Community led monitoring accelerating pace of empowerment and accountability

<Shrestha, Shikha[1]>; <Maharjan, Suran[1]>; <Thapa, Shantosh[1]>

[1]   <VSO Nepal>

Abstract:

Nepal is a least developed country with GDP per capita income of $1071 (The World bank, 2019). COVID 19 has created more adverse effect on economics and has impacted more adversely to women. The country is ranked 106th out of 156 countries in terms of Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2021). There is also inequality in terms of accessing education as male literacy rate is 79% and female literacy rate is 60% (The World Bank , 2018). Unfortunately, the country is ranked as fourth adversely impacted country considering climate change vulnerability (UNDP Nepal, 2020).

In this context of pre-dominance of inequality, Leave No one Behind (LNOB) Partnership has emerged as a synergized option to reduce these gaps of unequal power relationship in development politics. Community led monitoring has been found as an effective tool for empowering marginalized communities to hold duty bearers to account. This paper highlights the processes, findings and learning of Nepal's LNOB consortium's initiative on SDG monitoring adopting Community Score Card (CSC) focusing specific indicators under SDG goals 4, 5, 10, 13, 16 and 17 considering dire needs on improving progress on these goals.

As part of community score card, youth network and local government authorities make efforts in identifying most marginalized communities. Capacity building interventions were conducted targeting youth groups to equip them with information on SDGs and their meaningful participation in community based monitoring. Sensitization on SDGs was also organized for duty bearers and other stakeholders before their engagement in monitoring process.

In the process of CSC, separate rankings are prepared for communities, duty bearers and there was commonly agreed score based on interface meeting between the communities and duty bearers. It is interesting to note that present condition rating of communities is lower than duty bearer's claim. On the other hand, right holders seemed more optimistic for future than duty bearer clearly indicating higher expectations on changes. It is later being adjusted based on mutual understanding and discussion in the interface discussions. It clearly indicates that these community led participatory monitoring supports in providing more realistic tracking of the progress and expectations to avoid future conflict and promote collaboration and trust.

In this process, an aspect of empowerment is built into the data collection process – understanding and clarification on the position of the duty bearer. Thus, it helped marginalized communities in providing platform to demand for increased accountability of the duty bearers for improving status of these SDG targets. It has also helped government stakeholders more aware on strength of inclusive data collection. Based on these evidence, there should be continued effort to lobby with the government to institutionalize and recognize these community led monitoring and inclusive data collection procedures to accelerate pace of empowerment and accountability for achieving sustainable development with the core principle of Leave No One Behind.

Keywords:

1. Introduction:

Nepal is a least developed country and poorest among South Asia with GDP per capita income about $ 1071 that is far behind South Asia with GDP per capita income of $1957 as per data of the World Bank, 2019. The country is the second poorest country in the region after Afghanistan. It is found that multi-dimensional poverty does not hit all equally, the rural and urban divide is evidenced as 7% of urban and 33% of rural population are poor; provinces 6 and 2 dwells 50% of the population that are multi-dimensionally poor (National Planning Commission, 2018). These poor and marginalized groups are highly impacted by different disasters and the country is fourth vulnerable in terms of climate change vulnerability (UNDP Nepal, 2020).

