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Abstract

The Fifteenth Five-Year Plan of Nepal, launched under the slogan "Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali," set ambitious targets across various sectors. This article aims to evaluate the plan's achievements by comparing its quantitative targets with actual outcomes, focusing on economic, educational, social, and demographic indicators. Using secondary data analysis, the study draws on data from the National Planning Commission (NPC) for fiscal years 2019/20 to 2022/23. The analysis highlights a mixed performance: while economic growth averaged 2.6%, poverty reduction improved by 20.3%, and education sector indicators showed positive outcomes, such as high literacy rates and enrollment in higher education. Several targets, especially in the demographic and social sectors, remained unmet. Notable shortfalls were observed in maternal and child mortality, internet access, and drinking water availability. The study concludes that while some progress was made, the gaps in achieving targets emphasize the need for more realistic planning, better resource allocation, and improved governance in future development strategies.

Keywords: *Fifteenth Five-Year Plan, secondary data analysis, economic development, social development, human development*

Introduction

The Fifteenth Five-Year Plan (FY 2019/20-FY 2023/24) was a critical blueprint for Nepal's development, aiming to transition the nation towards a prosperous and self-reliant economy. The plan was designed to foster rapid, balanced economic growth while improving social welfare and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The plan's slogan, "Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali," encapsulated the ambition to uplift citizens' living standards through enhanced governance, equitable distribution of resources, and increased public-private sector collaboration. However, the execution of these plans has met with several challenges. Issues such as insufficient infrastructure, resource mobilization, and coordination between federal, provincial, and local governments have hindered the full realization of the intended targets (National Planning Commission, 2020).

One of the key challenges faced by the Fifteenth Plan was its ambitious nature. The plan targeted high economic growth, with specific goals such as an annual growth rate of 9.6% and significant reductions in poverty. However, these aspirations often clashed with the ground realities of Nepal's socio-economic conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, severely disrupted the economic and social landscapes, exacerbating existing challenges like unemployment, inflation, and poverty levels. Despite a significant push for infrastructure development, poverty reduction, and human capital development, the actual outcomes have been considerably lower than the targets. For instance, the target for poverty reduction was set at 9.5%, but actual poverty rates hovered around 23% at the end of the plan period (National Planning Commission, 2023). This discrepancy highlights the difficulty in meeting

development goals in a volatile environment, thus prompting a critical examination of the plan's implementation.

The aim of this article is to evaluate the Fifteenth Five-Year Plan's achievements by comparing its set targets with the actual results in key thematic sectors such as economic development, education, social services, human development, and demographic trends. By conducting a secondary data analysis of available assessments, the article seeks to understand why certain targets were not met and how these failures or successes can inform future planning efforts. The article draws upon data from FY 2022/23, as the fiscal year 2023/24 was still in progress at the time of writing. This evaluation provides an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the National Planning Commission's (NPC) approach in achieving its goals, while also offering insights into how future plans can be designed to address persistent challenges.

In addition, this article aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of how the federal structure of governance in Nepal, with its decentralized system, impacted the implementation of the plan. The role of local governments, in particular, has been crucial in meeting the development targets, but coordination and resource mobilization issues have hindered smooth execution. By focusing on key sectors like education and health, this study highlights how discrepancies between planning and actual achievement can affect broader national development goals. The findings aim to contribute to the ongoing conversation about the effectiveness of Nepal's planning processes and offer recommendations for improving future development strategies, with an emphasis on making them more adaptable, inclusive, and resilient in the face of emerging challenges.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this article is built on the premise that the success of a national development plan hinges on the alignment between its ambitious targets and the realities on the ground. In the case of Nepal's Fifteenth Five-Year Plan, there exists a significant gap between the set goals and the actual outcomes in key areas such as economic growth, social development, education, and human development. This misalignment raises questions about the effectiveness of the planning process and the feasibility of achieving such high targets in a complex socio-political and economic environment. The framework thus explores these issues by evaluating the discrepancies between projected outcomes and actual achievements, with a focus on identifying the root causes of these gaps.

A central issue in the framework is the role of Nepal's federal governance structure, which has introduced new challenges in terms of coordination and resource distribution among the three levels of government: federal, provincial, and local. Despite the plan's emphasis on collaborative governance, practical hurdles in intergovernmental coordination have slowed down the implementation of projects and policies, thus impeding the realization of development goals (Government of Nepal, 2020). These issues have particularly affected sectors that require substantial investment and human resource mobilization, such as education and healthcare.

