



GOAL PROFILES OF SDG 6: CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



Prepared by: _____



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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 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 6: Clean water and sanitation

**(Ensure availability and sustainable management of
water and sanitation for all)**

Introduction:

Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6) aims to “ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all” by 2030. It recognizes that access to safe water and adequate sanitation is a fundamental human right, essential for health, dignity, environmental sustainability, and economic development. The Constitution of Nepal, Nepal’s periodic development plan and WASH Sector Development Plan (SDP 2016 -2030) are in alignment with the water and sanitation related targets in SDG 6. Despite significant progress and WASH initiatives, Nepal still lacks access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation facilities. Challenges such as rapid urbanization, climate change impacts, and institutional weaknesses continue to hinder Nepal’s achievement of SDG 6 in a comprehensive manner.

Situation Analysis:

Water and sanitation have been central to Nepal's development discourse for decades. With more than 60% of the population relying on agriculture and rural livelihoods, access to safe water is critical for both domestic and productive uses. Nepal, due to its topography, faces unique challenges in terms of water availability and quality. For example, the Terai population mostly depends on ground water while the population of hills and the Himalayas drink from fresh and running sources of water. In the Terai, problems like groundwater depletion and contamination from arsenic are major issues, while hills and mountain areas face problems like drying of springs due to climate change and a greater amount of time required to fetch water from the sources. (1), (2), (3). Furthermore, waterborne diseases remain one of the leading causes of child mortality in the country (4). Thus, SDG 6 is nationally relevant not only for public health but also for economic productivity, gender equality, and resilience against environmental shocks.

Achievements:

Nepal has progressed remarkably in various targets of SDG 6, reaching or even exceeding in some of the targets. 96.4% of the population today has access to basic water supply, which is beyond the target of 92.6%. Similarly, the proportion of the population using safely managed sanitation services reached 61.1% in 2022, which is very close to the target of 62% (1). In addition, 95.5% of Nepali households now have basic sanitation facilities surpassing the target of 89.9% (5)

80% of households have water available in sufficient quantities (6). In addition, the country declared itself open defecation free (ODF) in 2019, marking a major milestone in sanitation. Policies promoting community-led total sanitation and strong grassroots mobilization have played a vital role in this achievement (5).

Gaps:

While the country has been progressing in many of the WASH indicators, there are areas

that require improvement. The proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services is only 25.81% in 2022, which is significantly below the targeted proportion. The quality of drinking water being supplied is another important challenge. More than 85% of households are at risk of fecal contamination based on the levels of E. coli detected in drinking water (6). Frequently reported under five diarrhea cases and incidents such as the recent cholera outbreak in Birgunj metropolitan of Nepal indicate the need to improve the water quality and sanitation practices (5). With only 24% of households using appropriate methods of water treatment (6), untreated waste water remains widespread (5). While the country is a declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) zone, only 80% of households had proper handwashing facilities with soap and water (6).

The other most important gap remains in addressing the disparity in access to safely managed water supply and sanitation services between urban and rural areas or among different economic situations. For instance, the percentage of households with water available at premises is almost double among the richest wealth quintiles, compared to the poorest ones. Also, women and girls are more affected as they are the ones responsible for carrying water from the sources, in most households (6). Moreover, climate change and population growth have aggravated the exploitation of natural water resources, and it is a huge challenge to ensure the sustainability of such water resources (5). The recent drought situation in the Terai region with rampant incidents of insufficient groundwater is a recent example.

Challenges/Gaps identified from Nepal Youth Forum:

The other challenges faced are non-responsiveness of local government regardless of public complaints, interventions by development partners that are not sustainable for WASH awareness among the people. Scarcity of water in dry seasons, limited access to clean and safe water especially for the

marginalized and poor population, and unclean ground water in the Terai region leading to water-borne diseases are other challenges identified. Similarly, excessive dependency on fertilizers while farming is causing damage to aquatic lives. Eutrophication caused by hazardous human activities is also considered an important challenge for achieving SDG 6.

On discussing SDG 3, 5 and 17 as cross-cutting issues, the important challenges and recommendations are identified. For SDG 3 (health and well-being), contaminated water increases the risk of water-borne diseases. Animal products from the animals that are fed with unclean water might cause health implications too.

Similarly, for SDG 5 (gender equality), women, who are usually considered as a responsible person to fulfill water needs of the family, should be spending a lot more time to fetch water, affecting their health and productive time. Women, even during menstruation, pregnancy or illness, still have to perform the water collection duties. In addition, dirty water contributes to complications relating to reproductive health especially in females. Regarding SDG 17, there have been issues in coordination between local bodies, development partners and other stakeholders concerned because of which accountability of interventions couldn't be established well.

