

Restructuring National Planning Commission Focusing on Asta-Ja and Nepal Vision 2040

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Introduction

As the 2015 Constitution federalized administrative and governance structure of Nepal into seven provinces and 753 local units with devolution of significant authorities to provincial and local governments, discussion on restructuring of National Planning Commission (NPC) in this changed context is underway. With federalization, it comes in the minds of most experts, academicians, and other concerned individuals that the new structure of NPC should be more of a passive and facilitating rather than an active on national planning and development. However, the spirit of the 2015 Constitution of Nepal, which envisions a socialistic economy under the federalized governance, nation's heavy reliance on its vast natural resources for accelerated economic growth, and the presence of multitudes of socio-economic and infrastructural development problems in the country warrant a robust, dynamic, and active NPC.

Although the 2015 Constitution gives autonomy to local and provincial governments for raising and spending revenues, and they are expected to contribute and drive their planning and development processes by themselves (Payne and Basnyat, 2017), federal government is still responsible for planning and development of big projects such as large hydropower, multi-provincial projects, national highways, and railways. In agriculture, local governments will manage local irrigation projects, agricultural roads, extension services, and livestock health; provincial governments will manage province level agriculture, livestock, and irrigation projects; and the central government will manage the issues of quarantine and large-scale irrigation projects (Kyle and Resnick, 2016). An active NPC will be necessary for close coordination with the line

agencies and the provincial and local governments for the development of integrated national plans and their successful implementations.

The Ministry of Finance (2017) has identified many challenges for Nepalese economy under the federalized structure. Major challenges identified include the development of an appropriate revenue system, achieving balanced and inclusive development, reducing dependency on foreign aid, developing infrastructure, agricultural modernization, employment generation, graduating from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) status, and developing a socialistic economy as envisioned by the 2015 Constitution. In this context, the role of NPC on guiding line agencies and the local and provincial governments in planning and development for expedited economic growth and socio-economic transformation becomes paramount.

A close look on every nation's production and distribution system reveals the presence of both capitalistic and socialistic approaches. In this sense, capitalism and socialism are the two sides of the same coin in a society. In Nepal, while Nepali Congress (NC) government in 1991-94 emphasized economic liberalization, CPN-UML government in 1995 introduced pensions for the aged, then the subsequent coalition government headed by NC continued pensions for aged but re-emphasized economic liberalization policy (Hachhethu, 1997). Tax incentives and promotional schemes for private business include capitalistic approach, whereas health and education services, old age allowance, or expenses on social welfare involve socialistic mode of governance. While capitalism enriches a society through efficient production, socialism augments it through better distribution of the wealth. Relatively strong presence of government is necessary for managing natural resources as well as making big investment on large projects until the private sector sufficiently develops in a developing country like Nepal.

Planning and development system of Nepal is seriously underperforming. National plans developed by NPC are poorly coordinated between programs and the budgets, largely ad hoc, highly politicized, and are failure in their implementations (Wagle, 2017). National plans are lacking clarity on their long-term visions. In order to develop a robust planning and development process to accelerate economic growth and realize fast-paced socio-economic transformation of the nation, it is critical to review and assess Nepal's planning and development history, analyze current and future challenges in relation to economic growth and socio-economic transformation, develop a long-term vision for the nation, and restructure NPC appropriately.

Planning and Development History

According to Wildavsky (1972), the concept of planning in Nepal began from Rana Prime Minister Shree Mohan Shamsher JBR in 1949 when he established a national planning committee for developing a Fifteen-Year Plan for making Nepal self-sufficient. Wildavsky (1972) further wrote that actual planning in Nepal began by establishing Planning Commission in 1956 following the proclamation stating "the necessity of a five-year plan for Nepal for attaining national self-sufficiency and establishing a welfare state" from His Majesty King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev on October 9, 1955. The Planning Commission of Nepal, basically, followed the similar ideals of the Planning Commission of India established in 1950 under the Chairmanship of the first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, following India's independence from British rule on August 15, 1947. Major reasons for the establishment of Planning Commission in India were the conviction that the long-range national planning was necessary for solving many national problems including eradication of poverty, tackling regional imbalances, increasing literacy, enhancing national defense and economic growth, advancement on scientific and technological research, raising living standard of the people, and the industrialization of India (Mishra, 2014).

India changed its Planning Commission to NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog, meaning “policy commission,” with its primary feature as a “think tank” for policy formulation (NITI Aayog, 2017a) in 2015. As an improvement on Five-Year planning system, the NITI Aayog launched Three-Year Action Agenda early 2017, formally closing over six decades of centralized planning, after ending the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-2017) on March 31, 2017 (NITI Aayog, 2017b; Singh, 2017). Along with increased economic growth, regional development, and sustainability of environment, forests, and water resources, the Three-Year Action Agenda is expected to help the Government of India in successful implementation of programs and projects and realization of the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The NITI Aayog emphasizes bottom-up approach for planning and development.

In Nepal, the First Five-Year Plan (1956-1961), which was produced by the Ministry of Planning and Development in 1956 (Wildavsky, 1972), and the subsequent five different plans emphasized infrastructural and industrial development coupled with import substitutions and employment generation. Planning goals and strategies in 1980s switched to agriculture (Khadka, 1988). Most infrastructural development projects such as highways, hydropower, irrigation schemes, airports, and industries were developed and completed during these early plan periods. The Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985-1990) keeps special significance in Nepal’s planning and development history as it marked the beginning of the privatization of Public Enterprises (PEs) in Nepal. This plan for the first time encouraged the involvement of private sector in economic development. Nepal implemented the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) from World Bank and Structural Adjustment Facility (SAF) and Stand-By Arrangement (SAB) from IMF during this plan period. These measures facilitated privatization and deregulation in the country. The decades of 1990s and 2000s saw significant progress on privatization of the industries and the liberalization of trade regime and financial sector. Poverty alleviation was the primary focus of national plans in which public-private-partnerships and encouragement for private investments remained the major strategies. From the end of the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-2007), the NPC started developing Three-Year Plans, mainly due to political transformation processes occurring in the nation. The 11th plan (2007/10) addressed the rehabilitation and compensation following the Maoist War (1996-2006). From 2010 to present, Nepal’s developmental strategy has been the promotion of market-oriented economy with additional involvement of private sector. The government has been emphasizing public-private-partnerships, private sector leaderships, and policy reforms. The 14th plan (2016/19) also stresses sectoral development with emphasis on private investment (NPC, 2017).