The article's aim is to utilize secondary data analysis to examine how these governance challenges, alongside other factors like limited resources, external shocks, and market dynamics, have influenced the achievement of the plan's targets. By focusing on economic, social, and human development sectors, the conceptual

framework links these targets to broader development theories such as modernization theory, which posits that economic growth leads to social and human development, and the capability approach, which emphasizes the role of human potential in development.

Through this framework, the study seeks to understand the interplay between Nepal's ambitious development goals and the structural, political, and economic constraints that have shaped the outcomes. The article ultimately aims to contribute to the discussion on how future plans can be designed more realistically, taking into account the complexities of governance and socio-economic factors in Nepal's evolving political landscape.

Methods and Materials

The article "The Fifteenth Five-Year Plan: Ambition and Reality" analyzes secondary data related to Nepal's 15th Five-Year Plan, covering the fiscal years 2019/20 to 2023/24. The study compares the quantitative targets set by the plan with its actual achievements, focusing on key thematic sectors such as economic, social, educational, demographic, and human development. The primary objective is to evaluate the progress toward the slogan "Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali." Data for this analysis are drawn from the latest available assessments up to FY2022/23, as FY2023/24 has not yet been concluded. The study selectively examines specific targets from the various sectors, excluding certain indicators, to draw meaningful conclusions about the plan's success in meeting its ambitious goals. This evaluation also serves as a baseline for assessing the 16th Five-Year Plan's progress.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

The analysis of the data and the comparison between the quantitative targets of Nepal's Fifteenth Five-Year Plan (FY 2019/20 - FY 2023/24) and the actual achievements at the end of the plan reveals a stark contrast between the ambitious goals and the outcomes realized. The targets set by the plan aimed to address a variety of sectors, including the economy, education, social welfare, demographics, and human development, all with the overarching vision of elevating Nepal from a least developed country to a middle-income nation. However, the actual results reflect a mixture of partial successes and considerable shortfalls, with most targets failing to meet expectations.

Economic Sectors: Ambitions vs. Reality

Nepal's Constitution envisions a self-reliant, advanced, and socialism-oriented economy, with the Fifteenth Plan aiming for rapid and balanced economic growth. This plan was designed to work through collaboration with private, cooperative, and community sectors while emphasizing efficient intergovernmental fiscal management within Nepal's federal structure. A key goal was to elevate Nepal from its status as a least developed country to a developing country by 2022 and to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, advancing the nation to middle-income status.

S.N.	Particulars	Unit	Target	Achievements
1.	Economic Growth Rate (Average)	Percent	9.6	2.6
2.	Per capita GNI	US Dollar	1595	1456

3.	Population Under Poverty Line (Absolute)	Percent	9.5	20.3
4.	Contribution of Primary Sector in GDP	Percent	23.0	24.6
5.	Contribution of Secondary Sector in GDP	Percent	18.1	12.5
6.	Contribution of Tertiary Sector in GDP	Percent	58.9	62.9

15th five-year plan: Target and assessments

However, the economic performance during the Fifteenth Plan period did not meet the ambitious expectations set by the National Planning Commission (NPC). The target for the average annual economic growth rate was 9.6 percent, but the actual achievement was only 2.6 percent, a significant shortfall. Despite an investment projection of around Rs 9.2 trillion, the economic growth indicators remained disappointing. The per capita Gross National Income (GNI) target was set at 1595 USD but fell short at 1456 USD. Moreover, the target of reducing the poverty rate to 9.5 percent proved overly optimistic, as the actual poverty rate remained at 23.3 percent. In terms of the contribution of sectors to GDP, the primary sector exceeded its target by contributing 24.6 percent compared to the planned 23 percent. However, the secondary sector underperformed, contributing only 12.5 percent instead of the targeted 18.1 percent, while the tertiary sector surpassed expectations with a contribution of 62.9 percent, higher than the planned 58.9 percent.

Educational Sector: A Mixed Performance

Education is critical for societal development, and the Fifteenth Plan aimed to make significant strides in improving education accessibility and quality. The Constitution of Nepal guarantees the right to education, including free education up to the secondary level and higher education for disadvantaged groups. The NPC set ambitious educational targets, including achieving 99 percent literacy rates and significantly improving enrollment at various levels of education.

