

Research Article

# Challenges and Obstacles in the Implementation of National Pride Projects in Nepal

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## Abstract

This study critically examines the challenges impeding the implementation of National Pride Projects (NPPs) in Nepal, analyzing them through political and administrative lenses. Despite their pivotal role in driving economic growth and advancing infrastructure development, these strategically significant projects are persistently hindered by systemic inefficiencies and governance issues. From a political perspective, frequent changes in government, an absence of political consensus, and the over-politicization of decision-making processes undermine project continuity, exacerbate policy instability, and disrupt long-term planning. These issues are compounded by administrative inefficiencies, including excessive bureaucratic red tape, a pronounced lack of technical expertise, resource mismanagement, and weak inter-agency coordination. Such deficiencies are further exacerbated by external challenges, including prolonged land acquisition disputes, delays in obtaining environmental clearances, and inadequate engagement with stakeholders, all of which contribute to significant delays and cost overruns. The interplay between political instability and administrative inefficiencies has not only jeopardized project timelines but also escalated costs and eroded public trust in the government's capacity to deliver on large-scale initiatives. These challenges call attention to the fragmented nature of Nepal's governance structure, emphasizing the urgent need for a holistic approach to reform. This paper argues for the necessity of comprehensive policy reforms aimed at depoliticizing decision-making processes, fostering political stability, and enhancing institutional capacity. Strengthened accountability mechanisms and more effective inter-agency coordination are imperative to streamline project implementation. Additionally, fostering stakeholder engagement, addressing procedural bottlenecks, and building technical expertise within implementing agencies are critical steps to ensure the timely and successful execution of NPPs. By addressing these multifaceted barriers, Nepal can harness the transformative potential of National Pride Projects to drive sustainable economic growth and infrastructure development. The findings of this study contribute to the broader discourse on public-sector project implementation in developing economies, providing actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners.

## Keywords

National Pride Projects, Political Challenges, Administrative Inefficiencies, Resource Mismanagement, Project Delays

## 1. Introduction

The psychological hinge that connects self-fulfillment with the public goals of government is national pride. The Second

World War demonstrates the damaging effects that nationalism can have. In Adolf Hitler's Third Reich, the connections

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between individual psychology and governmental policy were evident. The neurotic nature of the Fuhrer corrupted the nation's sense of patriotism and led to conjecture regarding the degree of neuroticism exhibited by political leaders, a notion that has since been extended to prime ministers and presidents [41].

Launching national pride initiatives, which combine hope and a forward-looking vision, frequently signifies an important turning point in a nation's development. Democratic leaders usually icing on the cake the psychological foundations of these kinds of programs, emphasizing how they help to promote pride and unity in the country. For instance, former US President Donald Trump frequently emphasized the significance of infrastructure initiatives in reviving American grandeur. Trump said, "Together, we are building a safe, strong, and proud America" in his 2018 State of the Union speech [55]. In a similar vein, Winston Churchill recognized the importance of infrastructure for boosting national morale even though he served during a time of war rather than peace. As Churchill famously observed, "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us" [12]. Churchill emphasized the enduring influence of a strong infrastructure on the mentality and sense of identity of the country.

The National Planning Commission (NPC) is the most specialized and senior advisory body of the Government of Nepal, tasked with creating a national vision, development policy, periodic plans, and sectoral policies for the overall development of the nation. It is headed by the Prime Minister. Funding sources, resource needs, and allocations for socio-economic development are determined by the NPC. It serves as the principal body responsible for monitoring and evaluating development plans, policies, and initiatives. Additionally, the NPC serves as a focal point for the exchange of ideas among scholars, business people, members of civil society, and development partners regarding new proposals and ideas for development [37]. Project alignment with national development plans and policies, which represent the nation's long-term economic, social, and infrastructure goals, is ensured by the NPC [35]. To make sure that the projects have broad support and address the needs of different sectors, a comprehensive consultation process involving various stakeholders, including government agencies, local authorities, the private sector, and civil society organizations, is conducted [31]. To make sure that potential projects are viable and sustainable, they are subjected to thorough feasibility studies that evaluate their effects on the economy, society, and environment [46, 48]. Prioritization of projects is determined by factors like their capacity to boost infrastructure, generate employment, and promote economic growth. To rank projects according to these standards, the NPC frequently employs a scoring system [35]. The selection of National Pride Projects is also heavily influenced by the availability of funding and other resources; projects that have successfully obtained funding or are highly likely to attract investment will typically be given priority [31].

