन्धान विभाग, राष्ट्रिय अनुसन्धान विभाग, नेपाल प्रहरीको विशेष ब्युरोलाई समेत संयुक्त रूपमा परिचालन गर्ने रणनीति लिने,
- ८.११.४ संसदीय विकास कोष आदिका नामबाट सांसदले गर्ने खर्चले निर्वाचनका लागि चाहिने समान खेल मैदान (level playing field) निर्माणमा असर पारेको मात्र होइनकि यसले चुनावलाई भन्ने महँगो बनायो। यस्ता कोष बन्द गर्ने,
- ८.११.५ नागरिक शिक्षा र नैतिक शिक्षामा राज्यको लगानी बढाउने र विद्यालय तह देखिनै यस्ता विषयलाई पाठ्यक्रममै समावेश गरी भविष्यको पुस्ता तयार गर्न उच्च प्राथमिकता दिने,
- ८.११.६ निर्वाचन व्यवस्थापनमा स्थानीय सरकार वा स्थानीय कार्यालयले गर्न सक्ने तपशीलका काममा समेत केन्द्रित आयोगको हालको भूमिकाको व्यापक पुनरावलोकन गरी समग्र निर्वाचन व्यवहारको सुक्ष्म अनुगमन, अनुसन्धान गरी व्यापक सुधारलगायतका नीतिगत तथा नियामक काममा बढी केन्द्रित हुने निकायको रूपमा

विकास गर्न ध्यान दिने ।

## ९. अन्त्यमा

राजनीतिक वित्त व्यवस्थापन कमजोर भई दिँदा प्रजातन्त्रका मूल स्तम्भ एवं प्राण वायुको रूपमा रहेका राजनीतिक दलहरू र समुच्चा निर्वाचन प्रणालीप्रति नै आमस्तरमा वितृष्णा बढेको छ । यिनै कमजोरीको पृष्ठभूमिमा समुच्चा राजनीतिक व्यवस्था र निर्वाचन प्रणालीकै भविष्यकाबारेमा प्रश्न उठिरहेका छन् । राज्यले चाहँदा यस्ता कमीकमजोरी पूर्ण रूपले हटाउन समय लागे पनि तिनलाई कम गर्न सकिन्छ भन्ने कुरा विश्वका कतिपय देशले देखाएका पनि छन् । त्यसैले, मूलतः यस्ता सुधारका कुरामा राज्य शक्तिको इच्छा प्रथम पाइला हो । राज्यले चाहँदा माथि उल्लिखित वा सुधारका अरू थप कुरा लागु गर्न नसकिने हैन । स्मरणीय छ कि यी माथि सुझाइएका कतिपय सुधारका काम आयोगले आफ्नै स्तरबाट गर्न सक्छ भने कतिपय विषयमा व्यापक राष्ट्रिय सहमति बनाउनुपर्ने हुन्छ । यस सन्दर्भमा मेरो विश्वास छ कि आयोग आफैले गर्न सक्ने काम तत्कालै सुरु गरेर सुधारको नेतृत्व गर्नेछ र अन्य निकायबाट हुनुपर्ने काम गराउन आफू स्वयं र निर्वाचनका अरू हिस्सेदारलगायत सबै क्षेत्रको परिचालनबाट पर्याप्त दबाव सिर्जना गरी वातावरण बनाउन सफल हुनेछ ।

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### About Author

Bhojraj Pokharel, former Chief Election Commissioner of Nepal (2006-2009) played a key role in integrating the Maoist rebels into democratic electoral processes and was one of the key architects to make Nepal's elected bodies most inclusive and representative. He also co-led the Carter Center's 2015 Electoral Observation Mission to Myanmar and served as a member of the UN Secretary General's

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## Policy Commentary

### सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन : वर्तमान अवस्था र भावी कार्यदिशा गोपीनाथ मैनाली <sup>a\*</sup>

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#### सारांश

राज्यले प्रभावकारी सेवा व्यवस्थापन र स्वच्छ राजस्व परिचालन एवम् जिम्मेवारीपूर्ण खर्च गर्नको निम्ति प्रभावकारी सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन महत्वपूर्ण हुन्छ। यस लेखको उद्देश्य वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनको सङ्क्षिप्त विकासक्रम र वर्तमान अवस्थाको लेखाजोखा गर्दै सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनका उद्देश्य, सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन चक्र तथा नेपालमा देखिएका प्रमुख सवाल र चुनौतीको पहिचान गर्नु र भावी दिनमा अवलम्बन गर्नेपर्ने केही नीतिगत तथा कार्यगत पक्षमा सुझावहरू पेश गर्नु हो। सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनका दश वटा चुनौतीहरूको पहिचान गर्दै सुधारका लागि वास्तविक बजेट निर्माण, योजना र खर्च संरचनाविच तार्किक सम्बन्ध, स्वचालित वित्तीय कारोबार, सूचना समावेश गर्ने खरिद प्रणाली, एकीकृत सार्वजनिक वित्तीय सूचना व्यवस्थापन प्रणाली, सम्पूर्ण बजेट प्रलेखीकरण प्रणाली, नतिजामूलक अनुगमन र कम्प्युटर-सहकृत लेखा परीक्षण, आदि सुझावहरू पेश गरिएका छन्।

#### Abstract

Effective public financial management is important for effective service management, clean revenue mobilization, and responsible spending. The purpose of this article is to present a brief history of financial management and assessment the current situation, and to identify the purpose of public financial management, the working of public financial management cycle, the major issues and challenges in Nepal, and to suggest some policy and action plan to be adopted in coming days. Identifying some ten challenges of the current public financial management, suggestion are offered which include practices and measures for actual budget, the logical relationship between planning and expenditure structure, automated financial transactions, procurement system that captures information, integrated financial information management system, whole-of-the-budget documentation system, result-based monitoring and computer-assisted accounting.

**Keywords:** सार्वजनिक वित्त, राजस्व परिचालन, स्वच्छता, बजेट, योजना, खरिद, वित्तीय सूचना व्यवस्थापन, सम्पूर्ण बजेट प्रलेखीकरण, अनुगमन

Public finance, revenue mobilization, integrity, budget, planning, procurement, information management, whole-of-the-budget, monitoring

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## १. विषय प्रवेश

राज्यसञ्चालनमा सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन निकै संवेदनशील मानिन्छ। सरकारको आम्दानी, खर्च, दायित्व र सम्पत्तिको व्यवस्थापन जति पारदर्शी, जवाफदेही र स्वच्छ बनाउन सकियो, त्यसैको सापेक्षमा शासकीय प्रणालीको वैधता र विश्वास देखिने गर्दछ। सरकारका यावत् क्रियाकलाप र नीति कार्यक्रमलाई प्रभावकारी बनाउने आधार भनेकै सार्वजनिक वित्त व्यवस्थापन हो। सरकारले जे गर्दा पनि कि त आम्दानी गर्छ वा खर्च। त्यसैले भन्ने गरिन्छ, सरकार नै वित्त हो। यस अर्थमा शासकीय व्यवस्थापनको प्रभावकारिता भनेको वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनको प्रभावकारिता हो।

सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनको महत्त्व हुनुको पछाडी दुई कारण छन्। पहिलो, प्रभावकारी सेवा व्यवस्थापन र दोस्रो, स्वच्छ राजस्व परिचालन एवम् जिम्मेवारीपूर्ण खर्च। विकासशील मुलकहरूमा विद्यमान गरिबी, विपन्नता बेरोजगारी र असमानता जस्ता आर्थिक-सामाजिक पछौटेपनको निवारण वा अन्त्य गर्न आर्थिक वृद्धि आवश्यक हुन्छ। साथै सेवा प्रवाह सबल, पारदर्शी र जवाफदेही बनाउनु पनि उत्तिकै जरुरी हुन्छ। राजस्व सङ्कलन र खर्च व्यवस्थापन स्वच्छ र प्रभावकारी हुने संस्थागत प्रणाली स्थापना गर्नाले सार्वजनिक संस्थाहरूको जनविश्वास बढ्न जान्छ। यी दुई कुरा नै शासकीय सुधारको जगमा रहने विषय पनि हुन्। त्यसैले सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन शासकीय प्रणालीलाई सबल, प्रभावकारी र वैध बनाउने आधार हो।

## २. वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनको संक्षिप्त विकासक्रम र वर्तमान अवस्था

वि. स. २००७ अगि सरकारी आय व्यय अर्थात् बजेट सार्वजनिक हुने प्रथा थिएन। सरकारी आय व्ययको हरहिसाबको जानकारी सर्वसाधारणलाई दिनु न त आवश्यक मानिन्थ्यो, न त्यस प्रकारको संरचना/प्रणाली नै थियो। सरकारको आय तोकिएका अड्डाहरूले खरदार गुणवन्तले विकास गरेका बहीखातामा राख्ने गर्दथे, खर्च लेख्ने कामचाहिँ 'दरबन्दी व्यवस्था' अनुरूप हुन्थ्यो। अड्डाहरूमा आर्थिक वर्षभित्र खर्च गर्न पाउने रकमको कच्चावारी सहितको दरबन्दी सनद श्री ३ कमाण्डर इन चीफको छाप लागेपछि, मुलुकी अड्डाले जारी गर्दथ्यो, जुन सनद वर्षौं कायम रहन्थ्यो। सरकारले बजेट प्रस्तुत गर्ने चलन २००८ मा सुरु भएपछि प्रत्येक आर्थिक वर्षमा हुने खर्च र आम्दानीको निर्धारण हुन थाल्यो। २०१६ मा प्रथम जननिर्वाचित सरकारले सरकारी खर्च सम्बन्धी कार्यविधि कार्यान्वयनमा ल्याएपछि विनियोजन ऐनमा उल्लेख भएका खर्चहरू नयाँ भुक्तानी प्रणाली मार्फत राख्नुपर्ने भयो। यसले बजेट र लेखा सेस्तालाई पूरकका रूपमा स्थापित गर्‍यो। उक्त कानून अनुरूप आर्थिक कारोबारको अभिलेखन तथा प्रतिवेदन गर्न २०१८/१९ बाट नयाँ सेस्ता प्रणाली लागु गरियो। यो नेपालको वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनमा महत्त्वपूर्ण कोसेढुङ्गा थियो।

वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनमा एकरूपता र प्रणाली विकासका लागि संरचनागत व्यवस्था पनि आवश्यक थियो। बजेट प्रथाको शुरुवातसँगै छरिएर रहेको लेखालाई एकीकृत बनाउन २००८ मा एकाउन्टेन जनरल (महालेखापाल) कार्यालयको स्थापना गरी आर्थिक कारोबारको व्यावसायिक विकासको शुरुवात गरियो। एकाउन्टेन जनरलको कार्यालयलाई यति शक्तिशाली बनाइएको थियो कि कुमारीचोक कार्यालय (खर्च जाँच गर्ने), राजस्व परिचालन, राष्ट्रिय ढुकुटी सञ्चालन र सिक्का निष्कासन/टकमारी जस्ता सबै काम यसै मातहत राखिएको थियो। २०१५ को संविधानले लेखा प्रणाली र लेखा परीक्षणको संयुक्तता (Combined system) लाई स्वीकार गरेन र लेखापालन र लेखापरीक्षणलाई क्रमशः व्यवस्थापन (कार्यकारिणी) र सवैधानिक कार्यमा अलग गरियो। एकै छातामुनि व्यावसायिक स्वतन्त्रताको ढाँचाभन्दा सवैधानिक अधिकारको परीक्षण र कार्यकारी अन्तर्गतको व्यवस्थापन गर्ने पृथक्करणको ढाँचा अधिकांश लोकतान्त्रिक मुलुकहरूले अवलम्बन गरेको विधि हो, जसबाट वाह्य नियन्त्रण र सन्तुलन प्रक्रिया प्रभावकारी भई वित्तीय जवाफदेही कायम हुन्छ।

नयाँ सेस्ता प्रणाली लागु भएपछि सरकारी कोष प्रणाली, खर्च प्रणाली, लेखा प्रणाली र बजेट सुधारका साना साना प्रयासहरू गरिदै आएको थियो। तर तीसको दशकबाट विकास प्रशासनलाई विकेन्द्रित बनाइएकाले र सरकारी क्रियाकलापको पनि विस्तार भइसकेकोले कोष प्रशासनलाई विकेन्द्रित बनाउन दबाव पर्थ्यो। तत्कालीन मन्त्री डा. भेषवहादुर थापाको संयोजकत्वमा गठन गरिएको प्रशासन सुधार आयोगको प्रतिवेदनले पनि कोष निकास तथा आन्तरिक लेखा परीक्षणलाई जिल्ला तहबाट सम्पादन गर्न सुझाव दिएको थियो। जिल्लास्थित कार्यालयमा केन्द्रबाट

निकासा दिने र त्यसको फछ्यौटकोलागि कागजातहरू केन्द्रमा नै ल्याउनुपर्ने प्रक्रिया निकै भङ्गटिलो, खर्चिलो र समय लाग्ने थियो। यसले विकास व्यवस्थापन र समस्त शासकीय प्रणालीको लागत बढाइरहेको थियो। आ.व. २०३७/३८ को बजेट बक्तव्यबाट प्रत्येक जिल्लामा कोष तथा लेखा नियन्त्रक कार्यालयको स्थापना गरी जिल्लास्थित खर्च निकायलाई निकासा दिने, राजस्व र जिन्सीको परीक्षण एवम् आन्तरिक लेखा परीक्षण गर्ने काम हुन थाल्यो। नेपालको वित्त व्यवस्थापनमा यो अर्को महत्वपूर्ण फड्को थियो।

विकेन्द्रीत कोष प्रशासनले वित्तीय कारोबारलाई स्थानीयस्तरमा सहजीकरण गरेपनि नगद प्रवाह व्यवस्थापन र कोष प्रणालीबिच उपयुक्त सन्तुलन ल्याई वित्तीय व्यवस्थालाई सबल बनाउन जरुरी थियो। लेखा समूहको जनशक्ति पनि व्यावसायिकतासाथ परिवर्तित चुनौती सम्बोधन गर्ने क्षमतामा पुग्दैथियो। यस परिस्थितिमा बजेटको उपप्रणालीका रूपमा लेखा व्यवस्थाले पूर्णता पाउनु आवश्यक थियो। सबैभन्दा अहम् विषय नगद व्यवस्थापन थियो। बजेटले व्यवस्था गरे अनुरूप निकायहरूले निकासा लैजाने तर खर्च गर्न नसकी नगद प्रवाहलाई प्रतिकूल बनाएको थियो। कारोबार सञ्चालन भएको समय (Real time) मा मात्र खर्च निकासा गर्नु सख्त जरुरी थियो। जसलाई सम्बोधन गर्न आ.व. २०६५ बाट एकल खाता कोष प्रणाली (Single Treasury Account) लागु गरियो। पहिलो वर्ष नमूनाका रूपमा भक्तपुर र ललितपुरबाट सुरु गरिएको यो प्रणाली आ.व. २०७१ बाट सबै जिल्लाका ८१ कोष तथा लेखा नियन्त्रक कार्यालयहरूमा सञ्चालनमा छ। एकल खाता कोष प्रणालीले साविकमा सरकारी कार्यालयहरूका नाममा रहेका बैङ्क खाताहरू एकिकृत गरी जिल्लास्थित सबै कार्यालयको कारोबार एकल खातामार्फत सञ्चालन गर्दै आएको छ।

