

ISET-NEPAL'S  
FIVE-YEAR STRATEGY  
**2016-2021**

# ADAPTING TO TRANSITION



International Centre for Science and Environmental Policy, Nepal



# PURPOSE

This strategy aims to situate ISET-Nepal strategically as it responds to the challenges Nepal faces in an era of tremendous change processes. The disastrous earthquake that took place in April 2015, its aftershocks and the subsequent political turmoil and strained relations the country faced with its southern neighbor have introduced major uncertainties in its research-knowledge-policy-practice landscape, which, as it is, struggles to contribute to the nation's journey towards development. To overcome existing and emerging challenges, including those mentioned above, new insights and entry points are required for fine-tuning existing policies and eventually forming new ones capable of adapting to new constraints as they arise.

To achieve these objectives, it is critical that ISET-Nepal engage at the intersection of natural science, social science and local knowledge streams, for it is such a multi-dimensional perspective that will generate the evidence needed to deal with emerging problems. While nurturing the growth of qualitative research, ISET-Nepal aims to constructively initiate and engage in public dialogue designed to influence the policy continuum, which consists of opinion-building, discourse-setting, research- result-uptake, and, ultimately policy-action. ISET-Nepal's strategy aims to generate outputs that will contribute towards developing new principles, help shape public policies, and improve local practices so that social and economic wellbeing can be achieved in ecologically sustainable ways.

# THE ORGANIZATION

ISET-Nepal is a research-oriented organization that conducts inter-disciplinary research and engages in policy dialogues. It was established in 2001, a time when significant social, environmental, and political change processes, along with climate change impacts, were emerging as major threats across the globe, including in Nepal. Since then, the ISET-Nepal has examined these social and environmental challenges with the aim of building a society capable of addressing such challenges through improved knowledge and capacities. In addition to conducting interdisciplinary research, ISET-Nepal holds interactions on crosscutting issues involving the environment, water, technology, politics, and society with a wide spectrum of the Nepali society as well as with global actors. ISET-Nepal produces high-quality evidence-based knowledge products in order to inform and influence existing policies and practices. Furthermore, ISET-Nepal supports education as well as training to enhance the capacity of young professionals. It supports youths to come up with innovative solutions to emerging challenges. The organization also collaborates and partners with diverse national and international academicians, researchers, and organizations.

# NEPAL'S CHALLENGES

Nepal's challenges are shaped concurrently by three phenomena with serious implications for the environment, livelihoods, and general wellbeing: growing urbanization, dependency on food imports, and constraining socio-economic structures.

First, in the coming decades, a more substantial portion of the country's population is likely to live in urban than in rural areas, and social disparities and inequalities in income, opportunities, health, and education are likely to be substantial. Urbanization will transform landscapes, and the current unsustainable practices of resource extraction that lead to environmental degradation and pollution are likely to be perpetuated. In addition, patterns of water use and demand will change, thereby posing significant local implications for its access. The pollution of water bodies with untreated wastewater and competition among uses, such as irrigation, drinking water, hydropower, and ecosystem services, will continue to increase.

Second, urban areas are likely to become more dependent on services produced by distant than local ecosystems. This shift toward external dependency will result in new sources of vulnerability, as illustrated by the recent "unofficial blockade," which prevented Nepal from accessing sufficient supplies of basic commodities, including food, fuel for vehicles, cooking gas, and medicines, from India, its main supplier.

The third challenge is rooted in a nexus of problems, including small landholdings, high rates of food insecurity and poverty, an unreliable supply of energy, a lack of non-agricultural livelihoods, frequent floods, feeble markets, and weak local institutions.

The risks associated with climate change, particularly for Nepal's poor and vulnerable populations, add radically new and different complications and require an entirely new approach to development. The 2015 Gorkha earthquake was yet another reminder of how ongoing seismic activity will periodically erupt and trigger a cascade of serious social, political, economic and institutional consequences.