Even though there is a formal process in place, the priorities of the current leadership occasionally have an impact on the selection of National Pride Projects. Projects that fit their political agendas or are situated in their electoral districts may be supported by leaders. This can occasionally result in an emphasis on initiatives that provide obvious short-term benefits, which can be advantageous from a political standpoint [48]. For example, in certain situations, leaders may advocate for initiatives in their home areas in order to win over voters; this is a practice known as "pork barrel politics." But the formal procedures of the NPC usually counterbalance this, making sure that the overarching strategic goals of national development are not jeopardized [31].

Large-scale development initiatives in Nepal are rarely finished on schedule time due to a variety of obstacles, such as a deficiency in the necessary coordination between various pertinent government agencies. Lack of laws, ambiguous policies, and strong political will also make it difficult to carry out projects. Such projects cannot proceed smoothly without adequate planning and designing as well. Furthermore, the slow progress of infrastructure projects can be attributed in part to the local population's propensity to block them under any pretext. Major projects frequently suffer from time and cost overruns in the face of these obstacles, placing a tremendous financial burden on the nation [13, 14]. Against this difficult backdrop, several scenarios could result in failure of NPPS in Nepal. This paper look into the most plausible scenarios that have been impacting NPPs.

## 2. Historical Context of Planned Development

The Araniko Highway, built in the 1960s, is one notable example of Projects that was built in the past way before NPPs were introduced. This highway was constructed during a time of geopolitical tension between China and India, linking Kathmandu with Kodari on the Chinese border. The building was a component of China's larger plan to challenge India's hegemony in the area by strengthening its position in Nepal. The highway's continued importance as a trade and tourism link demonstrates its long-term significance and designation as a National Park [45]. In the present, Indians have been wary of Chinese-funded projects in Nepal due to the timing of the creation of this road network.

The East-West Highway (Mahendra Highway), which was finished in the 1980s, is another important undertaking. Connecting Nepal's eastern and western regions, this highway runs the entire length of the nation. By enhancing internal trade and facilitating access to remote areas, it promoted economic development and national integration [29]. The Melamchi Drinking Water Project is an additional noteworthy instance. This large-scale project, which was started in the early 1990s, was designed to divert water from the Melamchi River in order to alleviate the persistent water shortages in the

Kathmandu Valley. But because of funding problems, technical difficulties, and political unpredictability, the project was repeatedly delayed. About thirty years after its founding, in 2021, it eventually started supplying water [27]. Large-scale infrastructure projects in Nepal are complicated and fraught with difficulties, as demonstrated by the Melamchi project. Though it began as a means of addressing an urgent shortage of resources, it became an arduous undertaking characterized by constantly changing schedules and spiraling expenses. Its eventual completion was hailed as a major accomplishment for the country's infrastructure and a monument to tenacity, despite the obstacles encountered along the way.

In Nepal, during the six decades of planned development, ten five-year and five three-year plans have been implemented. The political landscape underwent several revolutionary shifts during this time, but the advancements made in the fields of modern transportation, infrastructure development, economics, and society have not lived up to expectations. In the meantime, Nepalese are comparatively more conscious now than they were previously. The modern world has embraced society. Although they haven't completely disappeared, discrimination, inequality, and exclusion on the basis of class, gender, and ethnicity are undoubtedly declining. During this time, significant advancements have been made in a number of areas, including social security, drinking water, health, and education. Urban infrastructure, communication and information technology, and road transportation have all made substantial strides in the infrastructure sector. Nonetheless, additional work needs to be done in the remaining infrastructure sectors, such as air travel and hydroelectricity. Results-oriented plans that are implemented over the short, medium, and long terms are required to meet public expectations and advance the country's development into a wealthy and developed one [24].

