

Sustainable Development Diplomacy and Nepal's Foreign Policy

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Abstract

Sustainable development is one of the great challenges of our time. The unprecedented crisis that we cross today is a blunt reminder of the need for cooperation across borders, sectors, and generations. More than ever international assistance is needed to deal with the Covid-19 crisis and its economic and social impacts. The United Nations has been spearheading major diplomatic efforts: to define sustainable development agenda for the world focusing think globally and acting locally. Sustainable development diplomacy builds on but significantly advances the traditional understanding of diplomacy. This situation calls for a stronger approach toward aid assistance (i.e., development cooperation) and development diplomacy, particularly the cooperation between developed and developing countries. A new understanding is needed to make the fight against poverty sustainable. A systematic approach and a clear framework for cooperation, coordination, and management should be established for multilateral, regional, and bilateral engagements. It has been realized that coordinated diplomacy must be built around networks drawn from several government ministries as well as the private sector and civil society. With the changing global environment over the years, the United Nations has evolved and its importance for Nepal continues to remain even stronger. Both diplomats and practitioners in the field are crucial in making these changes, and they need a good knowledge of what development cooperation is and how it functions since their tasks may include the support to the formulation of policies and strategies, the mobilization and allocation of funds, and negotiation and monitoring of development interventions. This paper has been prepared based on desk studies, utilizing relevant publications and websites.

Key Words: *Sustainable development, sustainable development goals, diplomacy, coordinated strategy*

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development can be pursued without resolving certain philosophical issues. The great support of the word 'sustainable' is that it introduces the issue

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of time. It is a global agenda. As an alternative development wave, the notion of sustainable development was evolved since the 1970s development dynamics. The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) logically addressed the problems of conflicts between the environment and development nexus. The commission defined the notion of sustainable development:

"Sustainable development is the development which meets the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987)".

In the extensive discussion and use of the concept since then, there has been growing recognition in policy and diplomatic space incorporating three major components, for instance, economy, environment, and society. In other words, it is a development process that can endure into the indefinite future to meet societal needs, and maintain an effective economic system that manages the exchange of goods and services and an environment that can continue to supply essential resources and other ecosystem services.

Sustainable development is by definition extremely wide in scope. It could embrace any number of multilateral agreements above and beyond the process currently underway for defining post-2015 sustainable development goals. Issues that are being addressed in diverse forums on climate change, international trade, ozone protection, conflict prevention, and population, among others, all contribute in some way to sustainable development (Srivastava, 2020). Similarly, multilateral diplomacy has been taking place at several levels based on geographies, natural resource boundaries, common economic interests, development status, and specific sectors with varying degrees of success.

Sustainable development is one of the great challenges of our time. The unprecedented crisis that we cross today is a blunt reminder of the need for cooperation across borders, sectors, and generations. More than ever international assistance is needed to deal with the Covid-19 crisis, Climate change, and their economic and social impacts.

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Sustainable Development Diplomacy

Sustainable development diplomacy (SDD) is a relatively recent concept and is a process that a wide variety of actors can use in their efforts to pursue sustainability goals. Therefore, we focus on actors and what they can do to steer society toward sustainable development.

SDD builds on but significantly advances the traditional understanding of diplomacy whereby agreements are negotiated to advance mutual benefit. SDD applies the principle of diplomacy, where agreements are negotiated to advance common agendas, but is marked by several important shifts, both in the substantive content of what is negotiated and its practice or means of conduct (Moomaw, et. al., 2016).

First, SDD includes a broader conceptualization of the actors involved in diplomacy. Governance of sustainable development outcomes can emerge without the explicit consent of state authorities (unlike traditional diplomacy in the Hamilton and Langhorne definition). Second, SDD is not understood as simply the adoption of an agreement but incorporates all phases of negotiation and implementation of policies and programs. Third, in terms of substantive content, we utilize the definition of sustainable development provided by the Brundtland report as the foundation for our analysis. Given the universal nature of these subjects, the role of multilateral diplomacy would be crucial in breaking the deadlocks that already exist or are likely to arise.

Achieving sustainable development and meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals requires that there be an effective process of negotiating and implementing sustainable development policies and practices.

Policies designed to implement sustainable development must address underlying causes rather than treating symptoms. Policies are more likely to be implemented if they incorporate mutual benefits for all parties and create a sense of ownership through the engagement of diverse stakeholders. Policies that successfully implement sustainable development goals should incorporate all three dimensions of sustainable development: society, environment, and economy. Policies must have effective implementation and follow-up provisions that set a course for action but are sufficiently flexible to incorporate new information and conditions.

Meeting the SDGs will require multiple agreements regarding implementation policies, strategies, and actions at all scales from international to local, and across sectors of society and the economy. The process of implementing sustainable development requires a governance system that can match the ambition and complexity of the goals.

Nepal's Foreign Policy

The foreign policy (FP) of Nepal is guided, among others, by abiding faith in

the United Nations and a policy of non-alignment. The fundamental objective of the foreign policy is to enhance the dignity of Nepal in the international arena by maintaining the sovereignty, integrity, and independence of the country. Towards this, one of the major objectives of Nepal's FP is to play an active role in the United Nations and other international organizations to promote international peace, security, and development (GON-MOFA, 2020).