According to Schloss (1983), the planning process in LDCs consist of three stages. The first stage is merely a ritual of planning. In the second stage, LDCs realize the potential of planning for attracting donors in meeting their developmental needs and rely on both political considerations and economic justification. At the third stage, they elevate from the “project” level to integrate planning and implementation into regional and sectoral planning. Arguing that it is the third stage when LDCs utilize planning for their actual development, Schloss (1983), cited the three road projects completed by 1962 in Nepal, for example, were not due to the Nepalese plans rather they were due to external offers. As Nepal’s planning process can be considered at the third stage (Schloss, 1983), as discussed above, this is the prime time for Nepal to set up a highly dynamic, competent, and effective planning and implementation mechanism for expedited economic development capitalizing experiences gained and lessons learned over the past six decades of planning and development.

Economic Growth and Socio-Economic Transformation

Despite six decades of planned development, 25 percent of the Nepalese population is still below poverty line (NLSS, 2011) and 41 percent of children are suffering from stunting and chronic malnutrition (NDHS, 2011). In 2014, Nepal's literacy rate was 70.4 percent (CBS, 2016a). Nepal is still in the group of LDCs along with Afghanistan in Asia. Problems such as declining agricultural productivity, lack of employment, massive outmigration of youths, widespread corruption, environmental degradation, and lack of food and clean drinking water are enormous and widespread (Poudel, 2016). Of the total Nepalese population having access to electricity, one-third rely on small, rural off the grid hydropower and experience high load shedding especially during the dry season (USAID, 2017).

Nepal is experiencing seriously widening trade gaps in recent years (Ghimire, 2016; MoF, 2017). According to The Observatory of Economic Complexity (2017), Nepal's total expenditure on imports in 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015, respectively, was US \$619 million, \$816 million, \$1,300 million, \$5,010 million and \$6,610 million. Export has remained almost the same during this duration with the amount of \$356 million, \$732 million, \$653 million, \$971 million, and \$910 million, respectively, for 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015. Thus, the corresponding negative trade balance for the years of 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015 was US \$263 million, \$84 million, \$647 million, \$4,039 million, and \$5,700 million, respectively. In relation to the trading partners, the CBS (2016b) reports a negative trade balance of Rs. 622,374.56 million (Rs.774,684.20 million import and Rs. 85,319.10 million export) for the fiscal year 2014/2015, of which 63.22 percent was with India, 14.21 percent with China, and 22.57 percent with other countries. The top two imports in 2014/2015 included agricultural products (Rs 137.12 billion) followed by petroleum products (Rs. 112.16 billion).

Increasing dependency of Nepal on foreign aid, which consists of loan and grants, is another major concern in recent years. Nepal's first foreign aid came from US with \$2,000 in 1951 to Rana Regime. Nepal officially became the recipient for foreign aid after signing the Colombo Plan in 1952. The Colombo Plan established in 1952 aimed for cooperative, economic, and social development in Asia and the Pacific. Since then Nepal has been regularly receiving significant foreign aid to meet its annual developmental expenditures (Levi, 1959; Wildavsky, 1972; Schloss, 1983; Khadka, 1988, 1997; Shrestha, 2015). The foreign aid component estimated at 25.1 percent equaled Rs. 206 billion in 2015-16 budget (Shrestha, 2015). According to Shrestha (2015), the top five multilateral agencies that provide foreign aid to Nepal include: World Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Union, UN Agencies, and Global Fund (GFTAM), and Shrestha (2015) adds that Nepal has not been able to utilize even 50 percent of foreign aid due to lack of institutional capacity for timely and properly utilization of the funds. Sources of foreign aid in Nepal has shifted drastically from bilateral agreements in the past to multilateral agencies at present (Levi, 1959; Wildavsky, 1972; Schloss, 1982; Khadka, 1988; Shrestha, 2015).

Nepal's outstanding public debt has also been increasing fast in recent years. Total outstanding debt of Rs. 375.6 billion in 2007/08 increased to Rs. 545.3 billion in 2012/13 and Rs. 627.8 billion in 2015/16 (MoF, 2017). Corresponding proportions of the outstanding foreign debt to the total outstanding public debt for the fiscal year 2007/08, 2012/13, and 2015/16, respectively, were 66.56 percent, 61.14 percent and 61.93 percent. In 2015/2016, Nepal's outstanding per capita debt was Rs. 22,159, which was a 50.6 percent increase from that of 2007/08 and 10.6 percent increase from that of 2012/13. Similarly, the 2007/08, 2012/13, and 2015/16 debt, respectively, equaled to 46.1 percent, 32.2 percent, and 27.9 percent of Nepal GDP (CBS, 2016b; MoF, 2017). Citing IMF's categorization of a country at a "critical stage," when its foreign debt hits 200-250 percent of the value of its export and the debt servicing ratio reaches 20 percent to the export, Verma and

Navlakha (2007) reported Nepalese economy at crisis stage as early as in 1994-95 when Nepal's foreign debt was 600 percent of the total export value and debt servicing ratio was 35 percent.