एकल खाता भुक्तानी प्रणाली सञ्चालनका लागि महालेखा नियन्त्रक कार्यालयमा अनलाइनमा आधारित Treasury single account (TSA) Application software विकास गरी सञ्चालनमा ल्याएको छ। यसले सबै कोष तथा लेखा नियन्त्रक कार्यालयहरूले विनियोजन, राजस्व, धरौटी र अन्य खाताको कारोबार एकीकृत रूपमा व्यवस्थित गर्दछ। एकल खाता कोष प्रणालीबाट विनियोजन (चालू तथा पुँजीगत), वित्तीय व्यवस्था, धरौटी, राजस्व, कार्यसञ्चालन कोष तथा अन्य खाता, कोषको अवस्था, आन्तरिक लेखा परीक्षण प्रतिवेदनका कारोबारहरू समेटिने गर्दछन्। यसले आर्थिक अनुशासन, अग्रिम परीक्षण, Realtime reporting, कोष व्यवस्थापन, नगद प्रवाहको व्यवस्थापन, खर्चको प्रभावकारिता, उही दिनको हिसाब मिलान (day close), अभिलेखीकरणजस्ता पक्षहरूमा सुधार गरेको छ। TSA लाई सार्वजनिक खर्च व्यवस्थापन सुधारको रणनीतिका रूपमा पनि लिइन्छ। यसको कार्यान्वयन पछि खर्च प्रक्षेपणको गुणस्तर, खर्चको अनुमानयोग्यता, नगद प्रवाह व्यवस्थापन र खर्च प्रणालीमा सुधार भई वित्तीय अनुशासन कामय गर्न सहयोग पुगेको छ। त्यसैले यो सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन प्रणाली सुधारको अर्को कोसेढुङ्गा बनेको छ।

पछिल्लो समय सार्वजनिक स्रोतमा देखिएको सङ्कुचन र जनताका अपेक्षाले बढाएको विकासको माग प्राथमिकतामा राखेर सम्बोधन गर्न तयार गरिने वार्षिक विकास कार्यक्रम तथा बजेटमा थुप्रै सुधारहरू गरिए। यसै क्रममा आ.व. २०७२ मा राष्ट्रिय योजना आयोगले कार्यक्रम प्रस्ताव गर्दा नै निश्चित क्रियाकलाप सञ्चालनबाट प्राप्त हुने उपलब्धि पनि उल्लेख गर्नुपर्ने गरी मन्त्रालयगत बजेट व्यवस्थापन सूचना प्रणाली (Line Ministry Budget Information System : LMBIS) लागु गर्‍यो। बजेट छलफलको समयमा विषयगत मन्त्रालयहरूको प्रस्तावलाई प्रस्तावको औचित्य, कार्यान्वयनको योग्यता र स्रोतको उपलब्धताका आधारमा अन्तिम रूप दिन थालियो। तर बजेट कार्यान्वयन गर्ने, बजेटका क्रियाकलापलाई ट्र्याकिङ गर्ने लेखा प्रणाली विकास भइसकेको थिएन। बजेटका क्रियाकलापहरू खर्च भुक्तानीमा स्पष्ट देखिने आधार थिएन। यसका लागि क्रियाकलापमा आधारित लेखा प्रणाली चाहिन्थ्यो। बजेट एकातिर र लेखा अर्कोतिर जानु व्यावहारिक र वित्तीय जवाफदेहीका दृष्टिकोणमा पनि उपयुक्त थिएन। वित्तीय क्रियाकलापलाई व्यवस्थापकीय रूपमा प्रभावकारी बनाउन र संवैधानिक रूपमा पनि बजेट-क्रियाकलाप-उपलब्धिको आबद्धता कायम गरिनु जरुरी थियो। आर्थिक कार्यविधि तथा वित्तीय उत्तरदायित्व ऐन, २०७६ को भावना पनि कार्यान्वयन गर्नु आवश्यक थियो। यही आवश्यकतालाई सम्बोधन गर्न भन्डै साठी वर्षअघि (२०१८/१९) लागु गरिएको लेखा प्रणालीलाई क्रियाकलापमा आधारित लेखा प्रणालीले विस्थापन गरी आ.व. २०७७ श्रावण १ बाट कार्यान्वयनमा ल्याइएको छ, जुन Computer Based Government Accounting Software (CGAS) का आधारमा सञ्चालन गरिन्छ। नेपालको वित्त व्यवस्थापनमा यो अर्को युगान्तकारी फड्को हो।

मौजूदा लेखा प्रणालीले खर्च शीर्षकको लेखा राख्न, प्रतिवेदन दिन र नियन्त्रण गर्न त सक्थ्यो, तर कुन कुन क्रियाकलापहरूमा कति रकम खर्च भयो भनी वास्तविक वित्तीय स्थिति र नतिजालाई समेट्न नसकेकोले यो लेखा प्रणाली बजेट कार्यान्वयन/नियन्त्रणको वास्तविक संयन्त्र बन्न सकेको थिएन। सरकारको नीति संयन्त्र कार्यान्वयन नहुँदा नैतिक र व्यावहारिक दुवै रूपमा लाजमर्दो अवस्था थियो। विषयगत मन्त्रालयहरूले मन्त्रालयगत बजेट सूचना व्यवस्थापन प्रणालीलाई अन्तरबोध गर्न सकेका थिएनन्। हाल कार्यान्वयनमा ल्याइएको क्रियाकलापमा आधारित लेखा प्रणालीले एकसाथ बजेटको स्रोत तथा बजेट शीर्षक अनुसारको क्रियाकलापहरूको खर्चको लेखाइकन गर्न सक्षम छ।

हाल प्रयोग गरिएको सरकारी लेखा प्रणाली अर्थात् Computerized Government Accounting System (CGAS) ले तीन तहका सरकारहरूको प्रत्येक क्रियाकलाप र त्यसमा हुने खर्चको वास्तविक विवरण लेखाइकन गर्छ। मन्त्रालयगत बजेट व्यवस्थापन सूचना प्रणाली (LMBIS), प्रदेश बजेट सूचना व्यवस्थापन प्रणाली (PLMBIS) र स्थानीय तह सञ्चित कोष व्यवस्थापन प्रणाली (SuTRA) मार्फत अर्थ बजेटहरू TSA/ STSA मा एन्ट्री भए पछि सिधै CGAS लेखा प्रणालीले लिन्छ र खर्चको लेखाइकन तथा प्रतिवेदन गर्छ। CGAS ले एकल खाता भुक्तानी प्रणाली (TSA) सँग प्रणालीगत अन्तरक्रिया (Interfacing) गर्छ र चाहेको प्रतिवेदन तत्समयमा (Real time) प्राप्त हुन्छ। यस प्रणालीले युटिलिटी पेमेन्टका केही क्षेत्रबाहेक सबै भुक्तानीलाई विद्युतीय पनि बनाएको छ। सबै कर्मचारीको तलब भत्ता, निवृत्तिभरण भुक्तानीजस्ता विषयलाई सेन्ट्रल पेरोल सिस्टममा लैजाने पृष्ठभूमि पनि यसले बनाएको छ। यो सार्वजनिक कोषको यथार्थ अवस्था चित्रण गर्न र वित्तीय कारोबारको पारदर्शिता कायम गर्न पनि सक्षम छ। अन्तराष्ट्रिय लेखा मूल्य मानक (GFS-2014) का सबै भावनासँग यो मेल खान्छ भने वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन सुधारका सन्दर्भमा नेपाल सरकारले विकास साझेदारहरूसँग गरेको प्रतिबद्धतालाई पनि यसले कार्यरूप दिएको छ। यस अर्थमा यो वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन सुधारमा युगान्तकारी घटना हो। यसले शासकीय सुधारका अन्य पक्षलाई पनि सघाउ पुऱ्याउने आधार दिन्छ भने वित्तीय अनुशासन एवम् स्थिरताको आधार दिएको छ। वित्तीय सङ्घीयतालाई व्यवस्थित बनाइ स्थानीय तथा प्रदेश तहहरूलाई वित्तीय अनुशासनमा ल्याउन पनि यसले पृष्ठाधारको काम गर्दछ।

नेपाल सरकारले वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनका सबै चरण र क्रियाकलाप समेट्ने गरी सार्वजनिक खर्च र वित्तीय उत्तरदायित्व (Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability : PEFA) को सुधारका आयोजना पनि सञ्चालनमा ल्याएको छ। पेफा संरचनाले मूलतः बजेटको विश्वसनीयता, सार्वजनिक वित्तको पारदर्शिता, सम्पत्ति र दायित्वको व्यवस्थापन, नीतिमा आधारित वित्तीय रणनीति र बजेट तर्जुमा, बजेट कार्यान्वयनको सुनिश्चितता र नियन्त्रण, लेखा पालन र प्रतिवेदन एवम् वाध्य निगरानी र लेखा परीक्षणका स्तम्भहरूलाई समेटेदछ। नेपालमा पेफा दोस्रो चरणमा सञ्चालनमा छ। बजेट तर्जुमाको नीतिगत एवम् प्राविधिक नेतृत्व गर्ने राष्ट्रिय योजना आयोग, स्रोत व्यवस्थापनको जिम्मेवारी लिने अर्थ मन्त्रालय, कोष सञ्चालन तथा खर्च व्यवस्थापनको जिम्मेवारीमा रहेको महालेखा नियन्त्रक कार्यालय, खरिद अनुगमनको कार्य जिम्मेवारीमा रहेको सार्वजनिक खरिद अनुगमन कार्यालय, लेखा परीक्षणको भूमिकामा रहेको महालेखा परीक्षक कार्यालय र वित्तीय निगरानी र दृष्टिगोचर (Oversight) गर्ने सार्वजनिक लेखा समिति जस्ता वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनका पात्रहरू पेफा कार्यक्रममा समेटिएका छन्। साथै वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनमा अनौपचारिक रूपमा सहायोग तथा निगरानी गर्ने लेखा परीक्षण व्यवसायीहरूको सङ्घ (ICAN) र आर्थिक पत्रकार समाज पनि यस कार्यमा नागरिक समाजको भूमिकामा छन्। यी पात्रहरूको भूमिकाबाट नेपालको सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनलाई विश्वसनीय, गुणस्तरीय र अन्तराष्ट्रिय स्तरको बनाउन मद्दत पुग्दछ।

### ३. सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनका उद्देश्य

सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनका सैद्धान्तिक, संवैधानिक र व्यवस्थापकीय आसय रहन्छन्। सैद्धान्तिक आधारमा जनताको साधन जानताकै लागि उनीहरूको उच्चतम आवश्यकताको क्षेत्रमा सदुपयोग भएको पुष्टि गर्नुपर्दछ। संवैधानिक रूपमा आयव्यय सम्बन्धित कार्य संसदीय स्वीकृति र निगरानीको विषय हो। व्यवस्थापकीय रूपमा वित्तीय कारोबारका सबै आयाम यसरी सम्पादन गरिनु पर्दछ कि यसका कारणबाट व्यवस्थापन जवाफदेही बन्न सकोस्। यी आसय पुरा गर्न सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनका चार उद्देश्य रहन्छन् :

- समष्टिगत वित्तीय अनुशासन कायम गर्ने (Maintain aggregate fiscal discipline)
  - ✓ राजस्व सङ्कलनको लक्ष्य
  - ✓ खर्चको लक्ष्य
  - ✓ वित्तीय घाटा परिचालन
  - ✓ सार्वजनिक ऋण
- रणनीतिक प्राथमिकतामा साधन विनियोजन (Allocation in strategic priority)
  - ✓ विनियोजनका आधार र नीतिहरू
  - ✓ विनियोजनका मापदण्ड र वस्तुगत सूचकहरू
  - ✓ कार्यसञ्चालन दक्षता हासिल गर्ने (Achieve operational efficiency)
  - ✓ कार्यान्वयन कार्ययोजना
  - ✓ कार्यजिम्मेवारी निर्धारण
  - ✓ मितव्ययिता
  - ✓ कार्यकुशलता
  - ✓ कार्यप्रभावकारिता
  - ✓ नतिजा सूचक
- जबाफदेही मापन (Financial accountability)
  - ✓ पारदर्शिता (सरोकारवालामा सूचनाको पहुँच)
  - ✓ लाभग्राही विवेचना
  - ✓ नियन्त्रण र सन्तुलन (आन्तरिक तथा बाह्य)

सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन सुधार गर्नु भनेको उल्लिखित चारै पक्षमा प्रभावकारिता बढाउनु हो, वित्तीय कारोबार व्यवस्थित गर्ने नीति, कानून, कार्यविधि तथा मानदण्ड तर्जुमा, सबल संस्थागत क्षमता विकास, जनशक्ति व्यवस्थापन र स्वचालित प्रणाली सञ्चालनको वातावरण सुनिश्चित गर्नु हो ।

#### ४. सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन चक्र

सार्वजनिक क्षेत्रको वित्तीय क्रियाकलापहरू चक्रीय रूपमा चरणबद्ध सञ्चालनमा रहने गर्दछन् । यो चक्र प्रत्येक आर्थिक वर्षमा विभिन्न चरण पारगर्दै निरन्तर शृङ्खला रूपमा क्रियाशील हुन्छ । चरणहरू आफूमा स्वायत्त नभई कार्यात्मक तार्किक आवद्धतामा (Functional & logical chain) रहन्छन् । सबै चरणको प्रभावकारितामा नै सबल वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन संस्थागत हुन्छ । यसका चरण र प्रत्येक चरणका क्रियाकलाप सङ्क्षिप्त रूपमा यस प्रकार छन् :

- वित्तीय नीति तर्जुमा चरण (Policy Planing Stage): वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनको पहिलो चरणका रूपमा रहने यस चरणमा विगतमा लिइएका वित्तीय नीति कार्यान्वयनको उपलब्धि समीक्षा, आर्थिक तथा वित्तीय अवस्थाको विश्लेषण र राष्ट्रले अवलम्बन गर्नुपर्ने नीति कार्यक्रमको खाकालाई आकलन गरिन्छ । यस चरणमा सरकारी कार्यसंरचना भित्रका सम्बद्ध पदाधिकारी र संरचना बाहिरका सरोकारवालाहरू, जस्तै राजनैतिक समाज, अनुसन्धाता/एकेडेमिया शैक्षिक प्रतिष्ठान (Academia) र प्रबुद्ध नागरिक वर्ग, व्यावसायिक समाजले भूमिका निर्वाहमा गर्दछन् । नेपालमा यसको औपचारिकता अर्थ मन्त्रालय तथा स्रोत समितिले निर्वाह गर्दछ ।
- बजेट तर्जुमा (Budget formulation) : नीति तर्जुमा चरणबाट प्राप्त सुझाव तथा निष्कर्षहरू र प्रणाली भित्रका तथ्य एवम् जानकारी लिई बजेट तर्जुमाको प्राविधिक काम यस चरणमा गरिन्छ । स्रोत समितिबाट सुरु हुने यस

कामममा राष्ट्रिय योजना आयोग, अर्थ मन्त्रालय, महालेखा नियन्त्रक कार्यालय, विषयगत मन्त्रालयहरू र मन्त्रिपरिषद् संलग्न हुन्छन् । यो चरण जति वास्तविक हुन सक्थ्यो, त्यसैको सापेक्षमा बजेटको सबलता र विश्वसनीयता देखिन्छ । यस चरणमा सम्पादन गरिने प्रमुख कामहरू :

- अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय आर्थिक स्थितिको विश्लेषण
  - अर्थतन्त्रको समष्टिगत आर्थिक स्थितिको विश्लेषण
  - राजस्व परिचालन र खर्चको अवस्था विश्लेषण
  - आयोजना/कार्यक्रम कार्यान्वयनको स्थिति विश्लेषण
  - वैदेशिक सहायता प्राप्त र उपयोगको विश्लेषण
  - कोषको अवस्था तथा कोष प्रवाहको विश्लेषण
  - बजेटको आकार (आय तथा व्ययको सम्भावित आयतन) निर्धारण
  - बजेट तर्जुमा मार्गदर्शन तर्जुमा र वितरण
  - क्षेत्रगत सीमा विभाजन
  - आयोजना/खर्च प्रस्ताव प्रस्तुती
  - बजेट प्रस्तावमाथि छलफल (नीति प्राथमिकता रकमगत छलफल)
  - प्रस्तावित बजेटलाई अन्तिम रूप प्रदान ।
- बजेट अनुमोदन (Budget approval) : मन्त्रिपरिषद्बाट अनुमोदन भई सरकारका तर्फबाट सङ्घीय प्रतिनिधि सभामा अनुमोदनका लागि प्रस्तुत बजेट प्रस्तावलाई सैद्धान्तिक तथा विषयगत आधारमा छलफल भई अनुमोदन गरिन्छ । नेपालमा कार्यकारी बजेट प्रस्तुत हुने, सांसदका भावनाहरू पूर्वबजेट छलफलको समयमा नीति, सिद्धान्त तथा उद्देश्यमाथि छलफल भई त्यसैका आधारमा निर्धारित प्राथमिकताले बजेटलाई मार्गदर्शन गर्ने हुनाले संसदीय अनुमोदनको प्रक्रिया सङ्क्षिप्त हुन्छ । यस प्रक्रियामा औपचारिक रूपमा विधायकहरू र अनौपचारिक रूपमा राजनैतिक दल एवम् नागरिक समाजको संलग्नता रहन्छ ।
  - बजेट कार्यान्वयन (Budget execution): संसदबाट बजेट अनुमोदनपछि त्यसैलाई आधार मानी बजेट कार्यान्वयनको प्रक्रिया अगाडि बढ्छ । बजेट कार्यान्वयन भनेको संसदीय अनुमोदनका भावना र निर्धारित लक्ष्यलाई आधार मानी आय प्राप्त एवम् खर्च व्यवस्थापनका कार्यलाई समयबद्ध रूपमा सञ्चालन गर्नु हो । यस चरणमा विषयगत मन्त्रालय, अर्थ मन्त्रालय, राष्ट्रिय योजना आयोग, महालेखा नियन्त्रक कार्यालय र सरकारी कारोबार गर्ने बैङ्कको महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका रहन्छ । लाभग्राही तथा नागरिक समाजका अङ्गहरू पनि कार्यान्वयन प्रक्रियालाई सहजीकरण गर्ने, प्रभाव पार्ने र पहरेदारी गर्ने कार्यमा रहन्छन् । प्रस्तावित बजेट र कार्यान्वयनविचको अन्तर घटाउन सकिएमा मात्र बजेटको सार्थकता रहन्छ । कार्यान्वयनका सबै पात्रहरू यसैतर्फ निर्दिष्ट रहने गर्दछन् ।
  - लेखाङ्कन (Accounting) : बजेट कार्यान्वयनका प्रक्रियालाई निर्धारित ढाँचामा लिपिबद्ध गरी व्यवस्थापन र निगरानी निकायलाई वित्तीय कारोबारको सूचना उपलब्ध गराउने काम लेखाङ्कनले गर्दछ । लेखाङ्कन वित्तीय घटनाहरूको अभिलेखीकरण गर्ने, विश्लेषण गर्ने, प्रतिवेदन गर्ने र व्यवस्थापकीय निर्णयलाई सघाउ पुऱ्याउने काम हो ता कि आर्थिक कारोबारलाई संसदीय अनुमोदन अनुरूप बनाउन सकियोस् । यो वित्तीय जवाफदेहीको आधार हो । सञ्चित कोष र अन्य कोषहरूको हिसाव लेखाङ्कन गरेर व्यवस्थापन परीक्षण हुने गर्दछ । लेखाङ्कनका स्थापित आधार र मापदण्डहरू हुन्छन् । नेपाल सरकार लेखामान कार्यान्वयनमा आएको छ, जुन अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय लेखामानको स्तरसँग अनुकूलित छ । यस चरणमा प्रमुख भूमिका निर्वाह गर्ने निकाय महालेखा नियन्त्रक कार्यालय हो । जति वैज्ञानिक र भरपर्दो वित्तीय सूचना लेखा प्रणालीले उपलब्ध गराउन सक्थ्यो, त्यसैको सापेक्षमा वित्तीय

निर्णय र लेखा परीक्षणको स्तरीयता कायम हुन्छ। महालेखा नियन्त्रक कार्यालय मातहतका लेखा समूहका कर्मचारीहरू यस कार्यमा क्रियाशील हुन्छन्। उनीहरूको पेशागत दक्षता विकास र प्रणाली निर्माणको काम निरन्तर रूपमा महालेखा नियन्त्रक कार्यालयले गर्दै आएको छ।

- अन्तिम तथा बाह्य परीक्षण (External audit and oversight) : संसदीय अनुमोदन अनुसार आर्थिक नीतिको पालना बजेट कार्यान्वयन गर्दा भएको छ, छैन भनी विस्तृत र व्यवस्थित परीक्षण/विश्लेषण गर्ने काम लेखा परीक्षणबाट हुन्छ। यस कामको लागि संवैधानिक शक्ति प्राप्त सर्वोच्च लेखा परीक्षण निकाय (महालेखा परीक्षक) को व्यवस्था छ। यसले वित्तीय कारोबार र स्रोत व्यवस्थापनमा संसदको प्राविधिक संयन्त्र (आँखा र केही हदमा कान) को काम गर्दछ। वार्षिक रूपमा लेखा परीक्षणको विस्तृत प्रतिवेदन राष्ट्रप्रमुख मार्फत संसदीय छलफलको लागि प्रस्तुत गरिन्छ। तर एक्काइसौं शताब्दीमा लेखा परीक्षणलाई संसदीय परीक्षणको विषयमा मात्र सीमित नराखी लाभग्राही परीक्षणको सीमासम्म विस्तार भए पनि यो विधिको कानुनी मान्यता र व्यावसायिकता व्यवस्थित भइसकेको छैन। नागरिक परीक्षण, सेवाग्राही लेखाजोखा, सामाजिक विवेचना, सार्वजनिक सँवाद, सिभिक फोरा, लाभग्राही मूल्याङ्कन आदिका नाम र संयन्त्रबाट वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनमाथि नागरिक निगरानी हुन थालेको छ। नागरिक निगरानीले वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनमा सर्वसाधारणको पहुँच विस्तार गरेको छ, जसले प्रणालीको वैधता विस्तार गर्न सघाउने गर्दछ।

## ५. देखिएका प्रमुख सवाल र चुनौती

नेपालको वित्त व्यवस्थापनमा केही महत्त्वपूर्ण उपलब्धि हासिल भएका छन्। तर यसलाई विश्वस्तरको बनाई शासकीय सुधारको सहजकर्ताको रूपमा उपयोग गर्न केही सवालहरू सम्बोधन गर्न आवश्यक छ।

पहिलो विषय बजेटभन्दा बाहिरका खर्चलाई राष्ट्रिय कोषमा कसरी समेट्ने भन्नेमा छ। बजेट बाहिरको खर्च (Extra Budgetary Expenditure) जनताका भित्रिएको सहयोग र प्राविधिक सहायतालाई राष्ट्रिय प्रणाली र प्राथमिकतामा ल्याई त्यसलाई जबाफदेही बनाउने काम हुन सकेको छैन। संविधानको धारा ११६ अनुरूप गुठीबाहेक सरकारलाई प्राप्त हुने सबै प्रकारका प्राप्त सङ्घीय कोषमा दाखिल गर्ने, संसदीय स्वीकृति र लेखा परीक्षण गरी सार्वजनिक गर्ने भनिए पनि त्यो काम पुरा भएको छैन। सरकारी कोष र बजेट प्रणाली बाहिर आय तथा व्यय हुनु लोकतन्त्र र संसदीय मर्यादा बाहिरको कुरा हो।

दोस्रो, नेपालको लेखा प्रणाली 'होल अफ दी गभर्नमेन्ट' लाई समेट्ने गरी एकीकृत प्रणाली बनिसकेको छैन। सरकारका तहहरू र एक्स्ट्रा बजेटरी एकाइका सबै वित्तीय कारोबार (प्राप्ति, खर्च, दायित्व, प्रतिबद्धता, धरौटी, सम्पत्ति, विविध कोष) को एकीकृत वित्तीय प्रतिवेदन र लेखा परीक्षण गर्ने काम अबै भइसकेको छैन। अन्तराष्ट्रिय मान्यता, GAFS (General Accounting & Finance System) मानक तथा संवैधानिक दायित्व भने यसैतर्फ लक्षित छ।

तेस्रो सवाल संसदीय आर्थिक कार्यप्रणालीमा छ। नेपालको संसद बजेट प्रक्रियाका दृष्टिमा बजेटलाई स्वीकृत गर्ने (Budget approving) संसद हो, बजेटलाई प्रभाव पार्ने (Budget influencing) वा बजेट बनाउने (Budget making) संसद होइन। संसदले सरकारले प्रस्तुत गरेको बजेट (कार्यकारी बजेट) लाई स्वीकृत गर्दछ, संशोधन वा अस्वीकृत गर्दैन। नीति अस्वीकृत गर्नसक्छ तर परिमार्जन गर्दैन। कार्यसञ्चालन कोष, एक्स्ट्रा बजेटरी कोष र सार्वजनिक ऋणको परीक्षण गर्न सक्दैन। त्यस्तै समष्टिगत नीतिको समीक्षा गर्ने अवसर छ तर क्षमता विकास भइसकेको छैन। संसदीय सर्वोच्चताको सिद्धान्तले वित्त सम्बन्धी नीतिमा जानकारी राख्ने, स्वीकृति र समीक्षा गर्ने मान्यता राख्दछ। तर संसदको जानकारीविना श्रोतको परिचालन गर्ने अभ्यास भइरहेको छ। उदाहरणका लागि, के कति जलवायु वित्त नेपालमा भित्रियो, विपद् व्यवस्थापन, लैङ्गिक तथा समावेशिताका नाममा कसले कसरी कहाँ कति खर्च गरिरहेका छन्, त्यसको न प्रतिवेदन छ, न निगरानी।

चौथो, विकास साभेदारी खर्चको पोर्टफोलियो प्रवृत्ति फेरिएको छ। असीको दशकदेखि विश्वव्यापी रूपमा नै अनुदानका ढोकाहरू गैरसरकारी संस्थाहरूको लागि खुलेका छन्, आन्तरिक रूपमा पनि सहलगानीका कार्यक्रमहरू सञ्चालन गर्ने

क्रम विस्तार भएको छ। यस किसिमको वित्तीय स्रोत परिचालनको प्राथमिकीकरण, अभिलेख र प्रतिवेदनमा समेटिदैनन्। सम्बन्धित मुलुकका सार्वभौम संसद र व्यवस्थापनका प्राधिकारप्राप्त निकायबाट प्रयोजन सहित मुलुकभित्र खर्चिएका साधनहरूको जवाफदेही मापन नै हुन सकेको छैन।

पाँचौँ, सरकारी खर्च कार्यको जवाफदेही संरचना सोपानयुक्त (Hierarchical) छ। यो धुमिल (blurred) जिम्मेवारी हो, कमसल जवाफदेही हो। प्रत्यक्ष जवाफदेहीको सुनिश्चितताको लागि कार्यसम्पादन करार गर्न थालिएको थियो। सार्वजनिक संस्थानमा डेढ दशक अघिदेखि र निजामती सेवाभित्र तीनवर्ष अघिबाट कार्यान्वयन गरिन थालिएको कार्यसम्पादन करार अहिले निष्क्रिय छ। आर्थिक कार्यविधि तथा वित्तीय उत्तरदायित्व ऐन, २०७६ ले विभागीय मन्त्री/संवैधानिक निकाय प्रमुख, लेखा उत्तरदायी अधिकृतका रूपमा रहेको सचिव र आर्थिक कारोबारमा संलग्न जिम्मेवार व्यक्तिलाई वित्तीय जिम्मेवारी र जवाफदेही तोकेको छ। तोकिएको वित्तीय जिम्मेवारी पदाधिकारीबाट निर्वाह नभएकाले आन्तरिक नियन्त्रण र आर्थिक अनुशासन कायम हुन सकेको छैन। महालेखा परीक्षकको पछिल्लो प्रतिवेदनले गम्भीर प्रकृतिका कैफियतहरू औल्याएको छ। कार्यमूलक निकायलाई नतिजाका लागि जिम्मेवार बनाइनु पर्दछ भने अग्रपङ्क्तिका सेवानिकायलाई समय, पहुँच, कार्यव्यवहार जस्ता सूचकमा कार्यसम्पादन सम्भौता गरी जवाफदेही मापनको स्वचालित बनाउनु पर्दछ।

छैठौँ सबाल जवाफदेहीको विशेषीकृत सूचकहरूलाई वित्त व्यवस्थापनसँग जोड्ने कसरी भन्नेमा छ। साधन, रकम, जनशक्ति र समयसँग तार्किक कार्यसम्बन्ध देखाउने निकायगत सूचक चाहिन्छ। लेखा प्रणाली सुधारको लागि लागु गरिएको CGAS प्रणालीलाई उपयोग गरी प्रत्येक निकायका खर्च क्रियाकलाप बजेट र सेवा व्यवस्थापनको नतिजामा आबद्ध गराउन सकिन्छ।

सातौँ सबाल वित्तीय जवाफदेहीको संरचनामा (Framework) छ, जसको आसय सर्वसाधारणलाई उनीहरूबाट उठाइएको र उनीहरूका लागि खर्चिएको साधनको यथार्थ जानकारी दिनु हो। सूचना हकसम्बन्धी कानून छ, तर सूचना संस्कृति छैन। सर्वसाधारणहरू सूचना प्रक्रियामा आबद्ध छैनन्, स्वयम् प्रकाशन निष्क्रिय छ र सर्वसाधारण-पदाधिकारी संवाद छैन।

आठौँ सबाल विशेष कोषहरू सञ्चालनमा रहेका छन्। संविधानको धारा १२४ अनुरूप विपद व्यवस्थापनका लागि आकस्मिक कोषमा समय समयमा रकम जम्मा गरी त्यसबाट भएको खर्च यथशाशीघ्र शोधभर्ना गर्ने भनिएको छ। तर विपद व्यवस्थापनका नाममा विभिन्न कोषहरू, जस्तो कि, दैवी प्रकोप उद्धार कोष, प्रधानमन्त्री राहत कोष, कोरोना कोष जस्ता कोषहरू सङ्घीय तहमा छन् भने प्रदेश तथा स्थानीय तहमा पनि यस प्रकारका कोषहरू देखिँदै छन्। यस्ता कोषहरूले संविधानको भावनालाई सम्बोधन गर्दैनन् भने सर्वोच्च नागरिक संस्था संसदको जानकारी, स्वीकृति र दृष्टिगोचरभन्दा बाहिर समेत छन्। राहत, उद्धार लगायत आकस्मिक कार्यमा यसले सहयोग त पुऱ्याएको छ तर विपदमा अनियमितताको सम्भावना हुँदैन भन्ने कसरी ग्यारेन्टी गर्ने ?