Key stakeholders involved:

Three tiers of government work in close coordination to roll out WASH plans up to municipal levels. The Ministry of Water Supply is the major governmental entity responsible for planning and monitoring policies regarding components of Goal 6. The Department of Water Supply and Sewerage Management under the Ministry of Water Supply is the lead implementing agency of WASH sector which is responsible for planning, implementation, operation, repair and maintenance of water supply and sanitation systems (7).

Similarly, the provincial government has a distinct role in overseeing water and sanitation

services at regional levels. They are uniquely positioned to coordinate with both the federal government and local municipalities to plan and implement WASH strategies (8).

In addition, international development partners like Asian Development Bank (ADB), Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA), World Bank and others provide major financial support through loans and grants for water and sanitation infrastructures. Similarly, Nepal has been receiving technical support to build an inclusive, climate- and disaster-resilient, sustainable and federalism-friendly water and sanitation structures (9).

Similarly, Civil Society Organizations have been advocating for improved accountability of government and service providers for maintaining the quality and sustainability of water and sanitation services. They are bridging the gaps between government, citizens and donors. For instance, CSOs like Federation of Water and Sanitation Users Nepal (FEDWASUN) equip users to monitor water points so that the non-functioning water points overlooked by the authorities can be identified (10).

Current Policies Guiding SDG 6:

Nepal has adopted several key policies and plans to accelerate progress toward SDG 6:

- (i) **National Water Supply and Sanitation Policy (2022):** Focuses on universal access, water quality monitoring, and integrated service delivery.
- (ii) **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Sector Development Plan (2016–2030):** Provides a comprehensive roadmap for achieving SDG 6.
- (iii) **National Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Policy:** Prioritizes urban service delivery and resilience to climate change.
- (iv) **National Adaptation Plan (2021–2050):** Recognizes water as a critical sector vulnerable to climate change impacts.
- (v) **Local Government Operation Act (2017):** Grants local bodies authority over water supply and sanitation management.

While these frameworks provide direction, implementation gaps, limited financing, and weak inter-agency coordination remain significant hurdles.

Recommendations:

To address the gaps identified and accelerate the progress of SDG 6 in Nepal, some specific actions need to be prioritized. Firstly, to increase the lower coverage of safely managed drinking water, prioritizing the investments in water treatment technologies like chlorination, filtration, and community-level treatment plants should be done. Similarly, since the quality of water remains a huge public health concern, establishing strict regulation and monitoring of water quality as well as educating communities about accessible household ways of water purification should be done. Also educating them on safe disposal of child feces, wastewater draining systems while constructing houses through community led sanitation approaches could be productive. Another priority action is to promote techniques like rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge which could address the growing impact of droughts and groundwater depletion, especially in areas like Terai where heat waves strike and rainfall is low. Also, integrating climate adaptation into local policies of water supply and sanitation could help.

Actions to reduce inequities in WASH services should be prioritized. Integrating community financing models to bridge urban-rural and wealth-based disparities in water and sanitation needs to be focused. Gender-sensitive infrastructures should be built that helps in reducing a disproportionate burden on women and girls for collecting water.

Finally, better monitoring systems should be

implemented. Efforts to collect reliable data for all targets of SDG 6 should be made, so that regular monitoring of progress and gaps could be made better.

Recommendations from Nepal Youth Forum:

Similarly, the recommendations from youths included protecting fresh water sources from contamination and prioritizing proper drainage systems for wastewater management. The use of organic fertilizers considering its impacts on sustained agricultural crops and aquatic lives was also recommended. The youths also focused on conducting awareness programs, ensuring that livestock also receive clean water, and engaging youths at local level to implement inclusive WASH strategies.

It was also recommended that the participation of women and girls be ensured in decision making regarding the policies on water and sanitation. Ensuring the access to clean water at nearby sources would reduce the safety risk of women and girls. Similarly, to address the gaps on SDG 3 (overall health and well-being), protection of natural water resources, use of safe water for both humans and animals and awareness of chemicals used in land and water for different purposes were recommended by youths. In a nutshell, the adoption of “One Health” approach was highly suggested.

While discussing SDG 17 as a cross-cutting issue, the partnerships among different sectors including agriculture, veterinary, health, and environment was identified as a key for achieving sustainable progress on SDG 6. Similarly, coordination among local bodies, development partners, and community activists was also recommended to implement interventions.



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