GOAL PROFILES
OF
SDG 11: SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

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Background:

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are global development targets adopted by all UN member states, including Nepal, in 2015. The Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) and the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), respectively, have regional and global institutions in place to monitor and review Agenda 2030. Every year, CSOs, institutions, and people gather at these forums to share their experiences, best practices, progress, gaps, and obstacles in achieving the SDGs. These forums are quite effective in SDG advocacy for diverse groups and constituencies.

To implement follow-up actions around APFSD in Nepal, the Nepal APFSD Youth Alliance (NAYA) was formed after the completion of the 8th APFSD Youth Forum. The alliance is made up of eleven youth-led and youth-serving organizations in the working group, and more than 200 individuals who represent a diverse geography, themes, disability, gender identity, and other factors. NAYA envisions young people at the forefront of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development at the national, regional, and international levels.

Visible Impact serves as a secretariat for NAYA. Visible Impact serves as the secretariat for NAYA. Visible Impact is a young women-led organization in Nepal that is creating a visible impact on the lives of adolescent girls, women, and youth by unleashing their social and economic leadership through participatory innovative interventions.

Every year, NAYA conducts a youth consultation prior to APFSD main event, to collect recommendations of Nepalese youths on different clusters of SDGs being reviewed that year.

This year, NAYA first prepared goal profiles of all five SDGs being reviewed in 2026 (SDG 6: CLean water and sanitation, SDG 7: Affordable and clean energy, SDG 9: Industry, infrastructure and innovation, SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities and SDG 17: Partnerships for Goals). The working group members of NAYA and other partner organizations contributed to its preparation through intensive desk reviews of all relevant articles and documents found online. After the preparation of the goal profile, NAYA conducted 'Nepal Youth Forum 2025' on 31st of October to draw first-hand information on issues and recommendations of Nepalese youths on these five SDGs being discussed in 2026. The forum was conducted online and about 60 youths from diverse backgrounds contributed to the findings.

Combining the information from both, desk reviews and youth consultation, NAYA is producing this comprehensive goal profiles of all five SDGs. While goal profiles of SDG 6,7,9 and 11 consist of information from both, desk reviews and youth consultation, the goal profile of SDG 11 is solely documented through a desk review. Since SDG 17: Partnerships for Goals can be a cross-cutting theme to all other SDGs, a separate thematic session was not designed for it, at the youth consultation

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

(Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.)

Introduction:

Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. With over half of the world's population now living in urban areas, this goal addresses challenges of rapid urbanization, including inadequate housing, pollution, poor infrastructure, and vulnerability to disasters. It emphasizes access to affordable housing, safe and sustainable transport, green public spaces, and effective urban planning while reducing environmental impacts on cities. For Nepal, the goal is highly relevant due to growing urbanization, worsening air pollution, and the need for resilient infrastructure amid climate change (1).

Situation Analysis:

Nepal's urban population has been steadily increasing, reaching approximately 6.5 million in 2023, a 2.04% rise from the previous year. Despite progress in urban development, nearly half (49.3%) of the urban population was living in slums as of 2018 (2). Air pollution remains a critical issue, with Kathmandu ranking among the most polluted cities globally, recording PM2.5 levels exceeding 150 µg/m³. Rapid urbanization, weak urban planning, and insufficient infrastructure continue to strain cities' livability and sustainability (2).

Nevertheless, progress is visible through initiatives such as the National Urban Development Strategy (NUDS), the Nepal Building Code (NBC), and increased adoption of electric vehicles. Over 70% of newly imported

passenger vehicles in 2025 were electric (3). However, uneven implementation, poor coordination across tiers of government, and limited municipal capacity hinder the progress of SDG 11.

Achievements:

Nepal has developed strong policy frameworks such as the NUDS and NBC which align with specific targets of SDG 11 (4). Also, the compliance towards NBC has increased and structural retrofitting of some already established buildings can be seen around. Local adaptation and disaster risk reduction programs are being implemented and are also being integrated into local planning in some cases. The number of people living in slums has decreased and the proportion of families living in safe houses has increased (5).Cities like Kathmandu and Pokhara are seeing an increase in electric mobility and improved waste management systems (2). UNESCO heritage preservation efforts and green building initiatives are ongoing. Early warning systems for disasters have been introduced, and participatory planning has gained traction through federal restructuring. Similarly, there are some ongoing slums upgrading projects and affordable housing schemes especially in major cities (6). There has also been an increase in awareness of electric vehicles (EVs) and policies promoting sustainable transport are

being endorsed (3). With about 70% of new passenger vehicles entering service in 2025, there has been increased willingness towards EV adoption (3).