Planned development started to take shape in Nepal in the 1950s after the Rana autocracy was overthrown and replaced by a democratic government in 1951. The First Five-Year Plan (1956–1961) was introduced, marking the first major step. In order to create the groundwork for future expansion, this plan placed a strong emphasis on infrastructure development, particularly in the areas of transportation, education, and agriculture [51]. Nevertheless, a number of obstacles faced the original plans. Progress was hampered by a lack of funding, a lack of administrative experience, and subpar implementation techniques. Notwithstanding these problems, the era established a standard for organized economic activity and provided a structure for upcoming development initiatives [57].

Centralization of Nepal's development plans occurred during the Panchayat era (1960–1990). With large investments in agriculture, irrigation, and rural infrastructure, the Third Five-Year Plan (1965–1970) and later plans were centered on rural development [42]. The objectives of the government were to encourage self-sufficiency, lessen regional

disparities, and incorporate remote areas into the national economy. These initiatives, though, were frequently criticized for being unduly top-down and failing to sufficiently take local needs into account. Due to the concentration of power in Kathmandu, there has been uneven development, with many rural areas still falling behind in terms of infrastructure and basic services [7].

The restoration of democracy in 1990 signaled a sea change in Nepal's development strategy. In the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1992–1997), decentralization, privatization, and liberalization were prioritized. By decreasing the state's direct involvement in economic activities and encouraging private sector participation, this change attempted to create a more favorable environment for economic growth [26]. Problems like political unpredictability, corruption, and poor infrastructure have remained in spite of these efforts. The Maoist insurgency had an impact in the early 2000s, interfering with development efforts and taxing available resources. Federalism and inclusive development have gained more attention since the 2008 peace process and the founding of the Federal Democratic Republic. In order to better align development objectives with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Fourteenth Plan (2016–2019) and later plans placed a strong emphasis on reducing poverty, promoting social inclusion, and ensuring environmental sustainability [34].

With more control over development agendas at the provincial level, federalism is meant to more effectively address regional disparities [1-3]. Problems like political unpredictability, corruption, and poor infrastructure have remained in spite of these efforts. The Maoist insurgency had an impact in the early 2000s, interfering with development efforts and taxing available resources. Federalism and inclusive development have gained more attention since the 2008 peace process and the founding of the Federal Democratic Republic. Aligning development objectives with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and prioritizing poverty alleviation, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability has been the focus of the Fourteenth Plan (2016–2019) and subsequent plans [34]. Decentralization emerged as a major theme, with initiatives aimed at empowering communities and local governments. The landmark Local Self-Governance Act of 1999 aimed to promote more inclusive and participatory development practices by giving local bodies more power and resources [45].

With the overarching objective of realizing a "Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali" by 2043, the 15th Five-Year Plan has introduced this goal. The plan places significant emphasis on sustainable development, poverty alleviation, and Nepal's transition to a middle-income nation by 2030 [33]. As per Nepal's federal framework, the plan seeks to enhance the abilities of regional and local administrations. In order to guarantee that development projects are adapted to local needs and resources, decentralization will be essential [2].

The creation of a digital economy is probably going to be given priority in the 16th Plan, given the increasing trend

towards digitalization in the world. This entails advancing digital literacy, fostering entrepreneurship and innovation, and enhancing internet infrastructure [28]. Sustainability of the environment is still a major concern. Through the promotion of green technologies, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy sources, the 16th Plan is anticipated to increase Nepal's resilience to climate change [36]. The plan will keep addressing social inequalities with the goal of making sure that economic growth benefits every part of society. This includes initiatives to advance gender equality and programs specifically designed for underserved communities [44].