It is also a sad reality that has been revealed by the Economic Survey of 2019/20 that the growth rate will be reduced down to 2.27% due to negative impact of COVID-19 on people's lives and livelihood. This negative impact on economics has affected women more adversely in the context where gender disparity is still prevalent in the country as it ranked 106th out of 156 countries in terms of Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2021). It has also revealed that addressing gender parity in politics will be addressed only after 145.5 years. In Nepal, there is also disparity in terms of accessing education as the literacy rate of women is lower by 19% than its male counterparts (The World Bank , 2018).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a strategic development framework and it strongly believes in inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of these goals. The 15th Plan (2019–2023) is also anchored on a vision to graduate the country from the least developed country to a middle-income country by 2030 that can be done with the alignment with SDG achievements and localization of SDGs cannot be undermined (National Planning Commission, 2020).
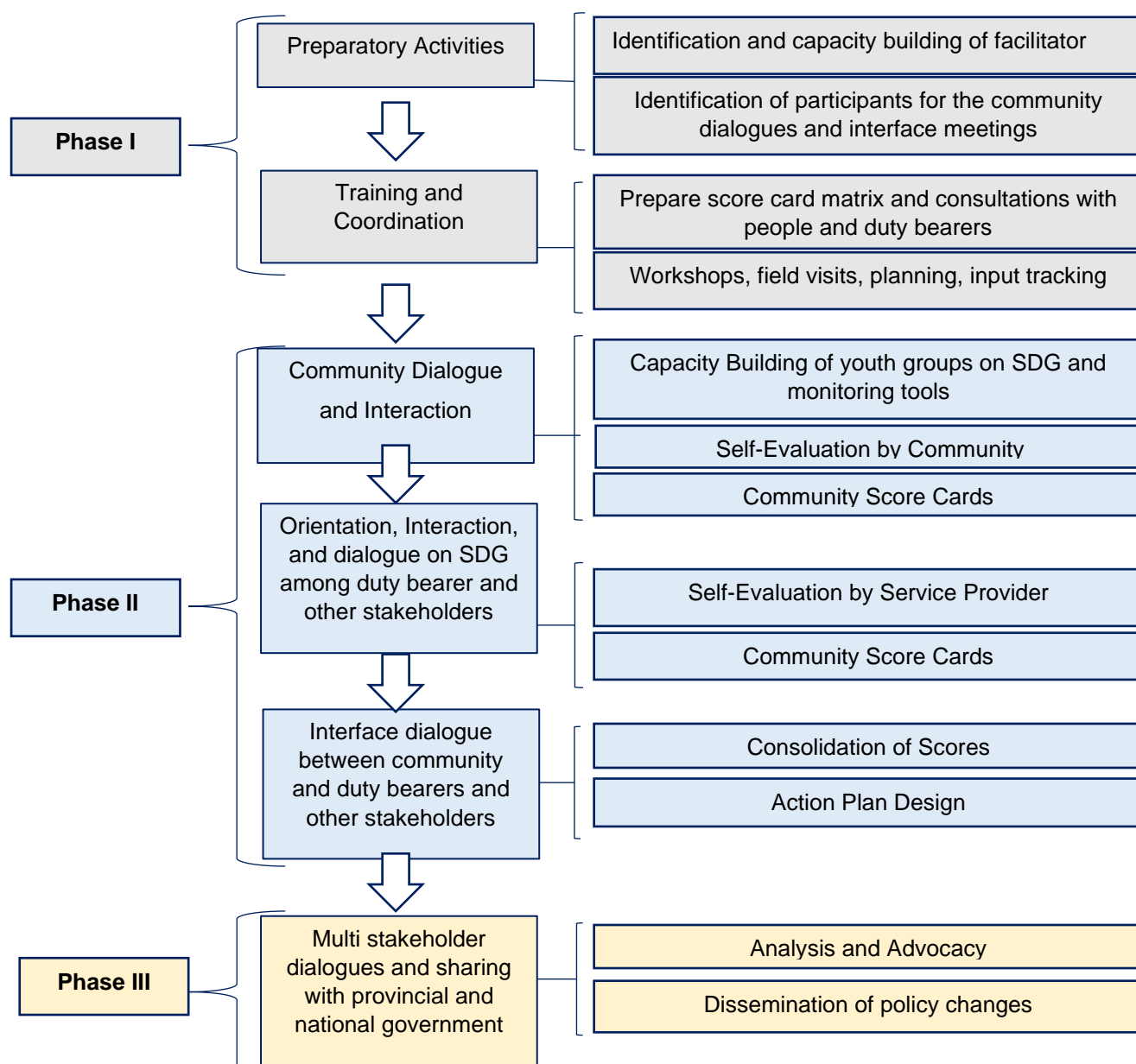
Civil society engagement in the localization of SDG will contribute to mainstream these targets in the local planning process. Besides, these organization can also strengthen community engagement in monitoring progress and prepare a plan for further improvement by adopting a community led monitoring mechanism. Leaving no one behind (LNOB) has been a central overarching concern of the 2030 sustainable development agenda. There are different civil society efforts dedicated for strengthening equitable sustainable development. The Leave No One Behind consortium in Nepal is also one of such civil society platforms comprising of different INGOs/NGOs with a strong commitment for strengthening capacities of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Nepal around inclusive data and evidence generation.

The LNOB Partnership is adopting methodologies of community-led monitoring (CLM) process, that allows citizens to take control of their own evidence and information and use it to exert influence over institutions that affect their lives. By monitoring public policy and services, citizens can tell their own stories, from their own perspectives, about how they experience service provision and the impact it has on their functioning and life chances. It provides accessible tools that allow citizens to reflect on and analyse their own realities but support them to go further to demand rights and accountability from the state, service providers and other powerful actors in society. Community-led monitoring, therefore, is a demand-driven process where citizens track and monitor aspects of state and institutional performance and use that evidence to claim rights and demand change. The initiative has trained youth from marginalized groups on community-generated data approaches and tools like community scorecard and interface meeting to collect data from communities. Based on the data, a report will be developed which will serve as a tool to influence the policy and practices at various levels.