In the present global context, there has been a shift in Foreign Policies of the world community, from one of geo-political security and stability concerns to more economic and social security concerns. The realization of economic interdependence between nations and relations based on mutually beneficial win-win situations is becoming the new norm that is more sustainable (Shrestha, 2017).

Nepal's FP embraces the broad concept of "development diplomacy", which includes policy dialogue and policy negotiation in international development, and has been the principle of MOFA to further Nepal's development agenda in the international sphere. At present, the Policy Planning, Development Diplomacy, and Overseas Nepalese Affairs Division at MOFA, along with its overseas missions, is responsible for Nepal's development diplomacy.

In line with this, Nepal has planned and implemented a sustainable, inclusive, and green growth-oriented development strategy for the coming decades to achieve a higher per capita income, reduce poverty, enhance human capital, and improve the living standards of vulnerable populations.

At times, it has been observed that MOFA does not seem to have the adequate capacity to engage other line ministries and non-state actors to tackle diverse and complex issues. As a result, there is coordination failure with the stakeholders in Nepal and missions abroad (Shrestha, 2021). Nepal's geo-political and geo-economic situation remains a major determinant in the conduct of relations with other states. Its geostrategic position warrants country-specific treaties.

To enable this, MOFA and overseas missions need to have a clearer understanding of the interdependence of economic, political, social, and environmental issues, and the working linkages between state and non-state players in the international system (Bhattarai, 2018).

This requires strengthening MOFA's institutional capacity and preparedness for this role. It is of paramount importance. Improving managerial capacity and acquiring new knowledge and negotiation skills are a prerequisite in the practice of development diplomacy. Effective development diplomacy not only mandates institutional preparedness of MOFA but also of other ministries and organizations, such as the ministries of Finance, Industry, Commerce and Supplies, the Office of the Prime Minister, Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), and other relevant agencies. To realize this, integrated and effective coordination operating under a broad framework

with clear operating procedures is required along with research and development (R&D).

A systematic approach and a clear framework for cooperation, coordination, and management should be established for multilateral, regional, and bilateral engagements (Shrestha, 2020). There are different multilateral and international agreements such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Paris Agreement on Climate Change (PACC), etc. Also, international financial institutions such as the WB, ADB, AIIB, and BRI facilitate freedom of transit and enable preferential trade for the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) (World Bank, 2019).

Opportunities for Cooperation

In the context of an increasingly globalized world, where states cannot escape economic interdependence, development diplomacy has become an unavoidable reality of 21st-century international relations. The intricacies of interactions among the state and non-state actors imply that development diplomacy cannot be compartmentalized into separate economic or geo-economic realities of countries like Nepal, making it crucial to formulate and implement development diplomacy to maximize benefits from international relations.

It has been realized that coordinated diplomacy must be built around networks drawn from several government ministries as well as the private sector and civil society. Regarding this, MOFA should expand its institutional capabilities to drive development diplomacy and find ways to interact effectively with other line ministries and non-state actors. Success to a large extent depends on new skills, capability, tact, and versatility of the staff engaged in the conduct of development diplomacy.

And to strengthen coordinated development diplomacy in the changing world, it should focus on institutional preparedness and coordination, increased multilateral and regional engagements, enhance technology transfer strategies, emphasize sectoral investment and tourism promotion, strengthen labor diplomacy, attract foreign assistance, prioritize partnership with the private sector, promote business-friendly missions, and, more importantly, concentrate on networking, monitoring, and supervision.

With the changing global environment over the years, the UN has evolved and its importance for Nepal continues to remain even stronger. We have established three Missions abroad to deal with UN matters. Nepal is the fourth largest contributor to UN peacekeeping operations. However, there is a need to develop a work culture based on strategic planning which includes specific targets Nepal hopes to achieve through each of the Missions.

The conduct of national diplomacy is contingent on the emerging dynamics in the regional and global environment, which often changes due to various global events occurring from time to time such as the SDGs, Climate Change, and recently the Covid-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

A consistent and appropriate response is required to meet the challenges of the changing scenario. Experts have identified six elements that can help cope with the emerging challenges for effective diplomacy. The new situation demands a new mindset and a new personality to tackle emerging issues. Scientific and technological activity is prevailing over and visibly dominates international dealings. Conventional diplomacy must now be supplanted by science, technology, health science, and particularly information technology.

Authorities responsible for handling diplomacy must, therefore, show an ability to meet the challenges posed by the changed global diplomatic development to better equip Nepal's diplomats professionally with the combined expertise of both the conventional and techno-scientific domains (Shrestha. 2021)

Nepal has given high importance to climate change and the mitigation of its impacts. A 17-point policy strategy to reduce climate change impacts is included in a document on foreign affairs matters. The policy includes a strategy for the protection, promotion, and utilization of natural resources to mitigate the impacts of environmental degradation and climate change to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while attracting needed financial as well as technical support (Acharya, 2019).

Nepal has been elected the chair of the climate negotiating group of the least developed countries (LDCs). It aims at playing an active role at the United Nations and other international platforms by playing a leading role in climate change issues of the mountain as well as various issues of other countries. Thus, it is hoped that sustainable development diplomacy will find a prominent place in the execution of the foreign policy of Nepal in the days ahead.

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