In spite of a number of catastrophic shocks in the past, including trade disruptions, earthquakes, unstable governments, and conflicts, Nepal has made significant strides toward eradicating poverty and promoting shared prosperity. After a ten-year peace and constitutional process, the Nepali government is eager to speed up economic development and reach middle-income status by 2030. The percentage of households living in extreme poverty decreased from 46 to 15 percent between 1996 and 2011. The macro-economic foundations of Nepal have not changed. Nepal needs to close the infrastructure gap if it is to realize its growth goals. Nepal hopes to leave the list of least developed nations by 2022 and quickly realize its goal of becoming a middle-income nation. But as of right now, Nepali citizens lack sufficient and dependable access to infrastructure services. The quality and sustainability of services must be improved with significant and effective investment if actual benefits are to be realized. By facilitating access to essential services, employment opportunities, and markets, infrastructure development can, in the correct circumstances, contribute to the advancement of growth and equity. Additionally, it will support the development of dependable supply chains in Nepal, a nation with difficult geography that will facilitate the more effective flow of goods and services [59].

Nepal started pursuing NPPs in the aftermath of the civil war as a means of advancing its economy and fostering national unity. Aspirations for modernization and the advancement of infrastructure were reflected in the start of projects like the Gautam Buddha International Airport, the Fast Track Road Project, and the Melamchi Water Supply Project [34]. But these projects have faced numerous obstacles that have hindered their progress and diminished their potential impact, even in spite of large investments and political commitments.

Twenty-Seven National Pride Projects (NPPs) have been designed and implemented as part of our infrastructure development endeavor with the goal of integrating the Nepali economy with the expanding economies of our two neighbors and, consequently, with the global economy. Strong and sustainable infrastructure does, in fact, contribute to increased economic growth, improved affordability and accessibility, trade facilitation through an unbroken supply chain, bridging the geographic divide for strategic bridgehead and human development, and increased national prestige. The National

Planning Commission's (NPC) proposal serves as the foundation for all of our NPPs. Three of these projects—the Upper Tamakoshi Hydropower Project, Bhairahawa International Airport, and Pokhara International Airport—have been finished thus far. However, for various reasons, both airports have been experiencing operational difficulties. There, we need to be aware that any delay in the investment's return could result in debt stress syndrome [53].

### 3. Socio-Economic, Political, Environmental and Judicial Factors

Large-scale projects deemed essential to the growth of the country are called National Pride Projects. These initiatives have been chosen because they have the capacity to bring about major changes in the social, economic, and infrastructure spheres. Nepal has currently named a number of projects—including those pertaining to irrigation, transportation, hydropower, and heritage preservation—as National Pride Projects [33]. Governments launch National Pride Projects (NPPs) as large-scale initiatives to boost the economy, demonstrate the nation's strength, and meet pressing infrastructure needs. The application of NPPs holds great promise in nations like Nepal, which are distinguished by varied landscapes, socioeconomic challenges, and developmental goals [1]. But expectations are not always met in reality, as many projects fall short of their goals.

It is impossible to separate Nepal's socioeconomic realities from the failure of NPPs there. Implementing projects is difficult in this environment because of regional development disparities, inadequate access to resources, and persistent poverty [58].

Furthermore, problems with land acquisition, resettling impacted communities, and environmental issues have frequently resulted in disputes and delays, impeding the successful implementation of NPPs [21]. The obstacles to implementation, according to Tulasi Sitaula, a former government secretary with experience managing infrastructure projects, have not altered in a number of years. For instance, money is allotted for unfinished projects, according to Sitaula. Before starting a project, the government almost never completes the detailed project report (DPR), acquires land, and obtains clearances for the environment and forests [4, 47].

Every day, Nepal witness evidence of stagnant development throughout the country. Crumbling infrastructure, national pride projects, and dusty, unfinished highways. Economic activity is typically extractive, occurring at significant environmental cost and disclosing corruption and a lack of accountability on the part of those in positions of power. In modern Nepal, all of this has become so standard that people no longer even bother to voice their complaints. Considering that they are not even offended by this poor performance. Public fatalism and a high bar for punishment have promoted impunity and let politicians and bureaucrats off the hook [38].