2. Methodology:

Community Score Card has been previously used by LNOB consortium members on collecting the people insights on effectiveness of the duty bearers in achieving SDG 5 targets. Based on the previous learning, the community scorecard was used to collect updated progress status and plan on the selected 45 national indicators from SDG goal 4, 5, 10, 13, 16 and 17. Some of the steps followed as part of data collection are as follows:

Figure 1: Stages of Community Score Card Process

Phase		
Phase I	Preparatory Activities	Identification and capacity building of facilitator
		Identification of participants for the community dialogues and interface meetings
	Training and Coordination	Prepare score card matrix and consultations with people and duty bearers
		Workshops, field visits, planning, input tracking
Phase II	Community Dialogue and Interaction	Capacity Building of youth groups on SDG and monitoring tools
		Self-Evaluation by Community
		Community Score Cards
	Orientation, Interaction, and dialogue on SDG among duty bearer and other stakeholders	Self-Evaluation by Service Provider
		Community Score Cards
	Interface dialogue between community and duty bearers and other stakeholders	Consolidation of Scores
		Action Plan Design
Phase III	Multi stakeholder dialogues and sharing with provincial and national government	Analysis and Advocacy
		Dissemination of policy changes

For the data collection process, participants were identified in close coordination with local government authorities by youth-led civil society organizations. In terms of community members, participants were selected considering diversity and intersectionality aspect.

Both quantitative data and qualitative data were collected. Through the CSC matrix, quantitative data was collected while through FGD, qualitative data was collected under each indicator. In order to generate evidence, the facilitator also referenced different secondary data from different sources to validate the scores and its justifications. The details of these findings are consolidated to prepare a comprehensive report and shared with different stakeholders. There is also a designated online platform https://nepal.tracking-progress.org/ developed for tracking the progress and this information is also updated in the platform for wider circulation.

3. Result:

The marginalized communities came together with duty bearers to analyse the present situation of the community in relation to progress and achievement in SDG goals. The right holders were able to share their real issues and needs based on their experience and issues to access resources. While duty bearers were able to highlight the efforts made so far and reflect on existing gaps. This enabled community people and stakeholders to reflect development practices through the lens of SDG. The CLM process enabled both duty bearers and right holders to understand the importance of SDG and their roles in achieving the SDG goals. The evidence-based advocacy seemed to be effective for the meaningfulness of the issues and issues of the backward communities in line with the objectives of the project.

This CLM process provided a safe place for oppressed people to express themselves and helped to break hierarchies (to some degree). It created an open forum for people and stakeholders to address social problems based on personal experiences and facts from the community highlighting the cross-cutting aspects of identity that contribute to exclusion. The process involves a comparative analysis of the targeted population's condition in relation to the country's position, policy, strategy, expenditure, and programs. The collected data and evidence provide space to separate the crosscutting problems and the fundamental gaps between perceived and actual needs.

It was very interesting to note that the present condition rating of right holders is lower than the duty bearer's claim, 2.5 and 2.7 respectively. On the other hand, right holders were relatively highly optimistic for the future than duty bearer, 3.9 and 3.6 consequently. It indicates that duty bearers have more optimism in the present context and right holders are more aspired for huge progress in the future.

Figure 2: Average Scoring of 47 indicators from 2 municipalities
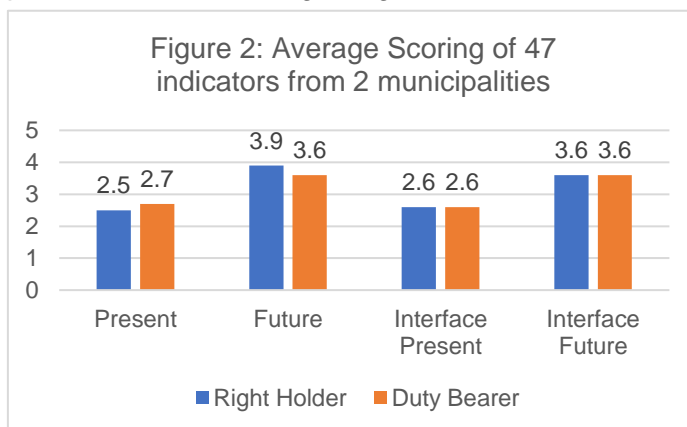
Interface dialogue results in a unique approach in which community members and duty bearers address issues based on facts to establish a shared understanding and future action plans. In this meeting, both parties agreed on 2.6 on the present situation, which is in between the earlier low scoring of right holders and a high score of duty bearer. It helped duty bearers to understand the reality of the current context from the perspective of marginalized community members. On the other hand, in terms of the scores related to the future, the interface meeting agreed to stick to the scores of most of the duty bearers as it was based on the realistic progress considering the current trend. It helped community members to avoid over expectations on the future progress outcomes.