Nepal Vision 2040

While King Birendra's pledge for raising the living standard of Nepalese people to the "Asian level" by 2000 (Baral, 1987) drew some attention in the past, there have been some exercises lately for developing vision for Nepal (Sharma et al. (eds.), 2012; NPC-ADB, 2016). Sharma et al. (eds.) (2012) presented a quite elaborative discussion on vision for Nepal in their book *Nepal 2030: A Vision for Peaceful and Prosperous Nation*. The ten chapters of this book cover the areas of land, tourism, hydropower, use of science and technology, transportation, water resources, overall security, women's empowerment, agriculture, climate change, and education as the focus areas for Nepal 2030. In order to come up with Nepal's long-term developmental strategy, the NPC with the help from Asian Development Bank (ADB) hosted a one-day high level international seminar, the "Envisioning Nepal 2030" on March 28, 2016, in Kathmandu, which was attended by representatives from government agencies, private sector, aid agencies, academia, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders (NPC-ADB, 2016). With the goals of graduating from LDC status by 2022, achieving SDGs, and becoming a middle-income country by 2030, various thematic presentations made in the seminar included accelerating inclusive growth, energy (hydropower) development, urban development and transport connectivity, human resource and social sector development, and transforming agriculture into a high-value competitive industry.

About a decade ago, Poudel (2008) founded a groundbreaking Asta-Ja Framework for nation-building and socio-economic transformation of Nepal. Asta-Ja Framework includes eight "Ja", Nepali letter "Ja" [*Jal* (water), *Jamin* (land), *Jungle* (forest), *Jadibuti* (medicinal and aromatic plants), *Janashakti* (manpower), *Janawar* (animals), *Jarajuri* (crop plants), and *Jalabayu* (climate)] and eight principles (community awareness; capacity-building; policy decision making; interrelationships and linkages; comprehensive assessment; sustainable technologies and practices; institutions, trade, and governance; and sustainable community development and socio-economic transformation) (Poudel, 2016). Based on Asta-Ja Framework and Nepal's current socio-economic and environmental challenges, Nepal Vision 2040 is developed (Figure 1). Nepal Vision 2040 aims elevating Nepal at the par of a developed nation by 2040. Discussion on goals and strategies of Nepal Vision 2040 follows.

Food Self-Sufficiency

Nepal has been aiming for self-sufficiency since its First Five-Year Plan (1956-61), when its major exports included jute products, rice, wood, medicinal herbs, bamboo, and sabai grass, and major imports included textiles, sugar, cement, and cigarettes (Consing, 1963). For import substitution, the U.S.S.R. and China assisted Nepal by establishing sugar, cigarette, and cement factories as early as in 1960s. However, despite high potential for food self-sufficiency, Nepal has been importing wide range of agricultural products in recent decades. Major agricultural commodities imported in 2014/2015 included cereals (Rs. 35.12 billion), fat and edible oil (Rs. 22.51 billion), vegetables (Rs. 15.93 billion), fruits and nuts (Rs. 10.54 billion), animal fodder (Rs. 10.02 billion), oil seeds (Rs. 9.11 billion), coffee, tea and spices (Rs. 4.27 billion), sugar and confectionery (Rs. 3.49 billion), beverages (Rs. 2.92 billion), tobacco (Rs. 2.55 billion), live animal (Rs. 2.42 billion), dairy products (Rs. 2.15 billion), and fish (Rs. 1.15 billion) (CBS, 2016b). Of

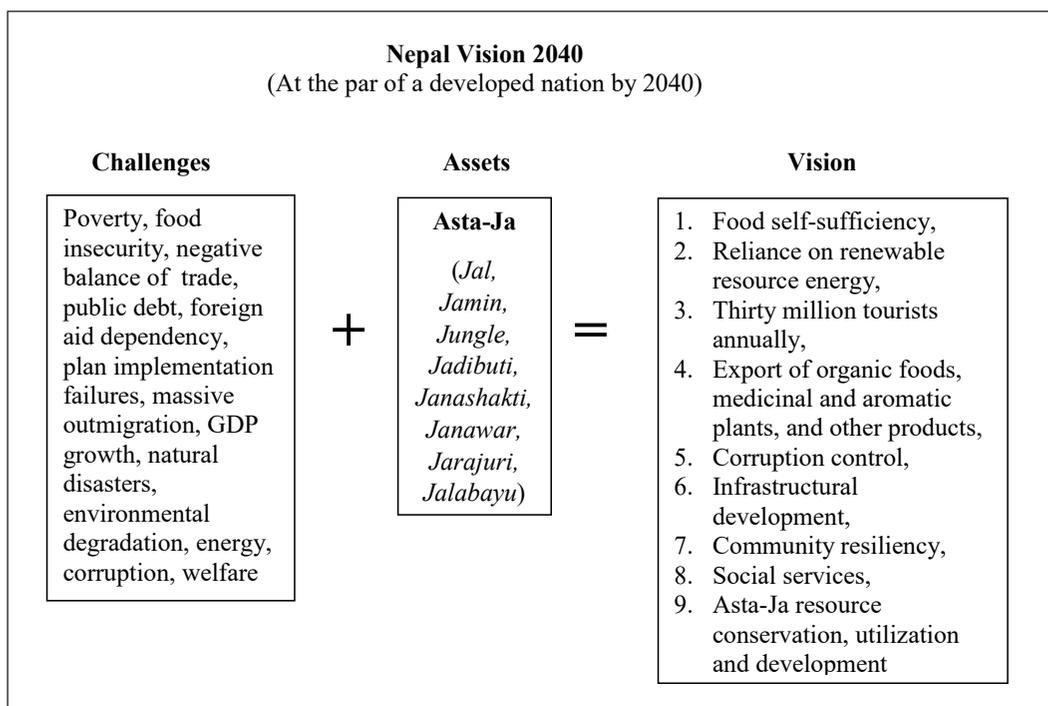


Figure 1. A Simple Diagram Showing the Development of Nepal Vision 2040

cereals, rice and paddy constituted Rs. 23.79 billion (684,130 MT) and maize Rs. 7.43 billion (290,993 MT). More than 95 percent of rice and paddy and maize imports came from India.