In seven years, the Madhes Fast Track (Expressway) project has made only 29% of its total physical progress. With the exception of one or two areas, the construction project site is clear of obstacles, but progress has been sluggish thus far. The Nepali Army was given six years to complete the expressway road project, one of the government's projects of national pride. By January 14, 2024, the total physical progress made since the Army assumed control of the project's construction was 29.52%. The 72.5 km Expressway, which will be the quickest route between Tarai and Kathmandu, will consist of multiple bridges totaling 10.59 km, six tunnels totaling 6.41 km in length, and 55.5 km of road [15]. People should understand constructing Tunnel is not easy task before righting off Nepali Army as we have already seen long delay in finishing 2.5 km tunnel in Naubise and Naghdhunga Surungmarga.

As the nation turned the page in 2015, millions of citizens from the many ethnic groups living there hoped to experience political self-governance and a much stronger voice in local and national decision-making. Along with more social and cultural rights with self-determination, they also hoped for a far more equitable share of development. Even though there have been a number of improvements in the way indigenous groups' rights have been upheld, much work remains. The hydropower industry, which is already crucial to the country's finances and is expected to experience further exponential growth due to pledges of billions of dollars in foreign investments, is one of the most obvious instances of how these rights are violated [19].

In order to finance a number of irrigation and river control projects, including multiple "National Pride Projects," the Ministry of Energy, Water Resources, and Irrigation in Nepal has asked the Ministry of Finance for an additional Rs. 4 billion. But the Finance Ministry has not made any additional funding available, citing a lack of funds. In response, the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation has been able to reallocate Rs. 1 billion from current budgetary categories to projects that are in need. An additional Rs. 5 billion is desperately needed for the irrigation projects, including Babai and Rani-Jamara-Kulariya. This financing issue is a reflection of larger problems in the government, as ministries dedicated to development look for more funding and the finance ministry struggles to raise enough money to cover both recurrent and development expenses [43]. The destiny of NPPs has also been greatly impacted by Nepal's complex political system. Project mismanagement and institutional weaknesses have been exacerbated by shifts in government leadership, inefficiencies in the bureaucracy, and a discontinuity in policy [50]. Implementation challenges are further compounded by the politicization of development projects, which has resulted in issues of corruption, favoritism, and lack of accountability [49].

Experts in the travel industry contend that if Bhairahawa

airport hosts regular scheduled international flights, visitor arrivals—especially those from abroad—will increase. However, according to Nepali officials, Delhi has refused to let large passenger planes pass through its airspace to the west, so aircraft cannot cross India to get to the Gautam Buddha airport. Shorter, less expensive flights would be possible with access to Indian airspace. Additionally, there are those in Nepal who think Delhi is leery of the fact that China's Northwest Civil Aviation Airport built the Gautam Buddha airport. The airport is situated close to Nepal's border with India, just west of the spot where the armies of two major Asian powers clashed in December 2022 in the Arunchal Pradesh region. At least 20 troops lost their lives in a significant conflict between China and India in 2020. The Line of Actual Control, also known as the LAC, is a 3,444-kilometer (2,100-mile) border that is poorly defined and demarcated and lies at the center of their dispute [18].

The Nijgadh Airport project's location in a heavily forested area raises the most environmental concerns. The proposed location is close to the richly diverse Nijgadh forest, which is home to endangered species like the Bengal tiger and Asian elephant [40]. Environmentalists contend that 8,045 hectares of forest land would be cleared for the airport's construction, seriously harming the environment and destroying wildlife habitat [5]. In addition, the project's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report has come under fire for failing to provide adequate mitigation measures and for not adequately addressing the long-term ecological impacts. Opponents contend that the EIA exaggerates the plans for compensatory afforestation while underestimating the possibility of environmental degradation [52].

Environmental concerns that have fueled opposition to the project include the possible increase in noise and air pollution, as well as the potential disruption of local ecosystems. The Nijgadh Airport project is facing major legal challenges as a result of the environmental concerns. 2020 saw the Supreme Court of Nepal issue a temporary injunction to stop construction and tree-cutting at the proposed site, citing the need for a thorough reevaluation of the environmental effects [9]. The project allegedly violated constitutional provisions pertaining to sustainable development and environmental protection, according to petitions submitted by environmental groups and activists that served as the basis for the court's ruling.