नवौँ, तहगत सरकारले प्राकृतिक सम्पदाबाट प्राप्त लाभको विभाज्य कोषमार्फत पाउने रकममा संवैधानिक भावना कार्यान्वयन हुन सकेको छैन। जस्तो कि, पर्वतारोहणबाट प्राप्त हुने रोयल्टी विभाज्य कोषमा राखी सङ्घ, प्रदेश र स्थानीय तहहरूमा क्रमशः ५०, २५, २५ प्रतिशत विभाजन गर्नुपर्नेमा केही हिमालको रोयल्टी व्यवस्थापन एक गैरसरकारी संस्थाले गर्दछ, ५० प्रतिशत आफैले खर्च गरी बाँकी मात्र सरकारी कोषमा पठाउँदै आएको छ। संवैधानिक तथा सैद्धान्तिक दुवै अर्थमा यो उचित होइन। त्यस्तै उदाहरण वनसम्पदाको उपयोगमा पनि देखिन्छ।

दसौँ सबाल ऋणात्मक निक्षेप उपयोगमा देखिएको छ। सङ्घीय सरकारको बजेट घाटा मात्र होइन, कोषमा नभएको नगदहरूको उपयोगबाट (अन्य प्रयोजनका खाताहरूमा रहेको नगद मौज्जातबाट) कार्य सञ्चालन हुँदै आएको छ। यस्तो Negative Surplus दुई वर्षअघि रु २३२ अर्ब सम्म पुगेको थियो (हाल यो रु १४३ अर्ब छ)। यसले बजेटरी अनुशासन कायम भएको देखाउँदैन।

एघारौँ सवाल लेखा परीक्षणमा छ । संविधानतः महालेखा परीक्षकले भौचिड अडिट/नियमितता र वित्तीय विवरणको मात्र गर्ने होइन, उसमा नीति परीक्षणको शक्ति छ तर सामर्थ्य भित्रिइसकेको छैन । एकाउन्टिड ट्र्याकबाट मात्र लेखा परीक्षण गर्दा संवैधानिक आसय र अन्तराष्ट्रिय अभ्यासको पालना हुन सक्दैन । प्रभावकारिता परीक्षण भएको छैन । आधुनिक लेखा परीक्षण नेमिड एण्ड ब्लेमिडमा सीमित हुनुहुन्न, प्रणाली सुधारको विश्लेषक र उत्प्रेरक बन्नुपर्छ । औचित्यको लेखा परीक्षण ठिक बेठिक भन्ने (judgemental) बढी छ ।

एक्काइसौँ शताब्दीमा राजनैतिक होइन, सामाजिक लोकतन्त्रको विकास भएको छ । यस अवस्थामा आन्तरिक नियन्त्रण तथा परीक्षण प्रणाली पर्याप्त हुन सक्दैन । वित्तीय सुशासनका लागि लाभग्राहीमा के अनुभूति छ, त्यो महत्त्वपूर्ण हुन आउँछ । स्रोत साधन विनियोजन प्राविधिक आधारबाट मात्र गरेर पुग्दैन, सामाजिक भावना, समावेशिता र सामाजिक न्यायका आधारबाट हेरिनु पर्दछ । साधन विनियोजनका सूचकहरू चाहिन्छन्, त्यसका लागि बजेट प्रक्रियामा संलग्न निकायमा तथ्य तथा ज्ञान आधार (Knowledge base) चाहिन्छ । इलाम र बाजुराविच भौगोलिक दुरीमात्र होइन, विकासको फासला पनि फराकिलो छ । जसलाई सम्बोधन गर्न संसद र समितिहरू राजनैतिक वा औपचारिक (सतही) हुन सक्छन् ।

वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनलाई सबल, आधुनिक, विश्वासनीय र प्रविधिमैत्री बनाउने काम उच्च प्राथमिकतामा छन्, सूचना प्रविधिमा आधारित सरकारी लेखा प्रणाली (CGAS) लगायतका प्रणालीहरूले उल्लेख्य उपलब्धि दिनसक्ने पूर्वाधार विकास भएको छ । तर तीन शासकीय तहका ७६१ सञ्चित कोष, छरिएका कार्यसञ्चालन कोष, बजेट बाहिरका वित्तीय कारोबार र मुलुकभित्र बजेट तथा राष्ट्रिय प्रणाली छलेर विभिन्न सजिला छिद्रबाट भएको खर्चको तोकिएको सममया यथार्थमूलक प्रतिवेदन लिने र त्यसलाई राइट ट्र्याकिङ गर्ने सबल प्रणाली स्थापना गर्न अबै वाँकी छ ।

## ६. भावी कार्यदिशा

- सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र सुधारको केन्द्रमा रहने वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनलाई निरन्तर गतिशील र समय सापेक्ष बनाउँदै लैजानु पर्दछ । परिवेशले ल्याएको चुनौतीलाई सम्बोधन गर्नसक्ने र स्वयम् गतिशील हुनसक्ने वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन प्रणाली जीवन्त हुन्छ । यस सर्न्दमा भावी दिनमा अवलम्बन गर्नेपर्ने केही नीतिगत तथा कार्यगत पक्ष साङ्केतिक रूपमा यहा प्रस्तुत गरिन्छ, जुन वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन सुधारका नीति सवाल (policy issue) का रूपमा रहेको छन् ।
- वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन सुधारको सुरुवात बिन्दु बजेट हो । बजेट (वार्षिक विकास कार्यक्रम) लाई वास्तविक बनाएपछि नीति र नतिजाविचको फरक (as expected and as executed) पत्ता लगाउन सकिन्छ । यो नै समष्टिगत वित्तीय अनुशासनको आधार हो । बजेटलाई वास्तविक नीति संयन्त्र बनाउन सरकारभन्दा बाहिरका पात्र परिचालन गर्ने नीति आधार, सरकारी साधनको आकलनलाई वास्तविक बनाउने सूचना तथा विश्लेषण आधार (model baed approach) र स्रोत विनियोजनका आधारहरू स्थापना गर्नु पर्दछ । किनकी बजेट समष्टिगत अर्थतन्त्रमा गति (vibration) दिने संयन्त्र हो, न कि सरकारी कोष व्यवस्थापन मात्र ।
- दोस्रो, आवधिक योजना, मध्यमकालीन खर्च संरचना र आयोजना बैङ्कविचको तार्किक सम्बन्ध कायम गर्नुपर्दछ । यो बजेटरी अनुशासनको महत्त्वपूर्ण पक्ष हो । आयोजना बैङ्क चाहिँ क्षेत्रगत रणनीतिक दीर्घकालीन योजना (Strategic Perspective Plan) सँग एकीकृत हुनुपर्दछ । क्षेत्रगत रणनीतिक लक्ष्य र योजनाका भावनालाई कार्यान्वयन गर्ने आयोजना विकास गरी त्यसलाई आयोजना बैङ्क मार्फत LMBIS मा प्रवेश गराउनु पर्दछ । आयोजना बैङ्क / LMBIS विच एकीकरण (integration) गर्ने प्रणाली बसाउनु पर्दछ । त्यसपछि मात्र स्रोत प्राथमिकतामा निर्दिष्ट हुने प्राविधिक आधार खडा हुन्छ ।
- तेस्रो, वित्तीय कारोबारको सबै क्रियाकलापलाई स्वचालित (full automation) मा लैजान आवश्यक छ । पार्टीले बिल प्रस्तुत गर्ने, त्यसको verification गर्ने, खर्च भुक्तानी गर्ने क्रियाकलापलाई एकै डिजिटल प्लेटफर्म मार्फत हुने प्रणाली विकास गर्न सख्त जरुरी छ । यसले प्रक्रियाको शुद्धता, शीघ्रता र पारदर्शितालाई एकसाथ सम्बोधन गर्नसक्छ । जुन अहिले देखिएको छैन ।

- चौथो, सार्वजनिक खरिद व्यवस्थापनलाई सुधार गर्न अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय स्तरको सार्वजनिक खरिद कानून कार्यान्वयनमा छ र सरोकारवालाहरूको प्रतिस्पर्धा र पहुँच विस्तारका लागि इलेक्ट्रोनिक बिडिङ (e-bidding) को प्रणाली पनि विकास भएको छ। तर यसलाई पूर्ण रूपमा एकीकृत योग्यता सर्त (aggregated qualification requirement) मा पुग्ने गरी सूचना समावेश (capture) गरी खरिद प्रणाली नै सुधार गर्नुपर्ने आवश्यकता छ। त्यसो गर्न सकिएमा खास निर्माण व्यवसायी/आपूर्तिकर्ताले कहाँ कहाँ कुन कुन काम गरिरहेको छ, उसले लिएको काम कति बाँकी छ, बाँकी काम कहिले पुरा गर्नेछ, लगायतका सबै विवरण प्राप्त गर्न सकिन्छ र आयोजनाको कार्यान्वयनमा ढिला हुने तथा समयमा सम्पन्न नहुने, निर्माण व्यवस्थापनको गुणस्तर नहुने अनि यसै आधारबाट सरकारको आलोचना हुने अवस्था आउँदैन।
- पाँचौं विषय लेखा प्रणालीमा स्थापित सूचना प्रविधिबिचको अन्तरआबद्धतालाई संस्थागत गर्नुमा छ। सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन सुदृढीकरणको लागि सूचना प्रविधिको उपयोगलाई महत्त्व दिइएको छ। यसअघि सूचना प्रविधिको उपयोग सैद्धान्तिक कार्यसूची रहेकोमा आर्थिक कार्यविधि तथा वित्तीय उत्तरदायित्व ऐन, २०७६ को दफा ६२ मा (क) बजेट तथा लेखा सम्बन्धी कार्यलाई व्यवस्थित गर्न क्रमशः सूचना प्रविधिको प्रयोग गरिने, (ख) महालेखा नियन्त्रक कार्यालयले सूचना प्रविधिमा आधारित प्रणाली विकास गरी लागु गर्ने, (घ) महालेखा नियन्त्रक कार्यालयले विकास गरेको प्रणालीमा समावेश नभएको वा कुनै प्रणाली विकास गर्न महालेखा नियन्त्रक कार्यालयको स्वीकृति चाहिने, (घ) सूचना प्रणालीबाट प्राप्त हुने सूचनाहरूको प्रमाणीकरणको लागि विद्युतीय हस्ताक्षर प्रयोग गर्न सकिने र (ङ) अन्तरसम्बन्धित प्रणाली विकास र प्रणालीहरूबिच अन्तरआबद्धता विकास गर्न सकिने प्रावधान राखेको छ। तहगत सरकार र सरकारका अङ्गहरूबिच स्थापित सूचना प्रणालीहरू दरिलो अन्तरआबद्धता नभएमा जोखिम निम्तिने छ। साथै विश्व मौद्रिक बजारमा विभिन्न वित्तीय प्रविधि (Fintech) को प्रयोग भइरहेको छ, जसलाई नेपालले पनि भित्र्याउँदैछ। यसलाई व्यवस्थापन गर्न पनि प्रणालीहरूबिचको सबल आबद्धता चाहिन्छ।
- छैठौं, वित्तीय प्रतिवेदन प्रणाली सुधारका लागि एकीकृत वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन सूचना प्रणाली (Integrated Financial Management Information System, IFMIS) लागु गर्नु जरुरी छ, ता कि यो अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय स्तर (GFS Guideline) अनुरूप हुन सकोस्। यसका लागि महालेखा नियन्त्रक कार्यालयले सञ्चालनमा ल्याएको Treasury Single Account (TSA), क्रियाकलापमा आधारित लेखा प्रणाली (Computer based Accounting system: CGAS) र स्थानीय तह सञ्चित कोष व्यवस्थापन प्रणाली (Subnational Treasury Regulatory Application, SuTRA) जस्ता पूर्वाधार विकास भएका छन् र यी प्रणालीहरूबिच Interfacing पनि हुन्छ। तर मन्त्रालयगत बजेट सूचना प्रणाली (LMBIS) को गुणस्तर कमजोर रहेकोले क्रियाकलागत प्रतिवेदन तयारी गर्न सकिने अवस्था छैन। अहिले भण्डै सात लाख जति क्रियाकलापहरू LMBIS मा प्रविष्ट छन्, LMBIS लाई सतही रूपमा लिइएकोले त्यसो भएको हो। यसलाई स्तरीय बनाएर आयोजना सङ्ख्या बास्तविक स्तरमा सफ्टवेरमा सबै तहका सबै क्रियाकलाप आउन सक्ने गरी परिमार्जन गरेपछि तहगत सरकारका सबै क्रियाकलापका आधारमा प्रतिवेदन तयारी गर्न सकिन्छ र तहगत सरकारका आयोजनामा हुने ओभरल्यापिङ र दोहोरापना पनि नियन्त्रण गर्न सकिन्छ।
- सातौं सुधारको क्षेत्र होल अफ दी गर्भन्मेन्ट रिपोर्टिङ हो। बजेटभन्दा बाहिरका सार्वजनिक निकाय (एक्स्ट्रा बजेटरी इन्टीटी) हरू आर्थिक कार्यविधि तथा वित्तीय उत्तरदायित्व ऐन, २०७६ अनुरूप जिम्मेवारी निर्वाह र प्रतिवेदनमा समेटिइसकेका छैनन्। उदाहरणका लागि, विश्वविद्यालयहरूमा प्रतिवर्ष अर्बौं रूपैयाँ अनुदान जान्छ, आफैले पनि करोडौं सेवा शुल्क असुल गर्दछन्, जसको एकीकृत प्रतिवेदन लिने, जिम्मेवारी वहनको समीक्षा गर्ने परिपाटी छैन। यस्ता एक्स्ट्रा बजेटरी इन्टीटीहरूलाई वित्तीय जिम्मेवारीमा समेट्ने कार्यनिर्देशिका र प्रतिवेदनको प्रणाली विकास गरी IFMIS सँग एकीकृत गराउनु जरुरी छ। अन्यथा, न संसदीय भावनाले कार्यरूप पाउँछ, न होल अफ दी गर्भन्मेन्टको अवधारणा अनुरूप वित्तीय विवरण तयार हुनसक्छ।
- आठौं विषय क्रियाकलापको नतिजामूलक अनुगमन हो। वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन सुधारका लागि अभ्यासमा ल्याइएका

प्रणालीहरूको प्रभावकारिताका नियमित अनुगमन, आन्तरिक नियन्त्रण प्रणाली, सम्पत्ति व्यवस्थापन र आर्थिक अनुशासनका समग्र पक्षमा जिम्मेवार पदाधिकारीहरूले नियमित अनुगमन गर्न पर्दछ । सबैजसो प्रणाली अनलाइनमा आधारित बनाउँदै ल्याएको सन्दर्भमा Sytem audit, Power Sytem audit, Business audit, Data Back up प्रणालीको विश्वासनीयताको आवधिक अनुगमन आवश्यक छ ।

- नवौं विषय, स्थानीय तहमा नियन्त्रण र सन्तुलनको संयन्त्र विकास गरिनु पर्दछ । पालिकाहरूमा बजेट कार्यक्रम तर्जुमा, त्यसलाई सभाबाट अनुमोदन गराउने, स्वीकृत बजेट कार्यान्वयन गर्ने र त्यसमाथि महालेखा परीक्षकले दिएको सुझाव कार्यान्वयन (बेरुजु फर्स्यौट र परामर्श कार्यान्वयन) पनि कार्यपालिकाले नै गर्ने गर्दछ । यसले नियन्त्रण र सन्तुलनको प्रक्रिया व्यवस्थित गर्नुपर्ने माँग गरेको छ । जसका लागि तदर्थ रूपमा भएपनि स्थानीय विज्ञ समूह जस्ता अनौपचारिक मञ्च (Informal forum) परिचालन गरी वित्तीय कारोबारलाई विश्वासनीय अनि नागरिकमैत्री बनाउन सकिन्छ । जसलाई वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनमा नागरिक परिचालन (Civic Engagement in Financial Management) भन्न सकिन्छ ।
- अन्तिम विषय लेखा परीक्षणको हो । अहिलेको लेखा परीक्षकको न्यायिक धारणामा आधारित (Judgemental) परीक्षणलाई Computer Assisted Audit System (CAAT) मा रूपान्तरण गर्न जरुरी छ । यसका लागि मापदण्ड (criteria) हरू विकास गरी प्रणाली एकीकरण (system integration) गरिनु पर्दछ ताकि उपलब्धि क्रियाकलापको भिन्नता (Gap) प्रणालीबाटै अवलोकन (observation) गर्न सकियोस् । लेखा परीक्षण थोरै मात्र आलोचनात्मक (judgmental) हुनुपर्दछ । यसो हुँदा लेखा परीक्षणको विश्वासनीयता र गुणस्तर बढ्न जान्छ, व्यावसायिकता विकास पनि हुन्छ । अहिले लेखा प्रणाली र अन्य व्यवस्थापन प्रणाली डिजिटल भए, तर लेखा परीक्षण चाहिँ त्यसो हुन सकेको छैन ।

## ७. उपसंहार

सार्वजनिक वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनलाई सबल, गुणस्तरीय, विश्वासनीय र प्रविधिमैत्री बनाउने काम उच्च प्राथमिकतामा छन्, सूचना प्रविधिमा आधारित सरकारी लेखा प्रणाली (CGAS) लगायतका प्रणालीहरूले उल्लेख्य उपलब्धि दिनसक्ने पूर्वाधार विकास भएको छ । तर तीन शासकीय तहका ७६९ सञ्चित कोष, छरिएका कार्यसञ्चालन कोष, बजेट बाहिरका वित्तीय कारोबार र मुलुकभित्र बजेट तथा राष्ट्रिय प्रणाली छलेर विभिन्न सजिला छिद्रबाट भएका खर्चको वास्तविक समयमा (Real Time) आधारित यथार्थमूलक प्रतिवेदन लिने र त्यसलाई राइट ट्र्याकिङ गर्ने सबल प्रणाली स्थापना गर्न अबै बाँकी छ । किनकी सुधार निरन्तरको यात्रा हो ।