Nepal's total food production in 2016/17 fiscal year was estimated at 9,741,000 MT, which included 5,230,000 MT paddy (rice), 2,320,000 MT maize, 1,841,000 MT wheat, and 306,000 MT millet (MoF, 2017). Compared to the previous fiscal year 2015/16, total estimated food production and the estimated production of rice, maize, wheat, and millet in 2016/17 increased by 13 percent, 21.6 percent, 3.97 percent, 6 percent, and 1.26 percent, respectively. Timely onset of monsoon and timely availability of fertilizers and improved seeds were the primary reasons for this yield increase. A close look of food production statistics and the fact that more than 4.26 million hectares of agricultural land with very suitable agro-ecology for agricultural production and 69 percent of total population engaged in agriculture, food self-sufficiency is not a difficult goal to reach. Crop yields can be increased significantly through adequate irrigation facilities, high yielding varieties, timely availability of necessary agricultural inputs, and appropriate crop production technologies. Food storage facilities and controlling food losses during storage will also significantly add to food self-sufficiency. Various programs including Agricultural Development Strategy (ADS) and initiatives such as the Food Security Action Plan, the Zero Hunger Challenge Initiative 2025, and the Multi-Sector Nutritional Plan (Kyle and Resnick, 2016) will potentially contribute to food self-sufficiency. As the 2015 Constitution devolves power from the Ministry of Agriculture Development (MoAD) to provincial and local governments for agricultural and livestock production, it is important for the central government to coordinate these activities across the nation effectively and allocate funds accordingly.

Reliance on Renewable Resource Energy

According to Chapagain (2017), Nepal is currently producing 914.18 MW of hydroelectricity followed by 53.41 MW from thermal plant and 0.68 MW from solar power. In 2014/15, electricity imported from India comprised 27 percent of Nepal's total energy supply. The Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) had emphasized the development of large hydroelectric projects so that Nepal would not only be self-sufficient in energy but also would export energy to neighboring countries. Major hydropower projects envisioned during the Ninth plan included Koshi 4,700 MW, Karnali 10,800 MW and Mahakali 4,680 MW. While it is estimated a GDP growth rate of >8 percent is necessary to graduate Nepal from the list of LDCs, even for a modest GDP growth rate of 5.6 percent Nepal needs additional 11,500 MW of electricity by 2030 (Lacoul, 2015). According to Chapagain (2017), Nepal's total demand for electricity will reach 6,000-11,000 MW by 2025 and 20,000-51,000 MW by 2040. With current capacity of 2,954 MW, there is obviously a serious future deficit of electricity in Nepal. Alternative energy sources such as solar, wind, and biofuel can augment energy production. Just as Bhutan has a plan to reduce the use of petroleum products by 70 percent by 2020 (Adhikari, 2015), Nepal should accelerate generation of hydropower and start utilizing electricity and alternative energy in households and other uses.

Thirty Million Tourist Annually

Nepal's tourist arrival in 2016 was 753,002 and total revenue generated from tourism was \$518,498,000 (MoCTCA, 2016). In 2016, seventy-six percent of tourists arrived by air, and the top five countries providing tourists were India, China, Srilanka, USA, and UK. There were 82,830 tourists for pilgrimage. Nepal's tourism infrastructure in 2016 included 38,242 beds with 120 star and 985 non-star hotels, 3,444 travel agencies, 2,367 trekking agencies, 3,717 tourist guides, and 13,049 trekking guides. By learning lessons from Thailand, Nepal can attract at least 30 million tourist annually. Thailand had 10.8 million tourist arrival in 2002, which reached to 32.58 million in 2016 (Thaiwebsites, 2017). Major countries providing tourists to Thailand included China, Malaysia, Japan, Russia, Korea, India, Australia, Laos, UK, Singapore, USA, Germany, Vietnam, France, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Taiwan. China was far ahead of Malaysia, the second largest tourist providers. According to Agoda Company (2017), there are at least 50,924 vacation rentals and hotels available in Thailand. Taking Thailand's tourism industry as a reference point, Nepal needs more than 1.5 million beds with about 4,800 star and 39,400 non-star hotels to accommodate 30 million tourists annually. There will be a tremendous growth on trekking agencies, including tourist and trekking guides. With the current rate of revenue generation, 30 million tourists will add more than US \$20 billion annually to Nepalese economy. The vast Himalayan range with beautiful Mountain and Terai landscapes can serve as the major tourist destinations for the world. Along with conventional tourism, Nepal must focus on eco-tourism and religious tourism.