The Supreme Court's 2022 decision to require the government to reevaluate the project's environmental impact and look into alternate locations in order to minimize ecological damage increased the level of judicial scrutiny [20]. This decision made clear how important it is for the courts to make sure that development projects follow both constitutional and environmental laws. The project's implementation has been significantly hampered by the court's order for a more thorough environmental assessment and the evaluation of less hazardous alternatives.

## 4. Project Management Issues and Current Scenario of NPPs

*Table 1. Project Management Issues and Current Scenario of NPPs.*

S.N.	Project Name	Year of Initiation in B.S.	Sector	Location	Objectives	Current Status
1.	Upper Tamkoshi Hydroelectricity Project	2068 B.S.	Energy	Dolakha	Generate 456 MW of electricity, promote energy self-sufficiency	Completed
2.	Gautam Buddha International Airport	2070 B.S.	Infrastructure	Lumbini	Enhance regional connectivity, boost tourism	Completed
3.	Pokhara International Airport	2072 B.S.	Infrastructure	Pokhara	Improve air transport, facilitate tourism and trade	Completed
4.	Budhigandaki Hydropower Project	2072 B.S.	Energy	Gorkha and Dhading	Generate 1200 MW of electricity, support industrial growth	In progress
5.	Melamchi Water Supply Project	2057 B.S.	Water Supply	Kathmandu Valley	Provide drinking water to Kathmandu Valley	Completed
6.	Postal Highway	2064 B.S.	Infrastructure	Terai Region	Improve transportation, enhance economic activities in Terai	Partially Completed
7.	Rani Jamara Kulariya Irrigation Project	2066 B.S.	Agriculture	Kailai	Enhance agricultural productivity, ensure efficient water management	In Progress
8.	Pashupati Area Development Trust	2069 B.S.	Cultural Heritage	Kathmandu	Preserve cultural heritage, promote religious tourism	Ongoing
9.	Lumbini Development Trust	2058 B.S.	Cultural Heritage	Lumbini	Develop Lumbini as a Buddhist pilgrimage site	Ongoing
10.	Nijgadh International Airport	2072 B.S.	Infrastructure	Nijgadh, Bara	Develop a new international airport to handle increasing air traffic	Planning Phase
11.	Mahakali Irrigation Project	2057 B.S.	Irrigation	Far-Western Region, Nepal	A project to provide irrigation facilities to the far western region, enhancing agricultural productivity and food security.	Phase II Ongoing
12.	Mid-Hill Pushpalal Highway	2064 B.S.	Infrastructure	East-West Mid Hill Region	Enhance connectivity and accessibility in mid-hill regions	In Progress
13.	Kathmandu Tarai Fast Track	2074 B.S.	Infrastructure	Kathmandu to Nijgadh	Reduce travel time between Kathmandu and Tarai, improve trade and mobility	Under Construction
14.	Bheri Babai Diversion Multipurpose Project	2072 B.S.	Water Resources	Surkhet	Irrigation and hydroelectricity generation	In Progress
15.	Babai Irrigation Project	2068 B.S.	Agriculture	Bardiya	Increase agricultural productivity through efficient irrigation	Partially Completed
16.	Sikta Irrigation Project	2062 B.S.	Agriculture	Banke	Enhance agricultural productivity with improved irrigation infrastructure	In Progress
17.	West Seti Hydroelectricity Project	2067 B.S.	Energy	Sudhur-Paschim	Generate 750 MW of electricity, promote regional development	Planning Phase
18.	Raxaul-Amlekhgunj Petroleum Pipeline Project	2072 B.S.	Energy	Amlekhgunj	To ensure a regular supply of petroleum products, reduce transportation costs, and minimize fuel leakage and	Completed