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## लेखक परिचय

नीति विश्लेषण, व्यवस्थापन र आर्थिक विधामा सुपरिचित श्री मैनाली नेपाल सरकारका पूर्व सचिव/पूर्व महालेखा नियन्त्रक हुनुहुन्छ । त्रिभुवन विश्वविद्यालयबाट अर्थशास्त्र र जनप्रशासनमा र पूर्वाञ्चल विश्वविद्यालयबाट व्यवस्थापनमा स्नातकोत्तर मैनाली म्याष्ट्रिच स्कुल अफ मेनेजमेन्टबाट 'वित्तीय व्यवस्थापन', जापानबाट 'अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय कर' मा डिप्लोमा र अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय मुद्रा कोषबाट 'फाइनान्सल प्रोग्रामिङ एण्ड पोलिसी' कोर्स पनि गर्नु भएको छ । उहाँले जलवायु परिवर्तन, विपदपछिको पुननिर्माण, दिगो विकास लक्ष्य, हरित अर्थतन्त्रको खाका, सवैको लागि दिगो उर्जा, राष्ट्रिय गरिवी निवारण नीति, भूमि नीति, सार्वजनिक वित्त व्यवस्थापन सुधार, सहकारी नियमन तथा प्रवर्द्धन लगायतका क्षेत्रमा महत्वपूर्ण योगदान गर्नु भएको छ । उहाँका व्यवस्थापन तथा विकास सम्बन्धी पाँच र साहित्यका पाँच पुस्तकहरू र पत्रपत्रिकामा अनेकन लेखहरू प्रकाशित छन् ।



## राजनैतिक दल र राज्यको नीतिका विचको अन्तरसम्बन्ध:समस्या, चुनौति र समाधानका उपायहरु

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### सारांश

नेपालले हालसालै सामन्तवादी राजनीतिक प्रणालीबाट सङ्घीय लोकतान्त्रिक प्रणालीमा फड्को मारेपछि राजनीतिक दलहरूको लागि राज्यका नीतिको प्रतिरोध गरेर होइन तिनलाई विस्तारित गरेर दलको उद्देश्य प्राप्त गर्ने अवसर र बाध्यता समेत सिर्जना भएको छ। दल र राज्यका नीतिहरूविचको सामञ्जस्य स्थायीत्व र विकासको लागि अति महत्त्वपूर्ण हुन्छ। यो लेखको उद्देश्य नेपालमा राजनीतिक दलका नीति र राज्यका नीति विच सामञ्जस्यपूर्ण अन्तर्सम्बन्धको आवश्यकता, समस्या, चुनौतीको लेखाजोखा तथा समस्या समाधानका उपायहरू निकर्षण गर्नु हो। यो लेखमा सार्वजनिक नीतिका केही सैद्धान्तिक पृष्ठभूमिसहित नेपालको समकालीन राजनीतिक परिवर्तनको पृष्ठभूमिमा राज्यको नीति अभिव्यक्त हुने संविधान र ऐन तथा दलहरूको नीति अभिव्यक्त हुने घोषणापत्र र सत्ताभिन्न र बाहिर रहँदाको व्यवहार लगायत पाटाहरूमा रहेको अन्तराल र अन्तरविरोधको विश्लेषण गरी तिनका कारक तत्वको विवेचना तथा समाधानका तार्किक उपाय सुझाइएको छ। नेपालमा राजनीतिक दल र राज्यका नीति विच स्थिरता र राजनीतिक विश्वसनीयतामाथि नै प्रश्न खडा हुने तहको अन्तराल रहेको देखिएको छ भने यसको समाधानको लागि राजनीतिक हैसियतको परिपालना, संस्कारजन्य व्यवहारमा परिवर्तन र संरचनागत सुधार गर्ने लगायतका सुझावहरू दिइएको छ।

### Abstract

Nepal's recent leap from a feudal political system to a federal democratic system has created opportunities and compulsions for political parties to achieve their objectives by expanding and not resisting state policy. Harmony between party and state policies is crucial for stability and development. The purpose of this article is to assess the need, problems and challenges of the harmonious interrelationship between and policies of the state and the policies of political parties and suggest solutions to the problems. I have presented the theoretical context of public policies and the context of contemporary political changes in Nepal. I have analyzed the gap and contradiction between the policy of the state as expressed in the constitution and relevant Acts, and the policies of political parties as represented in their manifestos, and also that between the behaviour of political parties when in power and the behaviour when out of power, identified the factors, and suggested logical solution to the problems. It is found that there are serious gaps between the policies of political parties and that of the state to the extent that it is undermining the stability and political credibility. Acceptance and adherence to the legitimate political status, change in cultural practices and structural reforms are among the suggested remedies of the problem.

**Keywords:** राजनीतिक दल, नीति अन्तरसम्बन्ध, राज्यको नीति, पार्टीको नीति; political party, policy interrelationship state policy, political party's manifesto

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## १. परिचय

नेपालमा बहुदलीय व्यवस्थाको आरम्भ र पुनर्स्थापना भए पछि, राज्यको बागडोर राजनीतिक दलहरूका हातमा पुग्यो । राज्यको नीति बदल्न सङ्घर्ष गरेका दलहरू आज राज्यको बागडोर समाल्ने हैसियतमा छन् र उनीहरूको नीति नै राज्यको नीति बन्न पुगेको छ भने राज्य सञ्चालनका हरेक कदम कदममा सो नीति प्रतिबिम्बित हुने भएकाले राज्यको नीतिसँग राजनीतिक दलको नीतिको अन्तरसम्बन्ध गहिरो छ र हनुपर्दछ । तर अपेक्षाकृत त्यसो हुन सकेको छ वा छैन, छैन भने तिनका समस्या र चुनौती के हुन्, दलहरू कहाँ चुके र समाधानको उपाय के हुन सक्दछन् भन्ने बारेमा समीक्षा गर्ने यो आलेखको आसय हो ।

बहुलवादी समाजमा विचारको विभिन्नता एक स्वाभाविक परिणति हो । त्यसैले संविधानले अङ्गीकार गरेको मूल नीतिका मातहत सबै दलहरूलाई कसरी राख्न सकिन्छ । यो पनि त्यतिकै सत्य हो कि आज अस्तित्वमा रहेका सबै दलहरू यही नीतिका लागि सङ्घर्ष गरेका र यही नीतिमा सहमत भएर दल गठन र सञ्चालन गरेका दलहरू नै छन् उनीहरूका लागि संविधानले निर्धारण गरेको नीति नै मूल नीति हुनु स्वाभाविक हो । समाज निरन्तर विकासको प्रक्रियामा हुनुका नाताले संविधानले निर्धारण गरेका नीतिभित्रै सीमित हुन पर्छ भन्ने तर्क गर्न नमिल्ला तर त्यससँग अन्तर्विरोधी हुने गरी नीतिको वकालत गर्ने कुरा स्वयं दलहरूका लागि नै पाच्य हुँदैन भन्ने यस आलेखको आशय हो । यसैको सेरो फेरोमा राज्य र दलको नीतिविचको अन्तरविरोध र अन्तरसम्बन्धलाई केलाउने प्रयास यस आलेखमा गरिएको छ । राजनीतिक दल र राज्यका नीतिको विचको अन्तर सोको कारणहरू र परिणामका बारेमा नीतिगत अन्तरका कारणले राज्य र दल दुवैका नीतिहरू बेवारिसे बन्न खतरालाई समेत औँल्याएर यसलाई प्रभावकारी बनाउनका लागि अवलम्बन गर्न पर्ने उपायहरूका बारेमा समेत सुझाउने प्रयत्न गरिएको छ । निष्कर्षका रूपमा राज्य र राजनीतिक दल दुवै सार्वजनिक निकाय भएका कारणले तिनका नीतिको प्रभाव सार्वजनिक नै हुने, राज्यका सञ्चालनको जिम्मा दलहरूकै हुने भएका कारणले दलहरू राज्य र दलका नीतिका विचमा सामान्जस्य कायम गर्न र तिनको प्रभावकारी कार्यान्वयनका लागि समेत प्रथम जिम्मेवार निकाय हुन भन्ने सार निकालिएको छ ।

## २. नीति के हो ?

बेलायती राजनीतिक परिवारमा जन्मे हुर्केका राजनीतिक लेखक, प्रकाशक, राजनीतिलाई नजिकबाट हेरेका तर राजनीति नगरेका Ernest Benn राजनीतिलाई भिन्न ढङ्गले चित्रण गर्दै भन्दछन्, राजनीति समस्याको खोजी गर्ने यस्तो कला हो, जसले यो अव्यवस्थित छ कि छैन पत्ता लगाउँछ, यसलाई गलत तरिकाले निदान गर्छ र गलतै उपचार अवलम्बन गर्छ । [Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it whether it exists or not, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedy.— Ernest Benn] (Opher's world, 2021) ।

सरकार वा अन्य निकायहरूले स्वैच्छिक रूपमा अवलम्बन गर्ने कानून, नियम, कार्यविधि वा प्रशासनिक कार्यहरूको सार पक्ष नीति हो । नीतिको प्रतिछाया सरकार वा संस्थाहरूका हरेक निर्णयमा प्रतिबिम्बित हुने गर्दछन् । कानून र न्यायको क्षेत्रमा पर्याप्त रकम विनियोजन भयो भने उसको कानून र न्यायको क्षेत्र प्राथमिकता राख्ने नीति रहेछ भन्ने प्रस्ट हुन्छ । त्यसै गरी स्वास्थ्य क्षेत्रमा पर्याप्त बजेट विनियोजन भएको रहेछ भने सो सरकारको स्वास्थ्य नीति प्राथमिकतामा रहेछ भन्ने बुझ्न गाह्रो पर्दैन । कुनै बेला मार्टिन लुथर किङ तृतीयले भनेका थिए कि यो हरेक वैचारिक धाराहरूका राजनीति नेतृत्वका लागि आत्मसात् गर्ने बेला हो कि विभाजन बुझ्न सकिने कुरा हो, अत्यधिक विभाजन मुलुकका लागि बिनाशकारी हुन सक्छ । तसर्थ यदि बेला दूरदृष्टि राख्न सक्ने नेतृत्वको खाँचो छ, जसले इमानकासाथ विभाजनकारी र दुई ध्रुवीय मत र विचारहरूलाई मनन गर्न र तिनको समाधान गर्ने नीति पहिचान गरी अमेरिकालाई अगाडि बढाउन सकोस् । “It’s time for political leaders across the ideological spectrum to realize that, while partisanship is understandable, hyper-partisanship is destructive to our country. We need more visionary leaders who will earnestly strive for bipartisanship and finding policy solutions that can move America forward” । यसै गरी इमान नै सर्वोत्तम नीति हो भन्ने “Honesty is

*the best policy*” (Goldring, 2021) – Benjamin franklin, र हामीले हाम्रा बच्चाहरूलाई इमान नै सर्वोत्तम नीति हो भन्नु अघि हामीले विश्वलाई नै इमान्दार बनाउन सक्छौं भन्ने प्रश्न आफैतिर गर्ने बर्नाड शा को यो भनाईले प्रष्ट पार्दछ - “I am afraid we must make the world honest before we can honestly say to our children that honesty is the best Policy” (Goldring, 2021) । राजनीतिज्ञहरू नीतिविहिन बनेकाछन् भन्ने आक्षेप पनि छ - “Politicians around the world are accused of being ‘out of policy control’ because they cannot influence policies as much as their voters would like, and they cannot respond to voters beyond the extent that their influence allows (IDEA International, 2017), यसबाट प्रस्ट हुन्छ कि नीति नै राजनीतिको कुञ्जी हो ।

त्यसो हो भने नीति आफैमा के हो त भन्ने बारेमा चर्चा गर्न जरुरी हुन्छ । सामान्यतः नीति यस्तो मार्गदर्शन सिद्धान्त हो जसले हरेक निर्णय र तिनको कार्यान्वयनलाई निर्देश गर्दछ । नीति वास्तवमा सरकारको इच्छा मन्तव्य हो, निर्णय गर्ने र कार्यान्वयन गर्ने प्रक्रिया र पद्धतिको दिशा निर्देश हो । यस्तो मार्गदर्शन सरकारको वा संस्थाको सर्वोच्च अङ्गबाट अनुमोदित हुन्छ । नीति, सो निकायको आम मान्यता हो । यसै मान्यताका अधीनमा रहेर नियम, कानून, निर्देशिका बन्ने र आदेशहरू जारी हुने, निर्णयहरू हुने, तिनको कार्यान्वयन हुने र अपेक्षा गरे अनुरूपको उपलब्धि हासिल भए नभएको मूल्याङ्कन र परीक्षण हुने गर्दछ । तिनैका परिणामका आधारमा अवलम्बन गरिआएको नीतिमा परिमार्जन वा विकास गर्ने गर्दछन् । आम नीतिभित्र सो निकायले गर्ने निर्णयका अलावा सो निर्णय प्रक्रिया र प्राथमिकता समेत पर्दछ । साथै सो निकायले राखेको लक्ष हासिल गर्न अवलम्बन गरिएका राजनीतिक आर्थिक प्रशासनिक लगायत अन्य संयन्त्र र उपायहरू समेत आम नीतिकै अभिन्न अङ्ग बन्दछन् । समग्रमा नीतिको परीक्षण परिणामबाट र परिणामको मूल्याङ्कन नीतिका आधारमा हुने गर्छ, यसो हुँदा नीति र परिणाम अन्तरसम्बन्धित छन् भन्न सकिन्छ ।

### ३. राजनीतिक पार्टी र राज्यको नीति:

*Public policy provides guidance to governments and accountability links to citizens* (Mackay & Shaxton, 2005), नीति दल वा सरकारलाई उत्तरदायी बनाईराख्ने दिशा निर्देश हो । नीति दलको त्यस्तो मान्यता हो जो अनुसन्धानबाट प्राप्त तथ्याङ्क र सूचनाद्वारा पुष्टि भएको र आफ्ना सदस्यहरूको दृष्टिकोण, मत र चाहनाको प्रतिबिम्ब बनेोस् । देश र जनताको सेवामा समर्पितहरूको समूह नै राजनीतिक पार्टी हुनाका नाताले देश र जनताको हित प्रवर्द्धन गर्ने मान्यताको विकास गर्ने र तिनको कार्यान्वयनका लागि अवलम्बन गर्ने अवधारणा नै समग्रमा राजनीतिक पार्टीको नीति हो । राजनीतिक दलहरूको नीति त्यो बौद्धिक सार तत्वको प्रतिबिम्बन हो जो अनुसन्धानबाट प्राप्त तथ्य तथ्याङ्क सूचनाहरूले पुष्टि गर्दछ र आफ्ना सदस्यहरूको मत र भावनाको उपयुक्त प्रतिनिधित्व समेत गर्दछ । खास विषयमा खास परिवेशमा के गर्ने भन्ने बारेमा राजनीतिक दलले अवलम्बन गर्ने दृष्टिकोण वा मान्यता जो आम रूपमा आफ्ना सदस्यहरूबाट स्वीकार गरिएको छ त्यो दृष्टिकोण वा मान्यता नै सो दलको नीति हो भनेर राजनीतिक दलको नीतिका बारेमा स्पष्ट हुन सकिन्छ । पार्टीको नीति राजनीतिक दलको विधान, घोषणापत्र र बेला बेलामा सम्पन्न गरिने राष्ट्रिय महाधिवेशनमा पारित गरिने राजनीतिक दस्तावेजका साथै बेला बेलामा लिइने निर्णयहरूमा प्रतिबिम्बित हुन्छ । राज्यको नीतिको कुरा गर्दा लिखित संविधान भएको मुलुकमा संविधानमा कानून र अन्य दस्तावेजहरूमा अभिव्यक्त भएको हुन्छ । लिखित संविधान नभएका मुलुकमा पनि सो मुलुकका आधिकारिक दस्तावेजहरू, लिखितहरू, ऐन, कानून र नियमहरूका साथै सरकारका निर्णयहरूमा अभिव्यक्त हुन्छ । मूल रूपमा राज्यको नीति भनेको सो राज्य सञ्चालनका लागि तय गरिएका आम मान्यता जो तथ्य तथ्याङ्क र प्रमाणहरूबाट पुष्टि भएको होउन् । त्यसै गरी, आम देशवासीको भावना प्रतिबिम्बित भएको पनि होस् र देश र जनताको इच्छा वा चाहना प्राप्तिको लक्ष चुम्ने प्रयत्न भएको होओस् ।