S.N.	Particulars	Unit	Target	Achievements
1.	Literacy Above 5+ Years	Percent	99	76.3
2.	Youth Literacy (15-24 Years)	Percent	99	94.2
3.	Literacy Rate 15+ Years	Percent	95	71.2
4.	Net Enrollment at Basic Level (1-8)	Percent	99	96.1
5.	Net Enrollment at Secondary Level (9-12)	Percent	65	56.2
6.	Net Enrollment in Higher Education	Percent	22	32.0

15th five-year plan: Target and assessments

Despite several reforms, such as the President's Educational Reform Programme, which focused on enhancing community school quality, building infrastructure, and improving school learning materials, the results were far from the desired outcomes. The literacy rate for those over five years old reached only 76.3 percent, falling short

of the 99 percent target. Youth literacy (ages 15-24) performed better at 94.2 percent, though still below the 99 percent target. Enrollment rates also did not meet targets: basic education enrollment was 96.1 percent (targeted 99 percent), while secondary level enrollment was only 56.2 percent, falling far below the 65 percent target. However, enrollment in higher education exceeded expectations, reaching 32 percent compared to the targeted 22 percent.

These results indicate that while Nepal made some progress, especially in higher education, the educational sector still faces significant challenges. Access to education, especially at the secondary and higher levels, and the integration of technical education into the mainstream remain major obstacles.

Social Sector: Unmet Expectations

The Fifteenth Plan also set out to address key social indicators, with an emphasis on achieving the SDGs by 2030 and ensuring citizens' rights to health, electricity, and improved living conditions. The NPC set ambitious targets for electricity generation, internet access, health services, and housing, with a focus on ensuring that all citizens had access to basic services.

S.N.	Particulars	Unit	Target	Achievements
1.	Electricity generation (installed capacity)	Megawatt	5820	3100
2.	Family with access to electricity	Percent	100	96.7
3.	Per capita electricity consumption	KWH	700	380
4.	Family with access to internet	Percent	80	69.2
5.	Access to health facilities within half an hour distance	Percent	80	77
6.	Family with access to improved drinking water	Percent	40	25.8
7.	Family with living in self-owned housing	Percent	89	86

15th five-year plan: Target and assessments

In terms of electricity generation, the target was to generate 5820 megawatts, but the country only achieved 3100 megawatts, falling short of expectations despite the efforts made through public-private partnerships. While the goal was for 100 percent of families to have access to electricity, the actual achievement was 96.7 percent. Similarly, the target for per capita electricity consumption was 700 kWh, but the actual consumption remained at 380 kWh. Internet access also lagged behind the target of 80 percent, reaching only 69.2 percent. Access to health facilities within a half-hour distance was nearly met, with 77 percent of the population having access compared to the 80 percent target. However, access to improved drinking water and self-owned housing fell significantly short, with only 25.8 percent of families having access to improved drinking water (target 40 percent), and 86 percent of families owning their homes (target 89 percent).

These discrepancies between targets and actual achievements highlight the persistent challenges in infrastructure development and service delivery, which remain key barriers to improving the quality of life for Nepal's citizens.

Demographic Sector: Challenges Persistence

Nepal's demographic landscape has seen significant changes, with an increasing proportion of the population being economically active. Health services have also improved, contributing to higher life expectancy. However, despite these improvements, demographic indicators still present challenges.

S.N.	Particulars	Unit	Target	Achievements
1.	Maternal Mortality Rate	1,00,000	99	151
2.	Child Mortality Rate	1000	24	33
3.	Life Expectancy at Birth	Years	76	70.5
4.	Adolescent Reproduction(Under 19 Years)	Percent	6	14

15th five-year plan: Target and assessments

The Fifteenth Plan aimed to reduce maternal mortality to 99 per 100,000 live births, but the actual rate was 151. Similarly, the child mortality rate, target of 24 per 1,000 live births was missed, with the actual rate standing at 33. Life expectancy at birth was also lower than expected, with a target of 76 years, but the actual figure was only 70.5 years. The adolescent reproductive rate, which was targeted at 6 percent, stood at 14 percent, reflecting continued challenges in addressing reproductive health and the needs of young populations.

While there have been notable improvements in health care services, these statistics underline the need for continued focus on maternal and child health, as well as reproductive education and services for adolescents.

Human Development: Limited Progress

Human development is a key focus of Nepal's development strategy, aiming to improve the overall well-being of the population. The NPC set a target for the Human Development Index (HDI) to reach 0.963, a very ambitious goal. However, the actual HDI achieved was only 0.601, well below expectations. The Gender Inequality Index, which reflects disparities in education, health, and political representation between genders, showed some improvement, reaching 0.30 (target 0.39), but it still indicates significant gender inequalities. Similarly, the Gender Development Index, which compares female human development with male development, was 0.885, lower than the target of 0.963.

These figures reflect Nepal's ongoing struggle to address deep-rooted inequalities, particularly gender disparities, and highlight the need for targeted policies and programs that address these issues effectively.