Gaps:

Despite these developments, major gaps persist. Urban growth continues to outpace infrastructure capacity, and housing shortages persist with nearly half of urban dwellers in slums (6). The cities face insufficient affordable housing and lack of basic services. Air quality remains hazardous, and air pollution often exceeds safe limits (7).

Similarly, solid waste management and recycling systems are insufficient, while industrial and vehicular emissions remain high (7). Public transport is underdeveloped, leading to overcrowded and unsafe travels and hence inclination towards private vehicles has increased. Moreover, urban development prioritizes buildings over public spaces because of which heritage conservation and disaster preparedness remain underfunded (8). Municipal planning lacks citizen participation and data-driven approaches which is further affected by weak monitoring and coordination across sectors at different levels of government (9). Non-compliance has been observed among private sectors mainly when it comes to standards regarding sustainable building practices (8). In addition, recycling systems for solid wastes are inadequate, while industrial and vehicular emissions remain higher.

Challenges identified from Nepal Youth Forum: The youths identified that poor urban planning including unplanned housing and settlements, urban development projects that remain under construction for long periods, and their improper management were causing obstruction in creating sustainable cities. The other challenges identified are unmanaged dumping of waste, especially around forests, water resources, and residential areas. Underdeveloped and unmanaged transportation systems in cities like Kathmandu contribute to air pollution and road accidents. Similarly, poor access to affordable and quality health facilities, gaps in sanitation and water supply especially around slums, under-representation of women, youths and marginalized groups in planning and policy making, and lack of coordinated actions between different ministries and stakeholders were also identified as hindering factors in achieving overall sustainable development in an urban setting.

Key Stakeholders Involved:

Key stakeholders include the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD), Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport (MoPIT), National Planning Commission (NPC), municipal governments, private developers, and NGOs. Development partners such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UN-Habitat, Asian Development Bank (ADB), and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) support infrastructure, mobility, and resilience programs. Civil society and community-based organizations play roles in slum upgrading, making the urban areas as green as possible, and participatory planning.

Current Policies Guiding SDG 11:

NUDS provides a framework for sustainable urbanization, land use, and infrastructure planning. Similarly, Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) allocates financial resources for SDG-linked urban projects.

In addition, Local Adaptation Plans for Action (LAPA) Integrates local priorities for resilience and disaster preparedness. Similarly, National Framework on LAPA (2011) guides integration of adaptation and risk reduction into local development plans. NBC promotes safe and environmentally sustainable construction.

Recommendations:

To effectively achieve SDG 11 in Nepal,

coordinated action across multiple levels of governance is vital. Firstly, strengthening coordination among federal, provincial, and local governments is essential for coherent and integrated urban planning. Expanding affordable and climate-resilient housing should be prioritized to improve living standards and ensure inclusivity, especially for low-income groups. Sustainable mobility should be promoted through the expansion of electric and non-motorized transport systems to reduce congestion, emissions, and dependence on private vehicles.

Furthermore, enhancing air quality monitoring, waste management systems, and green public spaces can significantly improve urban livability and environmental sustainability. It is also crucial to integrate disaster risk reduction and Local Adaptation Plan of Action (LAPA) principles into all stages of urban development to enhance resilience.

Lastly, investments in capacity building, technical training, and data-driven decision-making for municipal officials are necessary to strengthen urban governance and accelerate progress toward achieving SDG 11 targets.

Recommendations from Nepal Youth Forum:

To address the gaps, the youths recommended prioritizing sustainable urban planning that includes actions like promoting the affordability and accessibility of services, improving transportation, development of proper waste collection and disposal systems, and regular monitoring of air and water quality around the city to lay out the appropriate interventions. Similarly, the recommendations included strengthening local governance and ensuring inclusivity in development projects planning and management by prioritizing the representation of vulnerable and marginalized communities.

The youths also highlighted the importance of promoting disaster resilient infrastructure and proper monitoring of building codes along with the development of mobile alert based inclusive early warning systems to create sustainable cities and communities. In the discussion, actions like promoting rainwater harvesting to cope with dry seasons, integrating drainage planning into urban housing and road construction and launching awareness campaigns about waste management and other aspects of clean city were also highlighted.

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