# THE RESPONSES

**To respond to these persistent and emergent challenges, ISET-Nepal will continue to conduct research and generate evidence for policies on the six themes described below.**

## **Disaster Risk Reduction**

Nepal faces risks from recurrent (climatic) and episodic (seismic) hazards that can escalate into disasters that disrupt and lower development gains. In addition, damage from non-climatic disasters is exacerbated by climate change-induced impacts, and disaster risks intertwine with existing political, social and institutional conditions, compounding their impacts. For this reason, disaster response and recovery needs to be informed by a deep understanding of climatic and natural hazards and associated risks on the one hand and the social, economic, technology and institutional context and dynamics on the other. Disaster risk management requires inductive knowledge-based research and policy and regular discourse between researchers and policymakers. ISET-Nepal's past research on climatic hazards, vulnerability, and adaptation creates opportunities for it to expand its research and policy engagements in disaster risk reduction and resilience-building.

## **The Changing Rural-Urban Continuum**

By 2030 more people in Asia will live in urban regions than in rural areas. High social disparities and inequalities in income, health, and education will characterize urbanized areas. Urbanization transforms ecological landscapes, creates new patterns of resource extraction and degradation and increases air and water pollution. Collectively, these changes will produce new vulnerabilities, especially for the poor and marginalized. Evidence-based knowledge is required to inform urban development policies and planning processes that address that vulnerabilities, inequalities, and spatial injustices that emerge from urbanization and ensure that urban communities and systems are resilient.

### **Poverty, Inequality and Social Development**

Nepal ranks very poor in Human Development Index (145th in 2014). Rural communities are more vulnerable in social development paradigm. Social issues keep significant importance in development projects, which needs to be carefully dealt with. ISET-Nepal therefore is exploring research on this theme as these are crucial issues to be examined during research in climate change, disaster risk reduction and other themes.

### **Climate, Water, Ecosystem, Food, and Livelihood Interdependence**

The dynamics of water, food, and livelihoods are central to the productive use and protection of water resources. Climate change severely complicates these dynamics. Understanding the impact of climate change on water, food, and livelihoods is critical to integrating adaptive practices across all societal activities in order to create a climate-resilient society.

### **Energy System and Management**

Nepal faces constraints in its supplies of electricity and other commercial forms of energy, constraints which affect macro and micro economies in fundamental ways. Recent shortages stemming from geo-political tensions and dependence on imports of fuel, food, medicines, and other essentials highlight the country's systemic vulnerability. Since energy security is fundamental to shaping Nepal's development pathways, the promotion of decentralized and renewable energy systems and energy-efficient technology and practices needs critical examination.

### **Public-Sector Governance**

Good governance is fundamental to development. The ongoing political transition has weakened Nepal's formal governance at the central and the local levels and impeded development gains. Institutional erosion has severely limited the regulatory roles and functions of the government. This state of affairs needs to be examined systematically and evidence generated to improve governance. Simultaneously, mechanism that private-sector agencies can use to play more effective role in the delivery of basic services needs to be identified. The insights derived from such study will add immense value to the public as the Nepali state and society graduate from a least developed to a developing status.



# THE APPROACH

**We will use the approaches below in all the activities we engage in in order to achieve our vision, mission, aims, and strategic objectives:**

## **Interdisciplinary Research**

High-quality interdisciplinary research is a prerequisite for inductive policy engagement. Such research, because it involving technological, societal, environmental, economical, and political perspectives, resonates with policy needs better than research that is reductionist. Studies with systemic perspectives bring out evidence of power, politics, social differentials, and the interests of government departments and other local bodies, all important information for policymaking. ISET-Nepal will pursue the following measures to ensure the quality of its research:

## **Publication Protocol and Quality Control**

ISET-Nepal will develop and use a standard protocol for publishing papers, monographs, policy briefs, articles, book volumes, and reports. Principle responsibility for quality control is from the ISET-Nepal Executive Director and is assisted by the team. The office has trained, experienced administrative and finance staff to ensure that all compliance issues are handled promptly. The professional staffs ensure that all interventions are of the highest quality and are supported by technical staff as needed. ISET-Nepal partnership has been constructed in ways that allow for input from senior experienced researchers, editors and writers to ensure the quality of the research and final products. In addition, review comments are solicited from the external reviewers on technical content of assessments. The reports will be reviewed at different stages for ensuring quality. The reviewers will be selected in the initial stage of a study and will be budgeted in the project.