### ४. नेपालको सन्दर्भमा राजनैतिक दल र राज्यको नीति

राजनीतिक दलहरूको नीतिको कुरा गर्दा नेपालको राजनीतिक आन्दोलन विनिर्माणको गौरवगाथाले भरिएको छ । राणा शासन र पञ्चायत शासनमा राजनीतिक दलहरूमाथि प्रतिबन्ध रहे पनि राजनीतिक दलहरूको नीति भनेकै संस्थापन

राजनीतिक प्रणालीको अन्त गर्नका लागि जे जे पनि गर्न तयार हुने र त्यसका लागि जे जे कार्यक्रम वा कुर्बानी गर्न पनि तयार हुने नीति नै राजनीतिक दलको नीति रह्यो । मूलतः संस्थापन पक्षको विनिर्माण, संस्थापन पक्षका विरुद्धको कुर्बानी, त्याग र बलिदानलाई आदर्श ठान्ने र तिनै आदर्शलाई व्यवहारमा सही साबित गर्ने कार्यक्रम सफल बनाउन अवलम्बन गरिने हरेक कार्यक्रमलाई नै राजनीतिक दलका नीति वा नीति अन्तर्गतका कार्यक्रम भनियो । दलीय स्वतन्त्रताको प्राप्त दलहरूको नीति बन्यो । देशलाई अर्ध औपनिवेशिक र अर्धसामन्ती अवस्थाबाट मुक्ति दिलाउने कुरा दलहरूको नीति बन्यो । देश र जनताको स्वतन्त्रता मूलतः राजनीतिक स्वतन्त्रता पहिलो प्राथमिकता र गाँस, वास र कपासको उपलब्धता दोस्रो नीति राजनीतिक दलहरूको बन्यो । दलीय स्वतन्त्रता प्राप्त गर्नु अघि सम्म राज्यको नीति एकातिर राजनीतिक दलहरूको नीति अर्कोतर्फ फर्किएको स्पष्ट देख्न सकिन्छ । दलीय स्वतन्त्रता प्राप्त भएसँगै दलमाथिको प्रतिबन्ध हटेपछि दलका नीति र राज्यको नीतिका बिचमा निकटता देखा पर्न थाल्यो । तथापि दलहरूको आफ्नो पृष्ठभूमि, सदा सङ्घर्ष बलिदानी, भत्काउने र संस्थापन पक्षको विरुद्धमा सङ्घर्ष छेड्ने आम मान्यता र पहिचान नै बनेका राजनीतिक दलहरूका लागि राज्यको नीतिले धेरै आकर्षण गर्न सकेन । तसर्थ लामो समय राज्यका नीति र दलका नीतिका बिचमा अन्तर देखा परिनै रह्यो । दलीय स्वतन्त्रता प्राप्त भएसँगै केही राजनीतिक स्वतन्त्रता प्राप्त भएको भए पनि प्राप्त राजनीतिक स्वतन्त्रता पनि बेला बखतमा खोसिने र आर्थिक सामाजिक सांस्कृतिक स्वतन्त्रता अझै परको विषय भएका कारणले पनि राज्य र राजनीतिक दलका प्राथमिकताका बारेमा भिन्नता कायमै रह्यो । राज्यका नीतिको दायरा भित्र दलका नीतिहरू भेटिन कठिन भयो ।

पछिल्लो पटक संविधानसभाबाट संविधान बने पछि संविधानमा राज्यका हरेक नीतिहरूका बारेमा स्पष्ट उल्लेख भए पछि पनि ती नीतिहरूमा राजनीतिक दलहरूको एकरूप समझदारी कायम हुन अझै सकेन । जसका कारण कतिपय राजनीतिक दलहरू संविधानले अवलम्बन गरेका राज्यका नीतिहरू विभेदकारी रहेको अपर्याप्त रहेको भन्दै त्यसप्रति असहमति जनाउन छाडेका छैनन् (MJFN, 2008) । कतिपय राजनीतिक दलहरूका आफ्ना पृष्ठभूमिका कारण कहिल्यै पनि राज्यको नीतिको विकल्पमा वा सोको विरुद्धमा आफ्ना अवधारणाहरू तयारी अवस्थामा राख्ने परम्परागत मान्यताबाट मुक्त हुन नसकेको पाइन्छ । कतिपयका हकमा सत्तामा रहेका बखत एक खालको अवधारणा र सत्ताभन्दा बाहिर रहेका बखत अर्को अवधारणा अवलम्बन गर्ने भएका कारणले राज्यको नीति र राजनीतिक दलका नीतिका बिचमा सामन्जस्यको अभाव सदैव रही आयो । राज्यका नीतिहरूको लेखन राजनीतिक दलका प्रतिनिधिहरूका माध्यमबाट भएको भए पनि ती राज्यका नीतिहरू बेवारिस बन्ने, स्वामित्व लिन कोही तयार नहुने र राज्यका नीतिका विकल्पमा राजनीतिक दलका नीतिहरूको लेखन निरन्तर भई रहने भएका कारणले राज्यको नीति र राजनीतिक दलको नीतिका बिचमा सारमा भिन्नता नभए पनि रूपमा भिन्नता सदाबहार देखा पर्ने रोगको विकास भएको छ भन्न सकिन्छ । *“Policy Analysis provides a strong conceptual foundation of the rationales for and the limitations to public policy. It offers practical advice about how to do policy analysis, but goes a bit deeper to demonstrate the application of advanced analytical techniques through the use of case studies”* (Weimer & Vining, 2017) । नीति विश्लेषण समय समयमा गर्ने पर्ने काम हो यसले सार्वजनिक नीतिको औचित्यका बारेमा अवधारणा बनाउन मजबुत आधार खडा गर्दछ यसले सुधार गर्न केही व्यवहारिक ज्ञानहरू पनि दिन्छ भन्ने विश्वास गरिन्छ । नेपालको सन्दर्भमा पनि नीति विश्लेषण गर्ने संस्कारको विकास गर्ने खाँचो छ ।

## **५. राज्यको नीति र पार्टीको नीति:**

राज्यको नीति र पार्टीको नीतिको पहिचान गर्ने आधार राज्यको संविधान र पार्टीका दस्तावेज, घोषणापत्र र अभिव्यक्तिहरूलाई लिन सकिन्छ । यसका आधारमा भन्ने हो भने राज्यको नीति र दलका नीतिका बिचमा काफै अन्तर देखिन्छ जुन कुराको सामान्य फलक तलको तालिकाले दिनेछ । यो तालिकाको सर्सर्ती विश्लेषण गर्दा राज्यको नीति संविधानमा अभिव्यक्त हुने तर उक्त नीति प्रति दलहरूको जहिले पनि विमति रहने गत्यो । जसका कारण राज्यसत्ताले संविधानको नीति कार्यान्वयन गर्ने दलको नीति कार्यान्वयन गर्न नसक्ने, कार्यान्वयन नहुने नीति समातेर दल चल्ने, कार्यान्वयन हुने नीति को स्वामित्व कार्यान्वयन गर्ने जिम्मा वोकेका दलहरूले नलिने आदि आजको मुख्य समस्या हुन् ।

तालिका १ राज्यको नीति बोल्ने दस्तावेज र राजनीतिक दलको नीति बोल्ने दस्तावेज

सि.नं.	राज्यको नीति बोल्ने दस्तावेज संविधान	राजनीतिक दलका नीति बोल्ने विधान, घोषणापत्र र दस्तावेज
१	नेपाल सरकार वैधानिक कानुन, २००४  राजभक्ति, लोकनीति र सदाचार सिद्धान्तको बर्खिलाप नगरी, प्रचलित कानुनको विरोध नगरी वाक स्वतन्त्रता, तर उपचारको हक छैन	गणतन्त्र र पूर्ण वाक स्वतन्त्रता र राजनीतिक स्वतन्त्रता, आफ्नो शासन आफै छान्न पाउने व्यवस्था, सोका लागि जननिर्वाचित विधान सभाले बनाएको कानुन बमोजिम शासित हुन मन्जुर रहेको स्वीकारोक्ति (Commitment of Nepal Communist Party, 2008)
२	नेपालको अन्तरिम शासन विधान २००७  प्रचलित कानुनका अधीनमा रही स्वतन्त्रताको प्रत्याभुति तर उपचारको हक छैन	गणतन्त्र र पूर्ण वाक स्वतन्त्रता र राजनीतिक स्वतन्त्रता एकातिर र अर्कोतिर राजा सहितको प्रजातन्त्रको वकालत तत्कालिन राज्यको नीतिसँगको अन्तरविरोधका उदाहरण हुन्
३	नेपाल अधिराज्यको संविधान २०१५  शक्तिको स्रोत श्री ५, संविधान मुल कानुन भए पनि राजगद्दी, वंशानुक्रम, रीत परम्परा र भईरहेको कानुनलाई बदल्ने छैन ।  सार्वजनिक हितका निमित्त मौलिक हकको प्रयोगमा बन्देजको व्यवस्था गरिएको छ ।	गणतन्त्र र पूर्ण वाक स्वतन्त्रता र राजनीतिक स्वतन्त्रता (Election Manifesto of Nepal Communist Party, 2008) ।  राजा सहितको प्रजातन्त्र (Election Manifesto of Nepali Congress, 2008) ।  मौलिक हक कानुनका अधीन राख्दै संविधानलाई कानुन अधीनको दस्तावेजका रूपमा राखियो । यो मान्य छैन । यसै गरी हरेक मामला सार्वजनिक हितका लागि भन्ने त्याग लगाउनासाथ निषेधित सूचीमा पर्ने कुराले लोकतन्त्रको धज्जी उडेकोछ (MJFN, 2008)
४	नेपालको संविधान २०१९  सार्वजनिक हितका निमित्त मौलिक हकको प्रयोगमा बन्देज र पञ्चायत प्रणालीका निर्देशक सिद्धान्तहरू	गणतन्त्र र पूर्ण वाक स्वतन्त्रता र राजनीतिक स्वतन्त्रताको माग एकातर्फ अर्कोतर्फ राजा सहितको प्रजातन्त्रका रूपमा पञ्चायती व्यवस्था नै नेपाली माटो सुहाउँदो प्रजातन्त्र भन्ने दावी यसका साथै पञ्चायतको खिलाप पार्टी निर्माणको आधार बन्ने अवस्था र सो नै पार्टी नीति बनेको अवस्था
५	नेपाल अधिराज्यको संविधान २०४७ राजा सहितको संसद, राजालाई उन्मुक्ति, शक्तिको स्रोत राजा र राजा संविधानभन्दा माथि रहने व्यवस्था, मिश्रित अर्थतन्त्र, संवैधानिक राजतन्त्र बहुदलीय संसदीय प्रणाली आधारभुत संरचनाका रूपमा रहने र संविधान संशोधन गर्न पनि नसकिने, नागरिक तथा राजनीतिक अधिकार समावेश	गणतन्त्र र पूर्ण वाक स्वतन्त्रता र राजनीतिक स्वतन्त्रता, राजासहितको प्रजातन्त्र, राजाले संवैधानिक दायरामा बस्न पर्ने दलहरूको आग्रह, आर्थिक समाजिक साँस्कृतिक अधिकार समेत समावेश गर्नुपर्ने राजनीतिक दलहरूको माग

- ६ नेपालको अन्तरिम संविधान २०६३  
राजाको अवस्था निलम्बनमा, मिश्रित अर्थतन्त्र,  
राजनीतिक तथा नागरिक अधिकारका साथै  
आर्थिक सामाजिक साँस्कृतिक अधिकारको पनि  
ग्यारेन्टी गर्ने प्रयास
- गणतन्त्र र पूर्ण वाक स्वतन्त्रता र राजनीतिक स्वतन्त्रता,  
राजा सहितको प्रजातन्त्र र राजाका बारेमा निरपेक्ष  
रहनेजस्ता भिन्न मतका अतिरिक्त (Narasingha,  
2021), राजतन्त्रका बारेमा जनमत सङ्ग्रह राजतन्त्रसँग  
सम्भौताहीन सङ्घर्ष
- राजनीतिक क्रान्तिमार्फत राजतन्त्रको अन्त, अन्तरिम  
संविधानमार्फत गणतन्त्रको घोषणा (Asia report,  
2009)
- ७ नेपालको संविधान  
सङ्घीय लोकतान्त्रिक गणतन्त्र र समावेशीता  
सहित लोकतान्त्रिक मूल्य र मान्यतामा आधारित  
समाजवादप्रति प्रतिवद्धता (प्रस्तावना)
- संविधान अपूर्ण, सबैको स्वामित्व र अपनत्वका लागि  
संशोधन अनिवार्य छ, मतका विरुद्धमा विश्ववैङ्कको  
सुविधाको उपयोग गर्नुपर्छ, संविधान कार्यान्वयनको  
चरण हो संशोधन गर्ने बेला यो हैन (Nepali congress,  
2021)
- नागरिक तथा राजनीतिक अधिकारका साथै  
आर्थिक सामाजिक साँस्कृतिक अधिकारको  
प्रत्याभूति (भाग ३, मौलिक हक)
- संविधान पुनर्लेखन गर्नुपर्छ, यो संविधानले मधेशी  
आदिवासी जनजाति दलित र महिलाको हकलाई  
सुनिश्चित गर्न सकेको छैन (Madhesi Jana Adhikar  
Forum, 2021)
- सङ्घीय लोकतान्त्रिक गणतन्त्रात्मक व्यवस्था  
सुदृढ गर्ने राज्यको राजनीतिक उद्देश्य हुने (धारा  
५०(१))
- पूँजीवादी क्रान्ति सम्पन्न भयो अब समाजवादी क्रान्तिका  
लागि कार्यक्रम बनाउन जरुरी छ। आत्मनिर्भर अर्थतन्त्र  
सहित समाजवादी अर्थ व्यवस्था अबको कार्यभार हो
- समाजवादउन्मुख स्वतन्त्र र समृद्ध अर्थतन्त्रको  
विकास गर्ने राज्यको आर्थिक उद्देश्य हुने (धारा  
५०(३))
- निजी सार्वजनिक सहकारी नीतिको अवलम्बन,  
सहकारीलाई प्राथमिकता
- खुला बजारमुखी अर्थतन्त्रलाई इन्कार गर्न सकिन्न भन्ने  
मत
- सुकुम्वासीलाई जमिन र घर, शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य, रोजगारी,  
आवास, तथा खाद्यसंप्रभूताको अधिकारलाई मौलिक  
हकका रूपमा ग्यारेन्टी
- एकात्मक पार्टी संरचनाको निरन्तरता राज्य संरचनामा  
जिल्ला समन्वय समिति कार्यकारी अधिकारविहीन हुँदा  
पनि जिल्ला पार्टीको कार्यकारी अधिकारको निरन्तरता
- प्रत्यक्ष निर्वाचित कार्यकारी राष्ट्रपतीय प्रणाली, प्रत्यक्ष  
निर्वाचित प्रधानमन्त्री वा संसदिय प्रणाली अवलम्बन  
गरिनुपर्छ भन्ने नीतिको निरन्तरता