Export of Organic Foods, Medicinal and Aromatic Plants and Other Products

Located between two large countries, India and China, Nepal has great opportunities for production and export of high-value products including organic produce, medicinal and aromatic plant products, bottled drinking water, electricity, and other high-value commodities. Presence of unique agro-ecological zones, naturally isolated production belts, smallholder and mixed farming production system, and the existence of traditional knowledge for agricultural production favor

organic production. In fact, Nepal should consider declaring both the Mountainous and Himalayan regions as organic production belts in the first phase and then whole nation later. Nepal can serve the world as a global refuge for organic agriculture. Specialty products such as honey, cardamom, tea, coffee, medicinal and aromatic plants, vegetable seeds, flowers, organic meat and dairy, tea, coffee, fresh vegetables, and fruits are some products that possess high potential for organic production and export. Despite Nepal being a sovereign country and friendly neighbor for India and latter being one of the major countries helping Nepal for economic development, Nepal's relationship with India frequently gets strained (Levi, 1959; Gaige, 1971; Lohani, 1975; Ojha, 2015), which is not helpful for both countries in gaining peace, prosperity, and mutual respect. Currently, Nepalese trade is suffering from declining export, shrinking industrial sector, swelling demand prompted by foreign remittances, lacking quality products for exports, lack of trade related infrastructures such as road and electricity, lack of business conducive environment, and lack of appropriate incentives for export promotion (Ghimire, 2016). Therefore, while improving its trade competitiveness, Nepal should fully utilize existing various trade agreements and trade opportunities such as Trade and Investment Framework (TIFA) that Nepal has signed with USA, BIPA agreements that Nepal has signed with other countries, the "Everything but Arms" initiative of European Union, Nepal-India Free Trade Treaty, and growing market in China. The trans-Himalayan air route agreement signed between Nepal and China in 1978 (Baral, 1979) sets the stage for expansion of air transport system of the country.

Corruption Control

Corruption includes several monetary and non-monetary form, including bribery, fraud, embezzlement, extortion, favoritism and nepotism. According to Transparency International (2017), Nepal ranked 131 out of 176 countries in 2016 Corruption Perception Index. Corruption has infested almost all sectors of the country including public, political, private, judiciary, civil service, police, army, and NGOs (Poudel, 2011). The Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), Commission for Investigation of Abuse and Authority Act, 1991; Revenue Leakage (Investigation and Control) Act, 1995; Corruption Prevention Act, 2002; Good Governance (Management and Operation) Act, 2007; and Anti-Money Laundering Act, 2008, include the main constitutional arrangements and corruption control measures in Nepal (Poudel, 2011). Major reasons for uncontrolled corruption in Nepal include failure in the implementation of anti-corruption measures, inadequate laws and regulations, and the lack of institutional capacity for enforcement. In addition to successful implementation of anti-corruption measures, converting Nepal into digital economy and strong presence of anti-corruption institutions and authorities across the nation will help in corruption control. Additionally, a requirement of a financial transaction through bank checks, money orders, or bank transfers will be helpful in controlling corruption. Along with a high degree of coordination among the anti-corruption authorities and institutions such as CIAA, OAG, Vigilance Center, Special Courts, Judicial Council, Army Special Court, Public Media, and other stakeholders, strict enforcement of anti-corruption measures in private sector and in international transactions is necessary.

Infrastructural Development

Infrastructural development such as construction of roads, airports, irrigation canals, ropeways, hydropower stations, and the establishment of agro-industries incur heavy expenditures. However, such projects directly influence local communities through employment opportunities,

transportation, market access, and production of goods and services. According to Wildavasky (1972), infrastructural development plans must state clearly, why and where and how, these investments are justified. Unprecedented delay on the completion of construction projects has become a major problem in Nepal. Along with some administrative hurdles, rampant corruption, impunity, political malpractices, negligence, and construction syndicates are responsible for delayed completion of construction projects. Establishment of Nepal Army Corps of Engineers for construction, supervision, and the maintenance of large construction projects will expedite infrastructural development in Nepal. Such projects may include large hydropower, transportation, bridges, reservoirs, irrigation, mining and extractions, flood control, civil aviation, or diversion dams. Private sector can be involved in medium to small size projects. The practice of involving army in developmental activities is not a new one. Involvement of Iranian army in literacy program for decades or the frequent engagement of Indian army in infrastructural development works, and, although during the conflict time, the introduction of the ISDP (the Integrated Security and Development Program initiated in 2001) in Nepal (Gordon, 2005) demonstrate the fact that the concept of Nepal Army Corps of Engineers is not unrealistic.

Community Resiliency

Community resiliency entails building communities that are less vulnerable to the impacts of natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, landslides or climate change. Nepal is currently facing historic rebuilding challenges following the devastating 7.8 Magnitude Gorkha Earthquake on April 25, 2015 which took the life of more than 9,000 people injuring more than 19,000 and a complete loss of more than half million building structures affecting more than eight million people. Adverse economic impact of the Gorkha Earthquake coupled with the economic blockade by India is evident by the overall GDP growth rate of 0.01 percent along with the growth rates of 0.03 percent and 0.16 percent, respectively, for agriculture and non-agriculture sector in 2015/16 fiscal year (MoF, 2017). Another natural disaster, the 2017 Terai Flood, has reportedly caused a total loss of more than Rs. 63 billion destroying 41,000 houses completely and damaging 151,000 houses partially. An estimated cost for the recovery of the 2017 Terai Flood is Rs. 73 billion. Additional natural disasters of high magnitude that occurred within in the past 25 years in Nepal include the devastating flood of August 2014 in western Nepal and the 1993 landslides and debris flow (Poudel, 2016). Increased investment on infrastructures such as communication system, early warning system, flood control, evacuation routes, etc., and income diversification, and community capacity-building is necessary for developing resilient communities against natural disasters and climate change impacts.