## Research Ethics

It will be mandatory for all researchers conducting ISET-Nepal-related work to follow ISET-Nepal's ethical guidelines.

## Peer Reviews

All research outputs and knowledge products at ISET-Nepal will be peer reviewed both within the organization and by external reviewers. Synthesized findings will be regularly presented in seminars, conferences, symposia and forums to seek feedback prior to final publication.

## Reflective learning

ISET-Nepal will build on local trials and pilots in order to ground its policy engagement processes. The learning from such pilot projects will be used on the one hand to improve implementation and on the other to upscale learning from the local to the national to even the international arena for policy engagement. ISET-Nepal will pursue the following two components of its ongoing efforts:

### Piloting Resilience-Building

As a part of its effort to ground its policy engagement, ISET-Nepal is systematically piloting its Resilience Initiative within Mechi-Mahakali-Mustang and Marchawar (RIM4). This initiative will establish a learning lab and develop a systematic research focus in collaboration with local partners in order to upscale lessons on resilience-building from the local to the national scale.

## Education

ISET-Nepal believes that learning begins in school and continues to the tertiary level and beyond. It has invested in reforming formal education in Nepal by a) feeding its research findings into efforts to reform curriculum and curriculum delivery and b) inculcating a culture based on of inquiry and inductive learning. ISET-Nepal educational initiatives currently underway that will be further consolidated in the future include the following:

### *School Level*

ISET Nepal works with primary and higher level public schools to organize creative activities like art competitions on selected themes.

### *Bachelor's Level*

ISET-Nepal offers Abishkar Fellowships to bachelor-level students who need financial support to pursue innovations in research, dissemination, and technology.

### *Master's Level*

ISET-Nepal provides financial support to Master's-level's student to help them undertake graduate-level research and thesis writing. Grantees are required to hold departmental seminars.

### *Post-Master's Level*

ISET-Nepal partners with universities and other research groups to organize the Himalayan Knowledge Conclave (HKC) to provide opportunities to fresh university graduates to develop and present their Master's theses in an academic conference setting. This opportunity is instrumental in building the capacity and confidence of young graduate students through participation, presentation, and networking.

### *Manthan*

ISET-Nepal publishes Manthan, a trimester journal of book reviews in Nepal language which uses this genre as a means to engage with readers and large policy actors. The journal is disseminated through Shikhyak monthly magazine that targets teachers.

### *ISET-Nepal Platform Lecture*

ISET-Nepal invites eminent national and international scholars to deliver public lectures about their work and experiences with regard to various societal complexities and challenges. It organizes a maximum of two lectures per year.

### *Immersion Course*

ISET-Nepal engages in designing and organizing immersion courses for local schoolteachers, leaders, and other local agents of change.

### *Media Fellowship*

ISET Nepal offers fellowships to media person to undertake investigative inquiries on environmental issues, community initiatives, and success stories that have intrinsic value in informing policymakers, development personnel, and local communities.

## **Communication and Outreach**

ISET-Nepal will continue improve its internal and external communication mechanisms. ISET-Nepal's internal communication focuses on promoting sharing and exchanges among researchers involved in different thematic areas and using such exchanges as a means to build research capacity. Its external communication aims at enhancing the visibility and dissemination of its knowledge-based products. To that end, ISET-Nepal produces a wide range of products, including articles in vernacular and English newspapers, policy briefs, discussion papers, radio and TV programs, and blogs. We

believe these products could be instrumental in shaping and promoting public and policy discussion and discourse on the core issues ISET-Nepal works on. To reach out to more academic and policy-oriented audiences, ISET-Nepal will continue to organize national and regional conferences and symposia on important emerging themes. It makes concerted efforts to reach out to academics, university students, research organizations, and development agencies in the dissemination of its books, review volumes, monographs and other knowledge products.