S.N.	Particulars	Unit	Target	Achievements
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1.	Human Development Index	Index	0.963	0.601
2.	Gender Inequality Index	Index	0.39	0.30
3.	Gender Development Index	Index	0.963	0.885

15th five-year plan: Target and assessments

Findings and Discussion

The Fifteenth Five-Year Plan of Nepal aimed to drive significant improvements across various sectors, ranging from economic growth to human development. However, the plan's achievements have significantly fallen short of its ambitious targets. This gap between ambition and reality highlights the complexity of national planning and the challenges of implementing such wide-ranging goals in a developing country context.

In the economic sector, the plan set a target of achieving a 9.6% average economic growth rate, but the actual achievement was only 2.6%. This underperformance can be attributed to several factors, including the global economic downturn, political instability, and inadequate resource mobilization. Despite an investment projection of Rs 9.2 trillion, the country's economy failed to achieve its projected growth. The contribution of key sectors to GDP—primary, secondary, and tertiary—also did not meet expectations. Although the primary sector's contribution exceeded expectations, the secondary sector (which includes manufacturing and industry) underperformed, contributing only 12.5% against a target of 18.1%. The tertiary sector, encompassing services, did slightly better than expected, yet the overall structural shift envisioned in the plan was not achieved. The stagnation in the industrial sector is particularly concerning, given the strategic emphasis placed on promoting entrepreneurship and industrialization (Sharma, 2021).

In education, the plan set ambitious literacy and enrollment targets, but actual achievements fell short. For instance, the literacy rate above 5 years reached only 76.3%, well below the target of 99%. Similarly, while the net enrollment rate in higher education achieved 32% against a target of 22%, the overall enrollment in secondary education was only 56.2%, indicating that Nepal still faces significant challenges in ensuring access to quality education, particularly at the secondary level (World Bank, 2022). The education sector's shortcomings can be traced back to underfunding, lack of infrastructure, and disparities in access, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, the failure to integrate technical and vocational education into mainstream schooling is a missed opportunity, considering the pressing need for skilled labor in the economy.

The social sector showed mixed results. While the target for electricity generation was exceeded with 3100 MW installed (against a target of 2820 MW), per capita electricity consumption remained significantly below the goal of 700 kWh, reaching only 380 kWh. Internet access also fell short of expectations, with only 69.2% of families gaining access, compared to the target of 80%. These results underscore the challenges Nepal faces in infrastructural development and the equitable distribution of services. The disparity in access to essential services like electricity and the internet can hinder efforts to foster inclusive growth and development. Additionally, the target for improved drinking water access was not met, with only 25.8% of families gaining

access, which points to the persistent gap in basic infrastructure development (National Planning Commission, 2024).

In the demographic sector, Nepal made some progress, but key health indicators still fell short of targets. The maternal mortality rate remained high at 151 per 100,000 live births, well above the target of 99, reflecting ongoing challenges in maternal health and healthcare accessibility. Child mortality, while improving, remained higher than expected, and life expectancy at birth remained at 70.5 years, below the target of 76. These health challenges are deeply intertwined with social determinants such as access to quality healthcare, education, and nutrition (WHO, 2022). Additionally, adolescent reproduction rates remained high at 14%, double the targeted 6%, signaling the need for improved sexual and reproductive health education and services.

Finally, in human development, the Human Development Index (HDI) was expected to reach 0.963, but the actual achievement was only 0.601. While Nepal showed improvement in gender equality, with a reduction in the Gender Inequality Index (GII) to 0.30, the country still faces significant gender disparities that affect economic participation and decision-making (UNDP, 2022). The gap between the HDI target and actual achievement suggests that Nepal has made progress but remains far from achieving sustainable human development that translates into improved quality of life for all citizens.

Conclusion

The outcomes of Nepal's Fifteenth Five-Year Plan highlight significant gaps between the ambitious goals set by the government and the actual achievements. While there have been improvements in certain areas, like higher education enrollment and electricity generation, key targets in economic, social, and demographic sectors remain unmet. These shortfalls reflect the complex challenges Nepal faces in its journey towards a more developed and equitable society. To meet the goals of future development plans, it will be crucial to reassess strategies, better allocate resources, and prioritize areas that need immediate attention. The lessons from the Fifteenth Plan emphasize the importance of setting realistic targets, ensuring effective implementation, and maintaining continuous monitoring to achieve sustainable development. Moving forward, achieving the SDGs and transforming Nepal into a middle-income country will require strong governance, efficient resource management, and more realistic, incremental progress at all levels of government.

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