Social Services

Nepal has many complex issues and challenges on social service sector mainly education, health, drinking water, support for vulnerable groups, and pollution control. Streamlining Nepalese education system so that it comes within the reach of every citizen while advancing to a higher level of education and research is a critical task. A high degree of disparity exists among Nepalese population with regard to health services mainly due to remoteness, lack of infrastructure, lack of health services facilities, socio-cultural traditions, and gender relations (Campbell et al., 2003). Due to pollution and drying springs, both the quantity and quality of drinking water supply has emerged as a major challenge in recent years (Shrestha et al., 2013; Poudel and Duex, 2016). Many women, children and other vulnerable groups are in dire need of help for food, nutrition, clothing,

education, health services, and other necessities. Old citizens under these poverty-stricken groups are seriously lacking basic social services. Girl trafficking is another major social problem in Nepal. War victim children, handicaps, and disadvantage population need immediate help. Similarly, there is a large landless population in the country who need immediate help. Natural disaster victims from 2015 Gorkha Earthquake and 2017 flood need help and recoveries immediately. As many children in the rural areas lack foods, implementation of school meal programs including food stamps and other food support systems is urgently needed. Women empowerment programs such as providing training and loans for women should have high priority. A large population living in the slumps, landless people, disadvantaged population due to caste system and other differences, and population living in geographically remote and isolated areas need governmental support for basic education, health, employment, food, shelter, and income generation.

Asta-Ja Conservation, Utilization and Development

Nepal should give high priority for sustainable utilization, conservation and development of Asta-Ja resources. There have been massive degradation of agricultural resources due to soil erosion, deforestation, land use changes, and soil fertility decline (Khadka, 1988; Poudel, 2015). Programs such as soil and water conservation, forest conservation, reforestation, and conservation of medicinal and aromatic plants are necessary for overall development of natural resource base in the country. Springs rejuvenation, rehabilitation of degraded Chure lands, reforestation of degraded areas, and stream bank reinforcement include additional conservation programs that the nation needs to implement immediately. Global warming, climate change impacts, chemicals and pesticides in the environment, soil and water pollution, food contamination, and environmental degradation are major environmental and public health problems of the nation. Different approaches for Asta-Ja conservation, development and utilization include community involvement, collaborative undertakings, private businesses, or governmental initiatives. For the best utilization and the conservation of Asta-Ja resources, Nepal must immediately launch large-scale training programs leading to a widespread income generation and resource conservation activities across the nation. According to Khadka (1988), there must be high commitment, dedication, and seriousness in the part of politicians and the government for successful implementation of development plans and strategies. The Tenth Plan (2002-2007) (NPC, 2003) identifies three essential requirements for program success: (1) political stability; (2) strong governmental commitment and political will; and (3) good governance ensuring service delivery, accountability, and transparency.

Restructuring National Planning Commission

Failure of planning and implementation has remained a major problem from the advent of planning in Nepal. According to Levi (1959), the First Five-Year Plan was criticized of being very broad encompassing almost every aspect of economic life, too ambitious, underestimating the need for training of administrators and technical experts, neglecting the utilization of immediately available resources for economic growth, and undermining the political difficulties for project implementation. The plan was not able to create effective administrative machinery, failed to reach out to the villagers, and the Planning Commission was not functional due to high staff turnover; however, some progress was made mainly due to help from foreign countries as 75 percent of the projects were funded by foreign powers (Levi, 1959). Similarly, Gaige (1971) stated that ineffective administration was the major reason for implementation failure of the

Third Five-Year Plan (1965-1970). According to Wildavsky (1972), planning failure in Nepal was due to insufficient information available for planning, lack of competent project proposals, inability for effective planning of foreign aid, opposition of the Finance Ministry, and incapable administration for development. Schloss (1980) also cited lack of planning information, lack of skilled manpower, poor communication system, mismatch between planning and financing, lack of coordination among administrative units, and high degree of centralized decision making as some of the major causes of planning failure in Nepal. In recent years, planning and implementation is suffering largely from disconnection between budgeting and projects, too short time for planning and implementation (as Nepal has entered into Three-Year Plan mode after the Tenth Five-Year Plan), lack of proper monitoring and evaluation, political influence, and lack of manpower (Wagle, 2017). In addition, severe politicization of the bureaucracy, political instability, and widespread corruption include additional factors responsible for these failures. Federalization of the country has added additional challenges for successful planning and implementation. Effective functioning of local bodies due to their small sizes (i.e., on average 4,000 residents) is another major concern for successful planning and implementation (Payne and Basnyat, 2017).

Nepal government made several efforts in the past in reorganization of planning apparatus and the formation of new organizational procedures (Schloss, 1980; NPC, 2017). One of the early efforts of a particular interest include the establishment of the *Janch Bujh Kendra* (JBK) (i.e., Research and Enquiry Center) in 1971 and the formation of the National Development Council (NDC) in 1972. The JBK, headed by then Crown Prince Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, was originally established as public complaints investigation unit, which later developed into the Palace's special investigative unit for all administrative malpractices in the country, a "think tank," and policy research body. The JBK drew young officials from civil service as well as from outside and studied broad spectrum of policy issues including industrial policy, education schemes, and district and regional development. Similarly, the NDC, which was originally headed by King Mahendra himself, was an assembly of ministers, former prime ministers, Chairman of the Council of State, Chairman of the Standing Committee of National Assembly, members of NPC, representatives from District Panchayats and National Federation of Industries and Commerce, and some members nominated by the King (Schloss, 1980). The NDC reviewed the national developmental strategies and provided guidelines to the NPC for developing national plans. The Fifth Five-Year Plan (1975-1980) was developed within the framework of this new planning structure and was quite impressive (Schloss, 1980).

In the new federalized environment, the NPC should be able to formulate fully coordinated and realistic national plans, adopt bottom-up planning approach, serve as a "think tank," ensure implementation and the accountability of the projects, and achieve national targets and goals. The NPC should be capable for fulfilling its central coordinating role for project planning and implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and capacity-building. Holistic approach in planning and management is essential for a small country like Nepal where natural resources such as rivers, national parks, and forest reserves cross-cut local and provincial boundaries within a very narrow range of geographical distances (Poudel, 2011).