## ६. अन्तर के हो ? र किन हो ?

### ६.१ राजनैतिक संस्कारमा समस्या:

राज्यको नीति र राजनीतिक दलको नीतिका विचमा अन्तर हुनु सामान्य कुरा होला, तर अन्तर विरोध हुनु सामान्य मान्न सकिन्न । नेपालको सन्दर्भमा सामान्य अन्तर मात्रै हैन अन्तरविरोध नै देखा पर्ने गरेको छ । यसको पछाडिको कारण खोतल्दा राजनीतिक संस्कारमा समस्या हो भन्ने निष्कर्षमा पुग्न सकिन्छ । भनिन्छ, “*Political Culture is the sum of the collectively effective values, orientations, attitudes, and costumes, as well as the willingness to take political action. It plays a key role in shaping the reality, character, and functioning of every political constitution.*” (Meyer & Breyer, 2007)। पार्टी नीति र राज्यको नीतिमा भिन्नता आउनाको कारण भनेको विषय वस्तुलाई हेर्ने दृष्टिकोण र तद्अनुकुलको संस्कारको विषय हो भनिन्छ, “*If politics poses the question of “who gets what, when, where, and how,” then political culture supplies a big part of the answer. If politics is the “art of the possible,” then political culture helps define the limits of that art, for culture defines what is generally permissible in a given society.*” (Swedlow, 2013) । राजनीतिक संस्कारका बारेमा विकसित मुलुकहरू र विकासोन्मुख मुलुकहरूमा रहेको चेतना र विकासको स्तरको भिन्नता र लामो अभ्यास पछि स्थापित मान्यताका आधारमा अभ्यास गरिने राजनीति र सङ्क्रमणका अवस्थामा रहेका समाजको राजनीतिक मानसिकताको प्रभावका कारण राज्यको नीति र राजनीतिक दलका नीतिमा आधारभूत भिन्नता रहने कुरा अनुमान गर्न सकिन्छ । राज्यका स्थापित मान्यता मातहत राजनीतिक दलका नीतिहरू बन्नुपर्छ भन्ने स्थायी राजनीतिका अभ्यास हुनु भने सङ्क्रमणमा रहेका राज्यका नीतिहरू बदलिन पर्छ, भन्ने मान्यताका दलहरूले राख्ने भएका कारण राजनीतिक दलका नीति मातहत राज्यको नीति बन्न पर्छ, भन्ने मान्यता स्थापित हुन पुगेको पाईन्छ ।

### ६.२ राज्य निरन्तरतामा छ दलहरू छलाडमा

नेपालको सन्दर्भमा सात दशकमा सातवटा संविधान जारी भए । फरक फरक समयमा फरक फरक संविधान जारी भए पनि राज्यको नीतिमा आधारभूत भिन्नता पाईदैन । एकात्मक शासन प्रणालीका ठाउँमा सङ्घात्मक शासन व्यवस्था, राजतन्त्रका ठाउँमा गणतन्त्रात्मक शासन प्रणाली, हिन्दु अधिराज्यको ठाउँमा धर्मनिरपेक्षता जस्ता आधारभूत रूपमा परिवर्तन पछिल्लो संविधानले गरेर राजनीतिक रूपमा निकै ठुलो कान्ति भएको सन्देश दिएको भएपनि यी बाहेकका राज्यका अन्य आधारभूत नीतिमा खासै परिवर्तन आएको छैन । आरम्भदेखि नै लोककल्याणकारी राज्यको अवधारणा अवलम्बन गरेका कारणले तिनै मान्यताहरूको निरन्तरता राज्यका नीतिमा भेटिन्छ । राजनीतिक दलहरूका नीतिमा भने राजनीतिक रूपमा सङ्घीयता, गणतन्त्र, धर्मनिरपेक्षता र समावेशी समानुपातिकताका निमित्त भएका आन्दोलनमा उर्जा थप्ने गरी तदनुसूचका नीति अवलम्बन गरेको पाईन्छ । यसरी हेर्दा लोककल्याणकारी राज्यको अवधारणामा राज्यका नीतिमा निरन्तरता देखा पर्छ भने दलहरूमा समय समयमा कहिले दलमाथिको प्रतिबन्ध फुकुवाका निमित्त सङ्घर्ष, कहिले असमान सन्धि सम्झौता खारेजी माँगलाई सघाउने नीति, कहिले निरंकुशता र राजतन्त्र अन्त गर्ने खालका नीति गरेर बेला वखतमा फेरबदल भईरहने नीति अवलम्बन गरेको पाईन्छ । पञ्चायतकालमा बहुदलको निमित्त सङ्घर्षको नीति अवलम्बन गरेका संसदवादी दलहरू दलमाथिको प्रतिबन्ध फुकुवा भएपछि राजतन्त्रसँग सहकार्य गर्ने नीति साथ आफ्ना नीतिहरू परिमार्जन गरेको देखिन्छ भने माओवादी लगायतका दलहरू भने सामन्ती राज्यसत्ताको अन्त गरी जनगणतन्त्रको स्थापनाको नीति लिएका कारण उसको त्यतिबेलाको नीतिमा छलाड भन्न सकिन्छ ।

### ६.३ नीति निर्माणको तरिकामा भिन्नता:

*Defining policy positions is a small but important step towards parties becoming more programmatic* (IDEA, 2016). राज्यको नीति निर्माण गर्ने मात्रै हैन कार्यान्वयनको कार्यक्रमिक योजना सहित आउनु महत्त्वपूर्ण कुरा हो । राज्य वा दल कार्यक्रम सहितका नीति नबनेको प्रतीत हुन्छ एकातिर भने अर्कोतिर राज्यको नीति कहिले *Top Down* कहिले *Bottom Up* भयो तर दलका नीति जहिले पनि *Top Down* छन् । सात दशकमा सात संविधान वन्दा पाँचवटा संविधान राजाबाट जारी भए भने एउटा संविधान वार्ता टोलीबाट मनोनयन गरिएका विज्ञहरूबाट मस्यौदा भई पुनर्स्थापित संसदले पारित गर्ने र अन्तरिम व्यवस्थापिका संसदले अनुमोदन गरी लागु भयो । नयाँ संविधान निर्माणको प्रकृया *Bottom Up Approach*

मा भयो । प्रारम्भिक मस्यौदा र अवधारणापत्र तयार गर्ने बेलामा नै निर्वाचित संविधानसभाका सदस्यहरू गाउँ बस्तीमा पुगे र उनीहरूकै राय मुताबिक प्रारम्भिक मस्यौदा तयार भएको हो । तर राजनीतिक दलहरूको नीति निर्माणको तौरतरिका कहिल्यै तलबाट भएन । प्रतिबन्धित कालमा त्यस्तो सहजता पनि थिएन भने भूमिगत कालमा पनि अनुकूलता थिएन । अहिले पनि पार्टीहरू केन्द्रीय कार्यालयमा नीति बनाउने र तिनको कार्यान्वयनको अपेक्षा सहित तल्ला कर्मिटा मा पठाउने प्रचलन छ । यसै गरी नीतिको आधार भनेको विश्वसनीय सूचना हो । विश्वसनीय सूचना अनुसन्धानबाट मात्र पाईन्छ । *Policy must be based on accurate factual information. Otherwise it will be merely a leap in the dark* (Sharma & Sadhana, 1994) । राज्य अनुसन्धान बिनाको नीति अध्यारोमा ढुङ्गा हाने सरह हुन्छ भन्ने विद्वानहरूको भनाईका बाबजुद हामीकहाँ राज्य र राजनीतिक दल नीतिहरू अनुसन्धानका आधारमा बनाउने प्रयत्न भन्दा पनि सस्तो लोकप्रियता हासिल गर्न र आवेगमा बन्ने गरेका छन् । राज्य र राजनीतिक दलका नीति निर्माणमा भएको गम्भीर गल्ती र भिन्नताले सो को कार्यान्वयन, स्वामित्व र अपनत्वमा गम्भीर प्रभाव पार्दछ । सो प्रभाव नेपालको सन्दर्भमा देखा परेको छ भन्ने कुरा अनुभवसिद्ध ज्ञानका आधारमा नै भन्न सकिन्छ ।

#### ६.४ संरचनागत भिन्नता:

राज्यसँग नजोडिने पार्टी संरचना निर्माण गर्नमा अभ्यस्त नेपालका राजनीतिक दलहरू छन् । नेपाली राजनीतिको विशेषता नै संस्थापन पक्षसँग जुध्ने, उसका संरचना नीति र कार्यक्रमलाई बिना कुनै मोलाहिजा प्रतिवाद गर्ने, विरोध गर्ने र खारेज गर्ने हो । त्यसैका आधारमा राजनीतिक दलका संरचनाहरू बन्ने गरेका छन् । राज्यको संरचना वमोजिम दलको संरचना बनाउने हो भने प्रतिक्रियावादीहरूको जस्तै संरचना, नीति र कार्यक्रम भन्ने आक्षेप लाग्ला भन्ने त्रासका कारण पनि सो भन्दा भिन्न बनाउने भरसक राज्यको संरचनासँग मेल नखाओस्, सकेसम्म अन्तरविरोध नै पार्न सकियोस भन्ने मान्यताका आधारमा पार्टीका नीति बन्ने परम्परा हो । नयाँ संविधान जारी भएपछि राज्य सङ्घीय भएको छ तर सोही राज्य सञ्चालन गर्ने राजनीतिक दलहरू भने सङ्घीय हुन सकेका छैनन् । दलहरू एकात्मक नै छन् । राज्य र राजनीतिक दलहरूका बिचको यो भिन्नताका कारणले नीति निर्माणमा सोको कार्यान्वयनमा र सोको स्वामित्व र अपनत्व ग्रहण गर्ने मामलामा समेत गम्भीर समस्याहरू देखा पर्ने गरेका छन् ।

#### ६.५ सहमति र विमतिको भिन्नता:

नेपालको संविधान राजनीतिक दलहरूको भिन्न मतका बाबजुद आम सहमतिमा बनेको दस्तावेज हो । नेपाल राज्यको आम सहमतिको नीति भनेको संविधान नै हो । संविधानले अङ्गीकार गरेका सबै नीतिहरू राज्यका नीति बनेका छन् । राज्यको नीति सहमतिमा बनेको छ तर दलहरूका नीतिहरू आ-आफ्नै छन् । हरेक दलका नीतिप्रति अर्को दलको सहमति हुने कुरा सम्भव छैन । सहमतिमा बनेको राज्यको नीतिसँग आ-आफ्नै तरिकाले बनेका राजनीतिक दलहरूका नीतिहरू मेल खाने कुरा पनि भएन । तसर्थ नीति निर्माणको तरिकामा भिन्नता, नीतिका विषय वस्तुमा भिन्नता, नीतिमा सहभागिता र स्वामित्व र अपनत्वको समस्या समेतका कारणले राज्य र राजनीतिक दलका नीतिहरूमा भिन्नता देखा परेको छ । जसले राज्यको नीति कार्यान्वयनमा पनि र दलको नीति कार्यान्वयनमा पनि सहजता छैन । राज्यको नीति कार्यान्वयनमा दलका नीतिले सघाउ पुऱ्याएको छैन ।

#### ६.६ यथास्थिति र अग्रगमनको भिन्नता:

राज्यका नीतिहरू संविधान तथा कानूनमा अभिलिखित हुन्छन् । तिनको संशोधनको निश्चित विधि प्रक्रिया र संरचना हुन्छ । तर राजनीतिक दलहरूका नीति निर्माण गर्ने निकाय र थलो निरन्तर बस्ने र निरन्तर नीतिमा पुनरावलोकन भई राख्ने हुन्छ । यसो हुँदा नीतिका हिसाबले राज्य यथास्थितिको पक्षमा देखिन्छ । तर राजनीतिक दलहरू निरन्तर परिवर्तनको पक्षमा देखिने र त्यसो गर्न सम्भव पनि हुने हुँदा अग्रगमनको कुरासहित क्रान्तिकारिताको वकालत गर्दछन् । यस्तो अवस्थामा राज्यको नीति दलहरूले स्वीकार नगर्ने, दलहरूको नीति राज्यले बोक्न र कार्यान्वयन गर्न नमिल्ने भएका कारण राज्य र दलका बिचको नीतिगत भिन्नता कायम रहने स्थिति पैदा हुन्छ । भनिन्छ, *“the policy as a new source of tactics”* (Cohen & Ball, 1990), त्यसो हो भने अग्रगामी परिवर्तन पछिको राज्यको नीति कार्यान्वयन गर्न तदनुकूलको कार्यनीति अवलम्बन गर्न अनुसन्धान गरेर निर्माण गरेको नीतिले निर्देश गर्दछ भन्ने कुरा राज्य र दल दुवैले आत्मसात गर्न जरुरी छ ।

## ६.७ लोकतान्त्रिक र सामन्ती चिन्तन:

नयाँ संविधान जारी भए पछिको राज्यको कुरा गर्दा औपचारिक हिसाबले नै नेपाल सङ्घीय लोकतान्त्रिक गणतन्त्रात्मक राज्य हो। यस हिसाबले भन्न सकिन्छ कि नेपाल राज्यले लोकतान्त्रिक मान्यता अवलम्बन गरेको छ। तर राजनीतिक दलहरू भने विगतको सामन्ती चिन्तनबाट सम्पूर्ण रूपमा मुक्त भैसकेका छैनन्। राज्य पूर्णतः कानुनी संरचना हो तर दलहरू कानुनी संरचना हुँदाहुँदै पनि व्यक्ति हावी हुने भएका कारणले विगतको सामन्ती चिन्तनका अवशेषहरू दलमा र नेतृत्वमा कायमै देखिन्छन्। राज्यका हकमा जे लेखियो सोही लागु हुने भए पनि दलका हकमा भने लेखेको एउटा र कार्यान्वयन हुने अर्को हुन जाने गरेको छ। समग्रमा, राज्यको चरित्र लेखनमा र व्यवहारमा समेत थोरबहुत लोकतान्त्रिक देखिने तर दलका हकमा लेखिएको भन्दा व्यवहारमा भएको तथ्यहरूलाई नियाल्दा सामन्ती चिन्तनको प्रचुरता भेटिने समस्या पनि काफै छ। दल र राज्यका विचको चारित्रिक भिन्नता यसरी पनि बुझ्न सकिन्छ।

## ६.८ सत्तामा छडा र बाहिरिदा भिन्न मत:

दलहरूको नीति सत्ता बाहिर छँदासम्म लेखिन्छ, पढिन्छ, सत्तामा पुगे पछि हराउछ, बिसिन्छ, लागु गर्ने बेलामा राज्यको नीति लागु हुन्छ। जुन नीतिका बारेमा सत्तामा जानु अघि लेखिएको छैन, पढिएको छैन, तब लागु गर्ने बेलामा अन्योलता खडा हुन्छ। संविधानसँग मेल नखाने पार्टी नीति अनि संविधान एकातिर पार्टी अर्कोतिर नेपाली समाजको आजको यथार्थ हो। फेरि अर्को पनि सत्य के हो भने, राज्यको नीति, संविधान नबदलिँदासम्म कायम रहन्छ। दलका नीति हरेक चुनावमा फेरिन्छन्। दलहरूले दलको नीति लेख्छन्। सत्तामा गए पछि राज्यको नीति लागु गर्छन्। दलको नीति बिसिन्छन्। सत्ताबाट बाहिरिए पछि भने राज्यको नीति बिसिन्छन्। दलको नीति समाच्छन्। दलको नीतिको पनि व्यथा अर्कै छ। दलको नीति लेखे हो तर कार्यान्वयन गर्ने हैन भन्ने मान्यताबाट ग्रस्त छ। यो नेपाली राजनीतिको जब्बर परम्परा बनेको छ।