S.N.	Project Name	Year of Initiation in B.S.	Sector	Location	Objectives	Current Status
					adulteration.	
19.	Karnali Corridor	2068 B.S.	Infrastructure	Karnali region	Improve transportation infrastructure in the karnali region	In Progress
20.	Koshi Corridor	2068 B.S.	Infrastructure	Koshi Region	Enhance connectivity and promote regional development in Koshi region	Planning Phase
21.	Kaligandaki Corridor	2068 B.S.	Infrastructure	Kaligandaki Region	Improve transportation, promote tourism and economic activities	In Progress
22.	Sunkoshi Marin Diversion Project	2072 B.S.	Water Resources	Sindhuli, Ramechhap, and Sarlahi	A water diversion project designed to irrigate land and generate hydropower in the Sunkoshi and Marin rivers.	In Progress
23.	President Chure-Tarai Madhesh Conservation Programme	2071 B.S.	Environmental	Chure Region	Protect and conserve Chure-Tarai regions' environment and biodiversity	Ongoing
24.	East-West Railway	2067 B.S.	Infrastructure	East-West	Develop railway infrastructure to enhance connectivity and reduce road traffic	Planning phase
25.	Mulpani Cricket Stadium	2070 B.S.	Infrastructure	Kathmandu	A cricket stadium project aimed at developing sports infrastructure in the Kathmandu Valley.	Ongoing phase
26.	Girija Prasad Koirala Cricket Stadium	2072 B.S.	Infrastructure	Biratnagar	A stadium project to enhance sports facilities and promote cricket in Biratnagar.	Ongoing phase
27.	Gautam Buddha International Cricket Stadium	2073 B.S.	Infrastructure	Chitwan	A project to build a modern international cricket stadium in Chitwan to promote sports and tourism.	Ongoing Phase

Source: National Planning Commission

While successful project management is essential for NPPs to succeed, Nepal's experience has frequently shown this to be a weak point. Numerous projects have been beset by poor planning, overspending, technical issues, and delays in decision-making, all of which have damaged investor and public confidence [25]. These difficulties have been made worse by the lack of effective monitoring and assessment systems, which has made it more difficult to identify and mitigate risks in a timely manner [16].

There are many technical and financial obstacles that irrigation projects like the Sikta and Rani Jamara Kulariya projects must overcome. Ineffective water management systems and antiquated infrastructure are the main technical problems. Progress is further hampered by financial limitations, such as budget overruns and delays in fund disbursement [43].

Acquisition of land for irrigation canals frequently results in disagreements and hold-ups. Inadequate compensation and relocation plans also frequently result in opposition from nearby communities. These kinds of social issues can greatly lengthen project timelines and drive up costs [8].

National pride hydropower projects are performing significantly behind schedule because there are no special laws or

regulations to ensure the smooth operation of these projects. The Office of the Auditor General's (OAG) report claims that funds designated for national pride initiatives are not being used and that project development is falling short of expectations. Three hydropower projects—Upper Tamakoshi, Budhigandaki, and West Seti—have been declared by the government as national pride initiatives with significant national implications. Both the 1,200 MW Buddhigandaki and the 715 MW West Seti storage projects are underperforming, with the exception of the Upper Tamakoshi 456 MW run-of-the-river project. The main causes of slow development are inadequate attention, unique laws and regulations, removing obstacles as much as possible, setting priorities, and a strong political will to see these projects through to completion. Moreover, the current sorry state of these national pride initiatives is a result of past years' poor planning, unclear policies, and shoddy execution [6].

Environmental risks associated with hydropower projects such as the Upper Tamakoshi and Budhigandaki include the possibility of ecological disturbance, biodiversity loss, and community uprooting. Environmental impact assessments (EIAs) frequently identify major risks that necessitate cor-

rective action, raising the cost and complexity of projects [28]. Geopolitical and Technical Risks For hydropower projects, technical risks like earthquake potential and geological instability present serious obstacles. Furthermore, delays and confrontations may result from geopolitical disputes over water resources with nearby nations [42].