A new structure of the NPC has been presented in Figure 2 which contains an Asta-Ja Assembly of Experts and Policy Makers and forms six units: Project Analysis and Development; Project Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation; Policy Research and Advisory, Capacity-building; Data Analysis and Synthesis; and Planning. Of particular importance in this new structure includes the formation of the Asta-Ja Assembly of Experts and Policy Makers from the members identified and recommended by a nonpartisan Parliamentary Committee and ex-officio members from PMO, line ministries, academia, industry, national security, provincial governments, and other stakeholders. This provision will replace the current mechanism of NPC members coming

directly from the political parties in the government. The NPC members recommended by the Parliamentary Committee will have a five-year appointment coinciding with the election cycle. Interestingly, the proposed six units to be formed by the Assembly of Experts and Policy Makers here closely match with the four divisions: Sectoral Program Coordination, Plan Implementation and Administration, Resource Planning and Evaluation, and Economic Research and Regional Policy identified in 1968 for making changes in the planning structure of Nepal (Schloss, 1980).

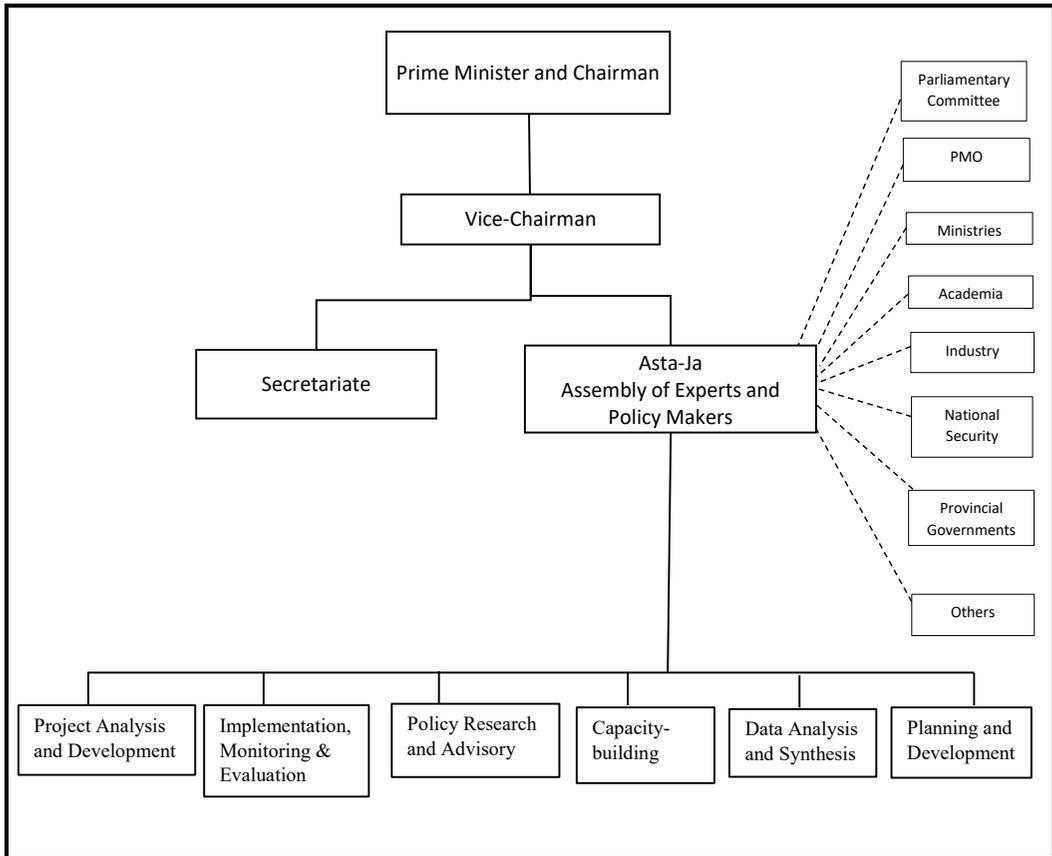


Figure 2. Proposed Organizational Structure of the National Planning Commission of Nepal

The NPC should work closely with the Ministry of Finance in planning and budgeting. While NPC comes up with a “basket” of national programs and projects with priorities from the budgetary guidelines received from the Ministry of Finance, the latter will have a final say in allocating funds for these programs and projects. The Ministry of Finance will coordinate the foreign aid. The NPC will work closely with the planning and implementation units of respective ministries and departments in terms of the development and implementation of sectoral plans. The NPC will work collaboratively with line agencies in program monitoring and evaluation and capacity-building. It is expected that the planning cells under each line ministries and provincial as well as local governments across the nation will be established/strengthened and equipped with data collection, data analysis, synthesis, reporting, and planning and development facilities.

Unified approach in planning leads to the development of horizontally and vertically integrated national plans and facilitate unity among various organizations in relation to resource sharing and successful implementation (US Department of Homeland Security, 2016).

The NPC will regularly collect planning information from the local and provincial governments and utilize in formulating national plans. Asta-Ja Log Frames (Poudel, 2016) should be used as one of the several instruments for collecting planning information from local and provincial levels. Asta-Ja Log Frame consists of a matrix of Asta-Ja resources (*Jal, Jamin, Jungle, Jadibuti, Janashakti, Janawar, Jarajuri, and Jalabayu*), and the eight principles of Asta-Ja (community awareness, capacity-building, public decision making, interrelationships and linkages, comprehensive assessment, sustainable technologies and practices, institutions, trade and governance, and sustainable community development and socio-economic transformation). Table 1 below shows a hypothetical Asta-Ja Log Frame for Kathmandu Metropolitan City. Asta-Ja Log Frame captures emerging issues and concerns related to natural resource in the city, serves as an instrument for resource planning and management, and educates local communities and stakeholders in natural resources planning and management. Information generated through log frames must be archived and undergo periodic analysis and synthesis.