### **Policy Engagement**

Nepal's policy landscape is highly polarized and dominated by partisan politics. In this context, ISET-Nepal's experience shows that influencing policy encompasses four interconnected elements in a continuum—opinion-building, discourse-setting, knowledge-uptake, and policy-change actions. ISET-Nepal will start with shaping opinion and then proceed incrementally toward policy uptake by engaging with policy agents vertically and horizontally within the socio-political space. It will engage in four key actions:

- a. Build public and private sector partnerships through joint publications, meetings, conferences, and shared learning dialogues;
- b. Develop customized knowledge products to sub-national level governance entities such as district development committees, local communities, non-governmental organizations, and community-based organizations;
- c. Prepare specially designed messages to government officials using amplification approach
- d. Use narrowcast results to strategic thought leaders, the private sector, policymakers, and practitioners through:
  - (i) Direct participation in research through SLDs and application of threshold analysis to practical needs of sectors; and
  - (iii) Increasing readership of peer-reviewed results through social media and LinkedIn, op-eds, visual media, local radio stations and local language publications.

### **Organizational Development**

Developing capacity for high-quality research is a continuous process, particularly in terms of consolidating and streamlining thematic focuses, translating research output to knowledge products, internalizing mechanisms for ensuring that quality is a key element of operational strategy, and expanding outreach and policy engagements. Our organizational development approach will focus on the following areas:

*Governance*

Continue to make governance dynamic, accountable, inclusive, and engaged.

*Financial robustness*

Systematize bookkeeping for income and expenditure to generate real-time financial positions on projects with multiple sources of funding.

*Internal policies*

Update the human resource and financial policies in place to streamline procedures for procurement, recordkeeping, recruitment, auditing, and performance assessment.

*Management and research synergy*

Encourage continuous interaction among research and administrative staff to build team spirit, a shared work culture, and synergy.

*Articles in popular press:*

Encourage research and non-research staff to write articles for magazines and national dailies. In particular, research staffs to develop working papers and write for peer review journals. For this ISET-Nepal will organize trainings and writing workshops.

*Human resource management:*

The organization will continue to maintain qualified and skilled professionals to carry out quality research. To further maintain the quality, we plan to update rooster of experts and professionals working in different disciplines. This will help pull expert's opinion when needed during research.

*Exposure*

Encourage research staff to participate in conferences, workshops, and seminars at the national, regional and international levels to gain exposure and build capacity.

*In-House Colloquium*

Hold weekly exchanges among in-house researchers and invite professionals to foster knowledge-sharing and capacity development.

# MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Assessing and monitoring the impact of our work is critical to further improvement and development. ISET-Nepal's program and research portfolio is consistent with the themes and approaches outlined above in this strategy. It will consolidate ISET-Nepal's internal systems to monitor programs and improve its accountability to donors, partners, and societies studied. Our peers, partners, donors, and government will continue to review and evaluate our work.

# THINKING AHEAD

The implementation of this strategy will take place not only in a period of tremendous changes in Nepal but also in one of its most difficult periods in history. The country faces the major challenges of implementing the new constitution and its provisions for re-organizing the state structure, recovering from the devastating earthquake disaster, resolving the country's regional politics and redefining its relationship with its neighbors, particularly India, and charting out a path to wellbeing for its people in an era made more complex by climate change. It is not clear how these processes will transpire. What is clear, however, is that dealing with these challenges and uncertainties requires a fair degree of flexibility, adaptive management, and innovation. ISET-Nepal cannot create the changes it wants on its own and will require strong and credible partnerships and alliances with different stakeholders that share its values. The themes identified and approaches proposed in this strategy utilize and build on the exiting strengths and experience of ISET-Nepal's staff. The global ISET alliance provides the organization with a focused path and support in its journey. The organization will creatively engage with the TTI cohort to build synergy. In the next five years, ISET-Nepal aims to improve its products and profile and expects that this strategy will form the foundation for steering the organization toward effectively meeting its objectives.