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The key challenge in the CLM process is overcoming underlying systemic and institutional obstacles, especially because marginalized groups are underrepresented. Power imbalances make it difficult to reach out to those targeted groups, and even though they are included, they are overshadowed. Due to the existing social hierarchy, it is difficult to ensure inclusiveness and constructive engagement during interface meetings. The concept of "targeted groups" was often muddled, with general words like "disadvantaged" or "marginalized" being used without a specific description of who they were. It must be described in terms of the local language.

Since there is no standard information system or program to document GESI information (such as HMIS/DHIS) at the local level, it is difficult to recognize and validate the community's or municipality's current marginalization or intersectionality. In addition to this, triangulation of collected data, especially of community voices, is difficult while officials and stakeholders still view citizen-generated data with scepticism, with concerns pertaining to the data quality as well as the limited geographical coverage and representativeness of the data.

4. Discussion and Conclusion:

Participant selection criteria ensured that a wide range of people were included in the CSC process based on the inclusion and thus they bring their perspective with evidence. Comparison among participants in terms of services they are receiving and sharing real-life examples provides reliable data to measure the state's and other service providers' resources and opportunities. Experiential evidence is very crucial in depicting the phenomenon such as "overlapping" "inter-linkages", and "inter-relatedness" of intersectional inequalities. The whole process generates a comparison of the applicable outcome metrics. This helps to gather information to determine who is being left behind, where they are being excluded, and why they are being excluded. It is more crucial while gathering data to describe intersectionality and its many facets to determine what works in various ways with different groups of people.

Nevertheless, to promote evidence-informed policy formulation and execution, predefined methods and tools should be in place, backed by data collection software or a standard (national to local level) capable of broad data analysis. While disaggregated data from marginalized populations is crucial for data sharing and ownership promotion for a broader audience of policymakers, there is a need to develop a standard information system or program to document GESI information.
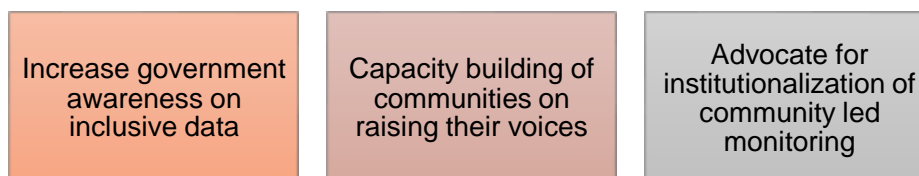
There is a need to follow up by youth participants on the agreed-upon action plan and track CSC's progress on a regular basis (periodically). To reach a wider audience from community to policy-making level, it is important to the appropriate presentation of the data, which contributed to its acceptance or relevance for policymakers and participants that can be in the form of a factsheet, infographics, and a visual overview that is brief and in the local language, as well as a comparison with national statistics – quantitative data. It is equally important to recognize and share existing best practices and success stories.

The CDD generation process itself capacitated participants about the discussion issues and method through facilitation. In this process, an aspect of empowerment is built into the data collection process – understanding, clarification on the position of the duty bearer, and so on. In addition to this, during the data collection process, there was an immediate realization of exclusion and marginalization among various classes. The opinion from diverse groups was differently grounded on their personal and social experiences and expressing their perspectives allowing the oppressed group's voices to be heard. The positive and encouraging engagement of duty bearer in the CLM process to hear the voices of people along with a reflection of progress and gaps fuelled positive energy while developing a plan of action

collectively for increased commitment. This in the long run helps in the creation of a relationship between the community people and those in positions of responsibility.

The community-led monitoring helped in the following aspects:

Figure 3: Contribution of community led monitoring

Increase government awareness on inclusive data	Capacity building of communities on raising their voices	Advocate for institutionalization of community led monitoring

It is essential to continue building the capacity of civil society organizations so that they can further support marginalized communities to be engaged more meaningfully in these monitoring procedures. The presence of a digital platform for storing the information from community and duty bearer engagement serve as strong evidence for future advocacy. Based on this evidence, there should be continued effort to lobby with the government to institutionalize and recognize these community-led monitoring and inclusive data collection procedures to promote equitable development that will ultimately support in accelerating pace of empowerment and accountability for achieving sustainable development with the core principle of Leave No One Behind.

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