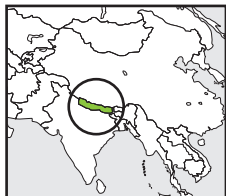


## Unsustainability: causes and consequences



Political instability, human rights violations and corruption are among the main challenges to sustainable development in the country. The Government also needs to address the loss of biodiversity and the mismanagement of agricultural resources, alongside the protection and fulfilment of human rights, the promotion of people's participation in all aspects of State governance and the ending of corruption in politics at all levels. However discrimination based on class, caste, ethnicity, religion and gender is fuelling the creation and perpetuation of poverty, hunger, environmental destruction/degradation and conflict. Unless these underlying issues are effectively addressed, sustainable development will remain a dream.

### Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN) Sarba Raj Khadka

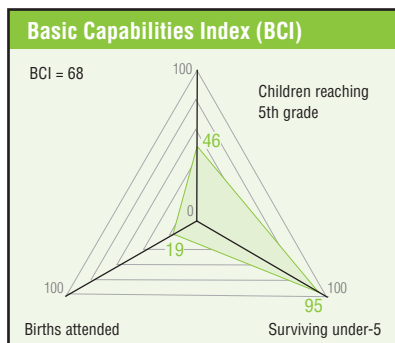
After the decade-long armed conflict (1996–2006) and the removal of the 240 year monarchy, Nepal was declared a Federal Democratic Republic in 2008. Efforts are now underway to institutionalize a republican form of governance by introducing a new Constitution, restructuring the State and bringing closure to the peace process.

Over the years the Government has introduced a number of policies, plans and legal frameworks regarding biodiversity conservation, environmental protection and sustainable development, all focused on benefitting and empowering local people. The key instruments are the 1988 National Conservation Strategy, the 1988 Master Plan for the Forestry Sector, the 1993 and 1996 Environmental Policy and Action Plan, the 1995 Agriculture Perspective Plan, the 1996 Environment Protection Act, the 2002 Nepal Biodiversity Strategy and the 2003 Sustainable Development Agenda.<sup>1</sup> However their implementation has been limited.

In addition Nepal has ratified several related international human rights instruments and agreements, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Convention on Biodiversity, Agenda 21, and the UN Millennium Declaration. It has also prepared a National Adaptation Programme of Action to address the problems arising from climate change. However, the implementation of these international agreements has also been weak.

### Sustainable development challenges

There are several obstacles to achieving sustainable development in Nepal. Most serious is the lack of political stability, particularly due to shifts in the political system first in the 1990s and then in 2008, and the political transition that the country is currently undergoing. Both the drafting of a new Constitution and the conclusion of the peace process are moving at a sluggish pace, and the process of sustainable socioeconomic transformation is still on hold.

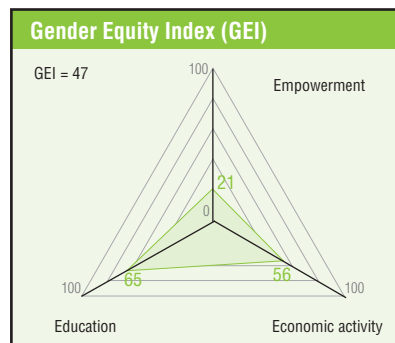


In the past almost all political changes and socioeconomic development efforts were dominated by elite groups who favoured their own interests rather than helping those most in need. Class, caste, ethnicity, religion and gender-based discrimination have fuelled poverty, hunger, environmental destruction/degradation and conflict. Unless human rights violations and socioeconomic exclusion are effectively addressed as part of a time-bound and realistic plan, sustainable development will not be possible.

The process of globalization and adherence to a neo-liberal economic development model constantly challenge people-centred, environmentally friendly and economically viable development in Nepal. Unfair trade conditions – including the imposition of tariff and non-tariff barriers and sanitary and phytosanitary measures without considering preferential trade arrangements – are also counterproductive for sustainable development in countries such as Nepal. Thus it is slowly being guided towards profit-oriented and market-led approaches to development including the controversial public-private partnership model.

### Sustainable development and environmental issues

Although Nepal's contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions is trifling (1,977.1 kg per capita compared to the global average of 3.9 tonnes per capita),<sup>2</sup> it is in the forefront in terms of experiencing the disastrous effects of global warming and climate change.



Erratic, inadequate or excessive precipitation due to climate change has affected livelihoods in a negative way. The river systems that originate in the snow-clad Himalayan range supply water for drinking, cleaning and irrigation throughout the sub-continent of South Asia. The faster melting snow is expected to cause water scarcity in the entire region. There is also a looming danger of glacial lake outbursts. Another threat of climate change is the gradual desertification of the agricultural area. The policies and programmes in response to the impact of climate change are scant in coverage and ineffective in implementation. Rather, these are focused more on dealing with the symptoms than with the root causes.

Nepal is one of the lowest energy consumers in the world, hence its contribution to environmental degradation due to energy consumption is also minimal. Its energy consumption level was 7.16 tonnes of oil equivalent per annum in 2007, which was mainly based on traditional sources of energy such as wood 72%, agricultural residues 5% and dung 7%.<sup>3</sup> The remaining 16% was met from commercial sources (coal 2.4%, petroleum 9.9% and electricity 2.7%) and renewable energy was less than 1%.<sup>4</sup> The poor and vulnerable people mainly living in the rural areas have limited or no access to alternative energy as the technologies required for harnessing it are capital-intensive.

Decreasing biodiversity and increasing genetic destruction and degradation are also threats to

1 S.R. Khadka, *Biodiversity Conservation in Nepal: Policies and Ground Realities*, (Saarbrücken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011).