## ७. अन्तर कम गर्ने उपाय के होलान् ?

### ७.१ हैसियतको परिपालना

संविधानको धारा २७० ले राजनीतिक दलमाथि प्रतिबन्ध लगाउन बन्देज गरेको छ। यसका साथसाथै, राजनीतिक दलहरू दर्ता गर्न पर्ने र दर्ता गर्दा दलको विधान लोकतान्त्रिक हुनपर्ने, प्रत्येक पाँच वर्षमा सङ्घ र प्रदेश तहका प्रत्येक पदाधिकारीको निर्वाचन हुने व्यवस्था र दलका प्रत्येक तहका कार्यकारिणीमा समावेशी प्रतिनिधित्व भल्कने गरी प्रतिनिधित्व गराउनु पर्ने शर्त पनि संविधानमा नै तोकिएको छ। बाँकी शर्त सङ्घीय कानूनमा तोकिने भनिए बमोजिम राजनीतिक दल सम्बन्धी ऐनले राजनीतिक दलले गर्न हुने र नहुने, सदस्यता वितरण गर्न हुने र नहुने तथा चन्दा सहायता स्वीकार गर्न हुने र नहुनेको लामो सूची बनाइएको छ। तिनको कार्यान्वयन त्यति उत्साहजनक छैन। यसबाट बुझिन्छ कि राज्यले राजनीतिक दलका हकमा निर्धारण गरेका नीतिगत व्यवस्थाको प्रभावकारी कार्यान्वयन दलहरूबाटै हुन सकेको छैन। राजनीतिक दल र राज्यको नीतिको दिशा फरक छ। यो चानेचुने समस्या हैन। तसर्थ यसको समाधानका लागि राज्यको र राजनीतिक दल दुवैको नीतिलाई एकाकार गर्न जरुरी छ। यसका साथै, राज्यको नीतिलाई आफ्नो बनाउने राज्यलाई आफ्नो बनाउने प्रक्रियाको थालनी गर्ने अभियानको आरम्भ नगर्दासम्म यो ग्यापको अन्त हुँदैन।

राज्यको नीति मातहत दलको नीति कि दलको नीति मातहत राज्यको भन्ने दुविधा अहिले पनि छ। व्यवस्था नबल्दासम्म दलको नीति मातहत राज्यको नीति बनाउने प्रयत्न भयो। अर्थात्, दलको नीतिका आधारमा राज्यका नीति बदल्ने, दलका नीति बमोजिम राज्य चल्ने वा त्यस्तो राज्य बनाउने प्रयत्न गरियो। जसले राजनीतिक दलले परिकल्पना गरेको नीतिलाई अवलम्बन गरोस् भन्ने चाहना राखियो। तर नयाँ संविधान जारी भए पछि, राजनीतिक दलहरूले नै घोषणा गरे बमोजिम अब राजनीतिक आन्दोलन समाप्त भयो। अब व्यवस्था बदलेर बदलेको व्यवस्थालाई संस्थागत गर्ने संविधान आईसकेपछि राज्यको नीति मातहत दलका नीतिको विकास गर्ने संस्कार आरम्भ गर्न जरुरी छ। यस तर्फ दलहरूको नीति निर्माणमा ध्यान पुग्न जरुरी छ।

## ७.२ संस्कारजन्य समाधान

नेपालका राजनीतिक दल र राज्य समेतको पनि नीति प्रधान निर्णय नगर्ने समस्या संस्कारकै रूपमा विकास भएको छ। अनुसन्धानहरूले बताएका छन् कि परिवर्तन र स्थायित्व नीति मातहत हुन जरुरी छ। सामन्तवादका विरुद्ध क्रान्ति गर्ने दलहरूका नीतिहरू हिजो र आजमा आधारभुत भिन्नता देखिन्छ। यो संस्कारजन्य समस्याको रूपमा देखा परेको छ। यसको समाधान जरुरी छ। *“public policy can incorporate the contrasts between policy change and stability and understand the differences between policy sectors and countries.”* (John, 2012) नेपाली समाजको संरचना सामन्ती संस्कारबाट प्रेरित छ। सामन्तवादका विरुद्ध सङ्घर्ष गरेर भर्खरै पुजिवादी क्रान्ति सम्पन्न गरेर पुजिवादको विकासको प्रकृत्यामा रहेको नेपाली समाजमा राजनीतिक दलहरू पनि तदनुकुल बदलिन जरुरी छ। तर समस्या समाज बदलियो, समाज बदल्नेहरू बदलिएनन्, अर्थात सामन्तवाद ढल्यो, त्यसकै अवशेष राजनीतिक दलहरूमा र तिनका नेतृत्वमा सन्थो। यसै गरी सामन्ती संस्कारका हिसाबले भनिदिने हो गर्न किन पर्छ र भन्ने मान्यता हावी हुदा दलहरूमा आवश्यक पर्दा जे पनि भनिदिने तर कार्यान्वयन नगर्ने, कार्यान्वयन गर्न नपर्ने भएकाले जे पनि भनिदिने समस्या हावी छ। तसर्थ नीति निर्माताहरूको सोच व्यापक होला तर त्यो नीति तत्काल कार्यान्वयन योग्य छ कि छैन भन्ने बारेमा ध्यान पुगेको छैन। हामी नीति विशाल र व्यापक बनाउछौं तर कार्यान्वयनकालागि साभ्ना न्युनतम कार्यक्रम बनाउछौं अधिकतम कार्यक्रम बनाउने दृष्टिकोण नै राख्दैनौं। तसर्थ नीति नै अधिकतम हैन न्युनतममा बन्ने र बनेको नीति पनि कागजमा थन्कने गरेको छ। यो समस्याबाट पार पाउन पनि कार्यान्वयनका दृष्टिले उपयुक्त नीतिको तर्जुमा गर्ने तर्फ ध्यान दिन जरुरी छ। यो काम संविधान बमोजिम गठित दलहरूले आफ्ना नीति तजुमा गर्दा संविधान अनुकुल छ कि छैन भन्ने कुरा र तयार गरिएको नीति कार्यान्वयन योग्य छ कि छैन भन्ने कुराको एकिन गर्ने काम राजनीतिक दलहरूको हो। यस तर्फ ध्यान दिन जरुरी छ।

## ७.३ विषयवस्तुको समाधान

सामन्तवादका विरुद्ध लड्न बनाएका पार्टी अब समाजवाद स्थापनाका लागि जस्ताको तस्तै काम लाग्दैनन्। तिनको विषयवस्तु परिवर्तन गर्नुपर्छ। समाजवाद स्थापना गर्ने आधार तयार गर्ने दलहरूले नै बनाएको घोषणापत्रप्रति प्रतिबद्धता जनाऊ भन्न पर्ने अवस्था आएको छ। अनुसन्धानहरूले वैचारिक नीति उपयोगी भनेका छन् तर हामीकहाँ विचार शुन्य हुँदै सत्ताकेन्द्रित राजनीति हावी हुँदैछ। त्यसैले विषयवस्तु केन्द्रित भई अनुसन्धान आधारित राजनीतिक समस्याको समाधान जरुरी छ। *“The ideology-policy correlation is the dominant approach in studies of state responsiveness, and it has been the most fruitful approach to date”* (Lax & Phillips, 2012)। निर्वाचनका बेला तयार गरेका नीतिहरू सत्ता सञ्चालनका बेला बिसर्ने प्रचलन हामीकहाँ छ। वैचारिक हिसाबले दलको नीति कार्यान्वयन गर्न सत्तामा गएको भन्ने कुराको अनुभूति दिलाउने गरी आजसम्म कार्यक्रम बनेको छैन। निर्वाचन घोषणापत्रहरू बनाउने र वाचन गर्नेले बाहेक न त उम्मेदवारहरूले, न नेतृत्वले, न विजयी भएपछि सत्तामा गएपछि सत्ता सञ्चालकहरूले नै वास्ता गर्ने चलन छ। यो अवस्थाको अन्त हुन जरुरी छ। घोषणापत्र संविधान अनुकुल हुनुपर्ने र संविधान अनुकुलको घोषणापत्र कार्यान्वयनतर्फ दलहरूले सम्पूर्ण ध्यान केन्द्रित गर्नु आजको आवश्यकता हो।

लोकतन्त्र भनेको जनताको तन्त्र हो। जनइच्छाको पालना गर्ने दायित्व दलहरूले स्वीकारेको पहिलो शर्त हो। तर आज जनता र नेता, जनता र दलको दुरी फराकिलो हुँदैछ। दलहरू जनउत्तरदायित्वबाट पन्छिदैछन्। तसर्थ दलहरूलाई जनउत्तरदायित्व पुष्टि गर भन्न पनि पर्ने भएको छ। राज्यको नीति जे भए पनि दलहरूले निर्वाचनका बखत जे सुकै वाचा गरेका भए पनि सत्ता सञ्चालनका बखत सो कुरा उनीहरूले बिसर्ने र सम्झाईदिनका लागि अरु मानिस पनि नभईदिने हाम्रो समस्या हो। राज्यको नीति र पार्टीको नीतिको प्रभाव सत्ता सञ्चालनमा देखिँदैन। नीति प्रगतिशील बन्ने राज्य परम्परागत ढङ्गले चल्ने समस्या ज्यूँका त्यूँ छ। दलको वा राज्यको नीतिगत प्रतिबद्धता र सो को कार्यान्वयनका निम्ति बाध्य बनाउने आलोचक चेत सहितको जनताको विकास गर्ने अभ्यास पनि भएको छैन।

## ७.४ संरचनागत समाधान

नेपाली समाजको समस्या संरचनागत हो। समाजको संरचनाले पछ्यौटेपन, भ्रष्टाचार दुराचार अनियमितता जस्ता

दुर्गुणहरू पैदा गरेको छ। सामन्ती संरचनाले पैदा गरेका थुप्रै समस्याहरू छन्। प्रतिनिधित्वको समस्या, पहुँचको समस्या र विभेदको समस्या लगायत यावत समस्याको समाधानका प्रयत्नहरू राजनीतिक दलको तहबाट युद्धस्तरमा गर्न पर्ने बेला हो, तर त्यसखाले कार्यक्रमहरू औपचारिकतामा नै सीमित भएका छन्। राज्यको चरित्र बदलियो राज्य सञ्चालनकहरूको उस्तै छ, भन्ने पनि चर्चा छ। त्यसखालको संरचनागत समस्याको समाधान पहिलो प्राथमिकतामा पर्न जरुरी छ, भने एकात्मकबाट सङ्घात्मकमा राज्य गइसकेपछि, पनि दलहरू एकात्मक अभ्यासमा नै रमाएका छन्। त्यसैले राजनीतिक दलको सङ्घीयकरण गर भन्न पर्ने भएको छ। आन्तरिक संरचना मात्रै पर्याप्त छैन। आजको विश्वव्यापीकरणको सन्दर्भमा त्यसतर्फ ध्यान नदिई बनाएको नीति कार्यान्वयन हुन कठिन छ, भन्ने पनि अनुसन्धानहरूले देखाएका छन्। “policy making should be considered a product of processes of globalization” (Bonjour, 2011) राजनीतिक दलहरूले विश्वव्यापीकरणको यो यथार्थसँगै आफ्ना दलका आन्तरिक संरचनाहरू राज्यका संरचनाँग तालमेल मिलाउन जरुरी छ। यसो भएन भने संरचनागत ढंगले नै राज्य एकातिर र दलहरू अर्कोतिर हुने र नीति ठीक नबन्ने र बनेका नीति पनि कार्यान्वयन नहुने समस्या आइपुग्छ। अहिले नेपालको समस्या यही हो। राज्य सङ्घीय हुने तर राज्य सञ्चालन गर्ने राजनीतिक दलहरू एकात्मक नै रही रहने अवस्था राज्य र दलका बिचको ठूलो अन्तर हो। यसले न राज्यको नीति कार्यान्वयन हुन्छ, न राजनीतिक दलको नीति नै कार्यान्वयन हुन्छ। वरु एकअर्काका बिचमा अस्वस्थ प्रतिस्पर्धा र बेमेल हुने खतरा पैदा हुन्छ। अहिले नेपालमा करिब करिब यस्तै अवस्थाको सिर्जना भएको छ। यो लगायत संरचनागत समस्याको समाधान गर्न दलहरू चुक्नु हुँदैन।

## ८. निष्कर्ष:

अध्ययनको निष्कर्ष के हो भने राज्यको नीति र दलका नीतिका बिचमा काफ़ी अन्तर छ। कहिँ-कहिँ त अन्तर मात्रै हैन अन्तरविरोधी पनि छ। राज्यको नीति निर्धारण गर्ने पनि यिनै दल हुन्। दलको नीति निर्माण गर्ने पनि यिनै हुन्। दुवै काम एक व्यक्ति वा निकायबाट सम्पन्न गर्दा पनि भिन्नता आउनुको मूल कारण भनेको संविधान जसले राज्यको नीति बोल्छ त्यो सार्वजनिक नीति हुने तर दलको नीतिलाई आफ्नो निजी ठान्ने प्रवृत्तिको परिणाम यसो हुन गएको पाइन्छ। राज्य जस्तै राजनीतिक दलहरू अझैसम्म पनि सार्वजनिक निकाय बन्न नसकेको, सार्वजनिक निकाय हुनु भन्ने स्वीकारोक्ति स्वयं दल र तिनका सञ्चालकहरूबाट हुन नसकेको परिणाम भन्न सकिन्छ। तसर्थ राज्यको नीति बदल्ने र निर्माण गर्ने समेत जिम्मेवारी दलहरूकै भएका कारणले नीति बदल्ने चरणमा राज्यका नीतिको अन्तरविरोधी नीति दलको भए पनि राज्यको नीति बदलिसकेपछि राज्यका नीति अनुकूल दलको नीति बनाउन पर्ने दायित्व पनि दलहरूकै हो। फेरि जतिबेला राज्यको नीति अपर्याप्त भयो भन्ने लानदछ, तब फेरि राज्यको नीतिको परिमार्जन गर्ने अभियानको नेतृत्व पनि दलहरूले नै गर्ने हो, अरुले गरेर हुँदैन। यो अन्तर सम्बन्ध र अन्तरविरोधलाई स्वीकार गर्दा मात्रै राज्य र राजनीतिक दल एवं तिनका नीतिको अन्तरसम्बन्ध र अन्तरविरोधका बारेको बुझाई प्रष्ट हुन्छ, भन्ने मेरो अध्ययनको निष्कर्ष हो।

तसर्थ, जस्तो सुकै होस् नीति नै दल र राज्य सञ्चालन गर्ने आधार हो। दल र राज्यका नीतिका बारेमा अन्तरविरोध कायम रहँदा न त राज्यको न त दलको कसैको पनि नीति कार्यान्वयन हुँदैन। त्यसैले केही संस्कार, संस्कृति र प्रवृत्तिका समस्या, केही संरचनाका समस्या र केही मानसिकताका समस्या छन्। वैज्ञानिक विधिको अवलम्बन गरी अनुसन्धानका आधारमा पहिचान भएका समस्याहरूको समाधान गरी आजका दिनसम्म भिन्नाभिन्नै दिशा तय गरेका दल र राज्यका बिचमा एकाकार गर्दै दलको नीतिलाई सङ्घीय लोकतान्त्रिक गणतन्त्रात्मक राज्यको नीतिमा समाहित गर्दै आफ्ना कार्यक्रमहरू सञ्चालन गर्न मात्रै सके पनि आजका दिनमा देखा परेको समस्याको समाधान हुने अपेक्षा गर्न सकिन्छ।

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### **About Author**

Mr. Khimlal Devkota holds a Bachelor's degree in Law and two Master's degrees in Political Science and Sociology/Anthropology from Tribhuvan University. He was a practicing lawyer at the Supreme Court of Nepal from 1990 to 2005. In 2006, he became a member of the Interim Constitution Drafting Committee and then the Interim Legislature-Parliament of Nepal. In these roles, he was closely involved in law-making and the tough negotiating process to create a consensus in the political transition. He focused on finding solutions to such issues as army integration, monarchy dissolution, and Maoist inclusion in parliament. In 2008, he became a member of the Constituent Assembly of Nepal and, in 2009, a member of the Constitutional Committee of Nepal. Here, he acted as a drafting committee member and contributed as a member of the Taskforce for High-Level Political Mechanisms in important negotiations. Mr. Devkota was the Chairperson of the National Intellectuals Organization of Nepal until 2015 where he was involved in facilitating intellectual discourse on constitutionalism, federalism, and good governance.

Mr. Devkota has widespread experience in presenting guest lectures and participating in seminars across the world and he frequently contributes to Gorkhapatra. He has also been actively involved in the human rights movement of Nepal for more than two decades and has been published widely in the areas of constitutional, administrative, and human rights law. Mr. Devkota is currently a senior advocate of the Supreme Court of Nepal. He is advising various federal and provincial parliamentary committees, Governmental and Intergovernmental institutions including UNDP, and other NGOs, INGOs, on the areas of federalism, constitutionalism, legislative drafting and scrutiny, good governance, and policy matters.