Within the new NPC structure, the main function of the Project Analysis and Development Unit will be generating highly competent, innovative, and high-impact development projects for accelerated economic growth. The Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit's main function will be the supervision and guidance for project implementation, especially large and of national significance projects, and their monitoring and evaluation. The Policy Research and Advisory Unit will focus on review and analysis of existing policies, formulation of new policies, policy implementation, and policy training and research. The new NPC should serve as a bank for policies and strategies so that future governments have opportunities for picking and choosing policies and programs as they like. The Capacity-building Unit's main function will be building necessary expertise and managerial skills for timely implementation of developmental project. Institutional incompetence of local governments for the implementation of local development projects was evident as early as during the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-1985), when the central government had allocated Rs. 2,400 million for local development and only a small fraction of the total projects were implemented (Khadka, 1988). Capacity-building entails not just training and supply of materials rather it is a continuous process (Poudel, 2012). The main function of the Data Analysis and Synthesis Unit will be developing NPC as the central repository for national statistics, geospatial data, natural resources and environmental information, and other related fact and figures. Computer models and appropriate statistical tools and techniques should support project analysis and policy decision-making. While early planning periods lacked planning information due to insufficient data and statistics and reaching district reports to the center very late due to poor transportation and communication systems (Wildavsky, 1972), this digital age of the 21st Century presents many opportunities for information sharing and analysis including high speed computers, real-time data sharing technology, and mass communication system. Cutting-edge information technologies such as GIS, Remote Sensing, World Wide Web, social media, and other communication systems are widely available for effective information collection, analysis, and dissemination. The Planning and Development Unit will be responsible for developing periodic and long-range developmental plans, while working closely with line agencies and other governmental entities in project formulation, finance and budgeting, audit, foreign aid coordination, spending of the funds, and budget adjustment. Long-range planning and development is critical for sustainable development, utilization, and conservation of Asta-Ja resources (Poudel, 2011).

Table 1
A Hypothetical Example of Asta-Ja Log Frame for the City of Kathmandu, Nepal.

	Community awareness	Capacity-building	Policy decision making	Interrelationships and linkages	Comprehensive assessment	Sustainable technologies and practices	Institutions, governance, and trade	Sustainable community development and socio-economic transformation
Jal (Water)	Drinking water, drainage, flooding	Water conservation, test labs	Drinking water projects	Ground water depletion and subsidence	Ground water	Water saving technologies, waste water recycling	Municipal Water Supply, Bottle Water Companies	Clean rivers, groundwater recharge
Jamin (Land)	Land-use, dust	Land-use, land protection	Open space, dust control	Congested living and public health	Land degradation	Green belt, lawn and grass cover	Soil Conservation Office, Land Office	Climate smart communities, recreational areas
Jungle (Forest)	Urban trees, sacred grooves	Tree nurseries, parks, community forestry	Green city, sacred grooves	Forest and water resources	Forest species and wildlife	Urban tree management, soil erosion control	Municipality Office, Soil Conservation Office	Green environment, tourism development
Jadibuti (Medicinal and aromatic plants)	Ayurvedic medicine, herbs	Memory bank, remnants	Domesticating herbs, processing industries	Medicinal and aromatic plants and riparian buffers	Inventory of medicinal and aromatic plants	Medicinal and aromatic plant nurseries, chemical extraction	Department of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants, District Agricultural Office	Community gardens, tourism, Plant ID tours
Janshakti (Manpower)	Education, capacity-building, employment	Schools, training centers	Public education, private schools	Education and employment	Education and ethnicity	Teaching practices, online education	Department of Education, Municipal Government	Practical education, employment
Janqwar (Animals)	Dairy, pets, chicken	Market, veterinary services	Commercial production, collection centers	Climate change and livestock	Livestock productivity	Sustainable livestock production, organic production	Department of Agriculture, Veterinary Services	Income generation, import substitution
Jarajuri (Crop plants)	Vegetable production, organic produce	Market, technical assistance, IPM	Commercial production, loans	Soil condition and crop productivity	Crop productivity	Sustainable crop technologies, fertilizer	Department of Agriculture, Cooperatives	Income generation, employment
Jalabayu (Climate)	Drought, rain events	Flood control, crop diversification	Climate-smart agriculture, flood	Climate change and wildlife	Climate change impacts	Climate-smart agriculture, drought resistant varieties,	Department of Meteorology, Municipality Office	Climate resilient communities, resource conservation

Conclusions

While some countries have adopted centralized national planning system, others have followed uncontrolled or free-market approaches for economic growth. Yet, there are many countries following mixed approach. Despite its vast Asta-Ja resources, Nepal is suffering from increasing negative balance of payments, poverty, lack of infrastructures, unemployment, and massive outmigration of youths. Nepal must fully capitalize the potentials of its vast Asta-Ja resources for accelerated economic growth and fast-paced socio-economic transformation. Nepal Vision 2040 is an opportunity for sustainable utilization, conservation, and development of Asta-Ja resources, and, thereby achieving accelerated economic growth and fast-paced socio-economic transformation while reaching at the par of a developed nation by 2040. Appropriate restructuring of NPC is necessary for the success of Nepal Vision 2040. Proposed NPC structure with Asta-Ja Assembly of Experts and Policy Makers will be capable of developing highly coordinated and integrated national development plans following bottom-up approach within the federalized condition. It will effectively serve as a “think tank” for the government, strengthen further its role as an apex advisory policy making body, successfully implement programs and projects, and be able to help capacity-building of local and provincial governments, line agencies, private sector, and other stakeholders. The new Planning Commission will be a robust, active and dynamic institution capable of providing strong leadership role for accelerated economic growth and fast-paced socio-economic transformation of the nation while materializing Nepal Vision 2040.

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