2 Government of Nepal and United Nations Country Team of Nepal, *Nepal Millennium Development Goals, Progress Report*, (Kathmandu: 2010).

3 Ministry of Finance, *Survey Monitoring the Paris Declaration, Nepal Country Report*, (Kathmandu, 2011).

4 Ibid.

sustainable development. Realizing the importance of protecting the environment, the United Nations convened the Second International Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, which also adopted the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD). According to Article 1, the objectives of the CBD are: conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use of its components, and fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources. The CBD entered into force in Nepal on 21 February 1994.

As a party to the Convention, the country has prepared biodiversity conservation policies, strategies and plans, including the Nepal Biodiversity Strategy in 2002. The goal of this strategy is to provide a strategic planning framework for the conservation of biodiversity, the maintenance of ecological processes and systems and the equitable sharing of the benefits accrued. The country harbours 118 ecosystems, 75 vegetation types and 35 forest types with significant presence of species and genetic diversity.<sup>5</sup> However biodiversity is threatened at several levels: ecosystems, species and genetic resources.<sup>6</sup>

Loss of ecosystems is due to conversion of the natural environment (forests, grasslands and wetlands) to other human uses. For example, the forest habitat is reported to be decreasing at an annual rate of 1.7%; if this trend continues, there are high chances of forest ecosystem degradation at an accelerated rate.<sup>7</sup> Genetic resources are being depleted due to the destruction of natural habitats, overgrazing, land fragmentation, commercialization of agriculture, extension of high-yield varieties and indiscriminate use of pesticides.<sup>8</sup> Pollution, fire, the introduction of alien species and illegal trade and hunting – as well as the high incidence of poverty among ever-growing populations – are also major causes of biodiversity depletion. Other problems such as soil erosion, landslides and land degradation, which are most pronounced in the mid-hills and

high mountain ecological zones during the summer monsoons, are due to lack of public awareness and improper land use by farmers.

### Agriculture and mismanagement

Unscrupulous and haphazard use of green revolution technology<sup>9</sup> is another problem in a country whose economy is based on agriculture: more than 65% of Nepal's economically active population is engaged in land-based agriculture, though land holdings are small. While the use of green revolution technology improved the situation of food insecurity and poverty in some parts of the country – even if temporarily – it has destroyed long-used indigenous systems. Most of the research focused on short-term results and not on the sustainable and stable solutions that were the basis of indigenous knowledge and skills. In addition agriculture is now almost completely based on imported inputs that frequently need to be replaced. The regulatory mechanisms are so ineffective that multinational companies now have direct access to Nepal's peasantry where they can sell seeds and other unsustainable products.

The Nepalese are highly dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods, and extreme levels of poverty have been forcing people to use marginal resources in unsustainable ways. For example, they may have no other option than to cultivate unstable slopes or encroach on areas for agriculture that are meant for other uses, and they have low levels of investment for increasing production.

### Corruption and lack of appropriate education

A culture of impunity coupled with escalating corruption is also a challenge to sustainable development in Nepal. According to Transparency International's 2010 report, the country ranks 148th with a 2.2 score on the Corruption Perception Index.<sup>10</sup> The authorities are obviously more concerned about their personal fortunes than about the quality and sustainability of development work.

The dwindling political commitment to country ownership and local systems is a further challenge. Development assistance is channelled without any consideration of the specific needs and interests of the people and hence the most suitable mechanisms are not put in place. Lack of appropriate education and awareness are also posing a threat to sustainable development, while the education system promotes consumerism and an unsustainable lifestyle, emphasizing markets and profits.

### Conclusion and recommendations

Gross human rights violations, socioeconomic exclusion, the lack of social justice and lack of effective management of natural resources are among the main challenges to achieving sustainable development in Nepal. The following steps are therefore recommended in order to remedy this situation and make sustainability a reality rather than a dream:

- Promote democracy, peace and justice;
- Protect, respect and fulfil human rights;
- Address the underlying causes of poverty and conflicts;
- Promote people's meaningful participation in all aspects of State governance;
- Stop corruption in politics at all levels;
- Promote a culture of addressing needs not greed;
- Implement effective measures for addressing the impact of climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
- Ensure adequate investment in research, development and extension in order to promote sustainable development based on the needs and priorities of the country;
- Engage local people in planning, implementation and monitoring for the management of natural resources; and
- Invest in harnessing alternative energy sources. ■

5 His Majesty's Government of Nepal, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, *Second National Report on the Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nepal*, (Kathmandu: 2002).

6 T.M. Maskey, "State of Biodiversity in Nepal" in Pie Shengji (ed.), *Banking on Biodiversity: Report of the Regional Consultation on Biodiversity Assessment in the Hindu Kush Himalayas*, (Kathmandu: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), 1996).

7 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Nepal: State of the Environment*, Ministry of Population and Environment of His Majesty's Government of Nepal, South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme, ICIMOD, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation and UNEP, (Bangkok, 2001).

8 Khadka, op. cit.

9 Research and technology initiatives from the late 1960s aimed to increase agriculture production through the development of high-yield cereal grain varieties, expansion of irrigation infrastructure, modernization of management techniques and distribution of hybridized seeds, synthetic fertilizers and pesticides to farmers.

10 Transparency International, *Corruption Perception Index Report 2010*, (Washington DC: 2010), <[www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/survey\\_indices/cpi/2010/in\\_detail#6](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/survey_indices/cpi/2010/in_detail#6)>.