Road construction projects such as the Kathmandu-Tarai Fast Track and the Mid-Hill Highway are severely hindered by Nepal's difficult topography and erratic weather. Construction and maintenance tasks are complicated by landslides, flooding, and challenging topography [2]. Poor management and insufficient funding are common problems for road projects. Common problems include misallocation of resources, corruption, and delays in project completion. These elements lead to shoddy infrastructure and drawn-out completion times [8].

Airport development, like that of Pokhara International Airport and Gautam Buddha International Airport, is hindered by antiquated technology and infrastructure. It takes a significant amount of money and experience, which are frequently lacking, to ensure that international standards for efficiency and safety are met [47]. Legal challenges and local opposition can cause major delays in the acquisition of land for airport expansion. Airports also have significant negative effects on the environment, such as habitat destruction and noise pollution, which call for careful management [28]. The new Gautam Buddha airport in Bhairahawa, Nepal, has difficulties because it is close to the Indian city of Gorakhpur and the Nepal-India border. Due to Nepal's inability to obtain permission to use Indian airspace for flights to the airport, international pilots must now fly longer routes and burn more fuel. There is a significant Indian Air Force base close by, which could be connected to this denial. Gautam Buddha airport was formally inaugurated on May 16, 2022, in Lumbini, Nepal, coinciding with the celebration of Buddha Purnima. The event was attended by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who conveyed his dissatisfaction with the airport's construction by a Chinese company by flying in on an Indian Army helicopter. India's hesitancy is demonstrated by the time it takes to issue "No Objection Certificates" to citizens of India who travel to Nepal through the airport and by discouraging Indian airlines from operating there. Nepali officials think that opening the airport to Indian visitors could greatly increase travel, particularly to Lumbini. With over 10,000 passengers leaving and over 11,000 arriving, Gautam Buddha airport in Lumbini, Nepal, has primarily served foreign Nepali workers traveling to and from Gulf countries since its opening on May 16, 2022. But foreign job seekers have to travel to Kathmandu because Bhairahawa isn't equipped to provide the medical exams and labor permits that are necessary. Similarly, the Gautam Buddha airport discourages students who want to study abroad from using it because all the facilities they need are in Kathmandu [39].

According to studies, when it comes to security, traffic, and other amenities, Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA), the

only international airport in Nepal, is among the worst in South Asia. To handle the increasing number of foreign travelers, Nepal urgently needs a second international airport. An Asian Development Bank report projects that by 2028, TIA will handle 7.29 million international passengers annually, more passengers than it can currently accommodate. Three decades ago, the government of Nepal realized the need for a new airport and started the process of building a second international airport in Nijgadh, in the Bara district on the country's southern plain. However, the project has not yet moved forward. The government has attempted to expedite the airport's construction in recent years, but environmentalists have fiercely opposed these efforts. Recent court orders have now halted further advancement. The government intends to transform this Nijgadh airport into a global hub serving 22 nations. In order to make room for the construction, the Nepalese Civil Aviation Authority has begun purchasing land and has already reached an agreement with the Nepali Army to clear trees [8].

Initiatives such as the Lumbini Development Trust and the Pashupati Area Development Trust frequently face challenges related to insufficient funding and resource distribution. National budgets frequently don't allocate enough money for the ongoing maintenance and restoration that is necessary for heritage conservation [42]. A major challenge is striking a balance between the need for development and the preservation of cultural heritage. Conflicts between developers and conservationists can occasionally arise when modern infrastructure development encroaches on heritage sites. It takes careful planning and stakeholder engagement to ensure heritage sites are preserved while promoting tourism and local development [2].

## 5. Lessons Learned and Policy Implications

Several of Nepal's ambitious National Pride Projects (NPPs) have encountered significant challenges both during and after their execution, meaning they have not always achieved their intended goals. Two prominent instances are the Pokhara International Airport and the Gautam Buddha International Airport, both of which have struggled with operational inefficiencies and have fallen short of their strategic objectives despite having been completed.

Large-scale infrastructure projects in Nepal have historically been met with a mixture of skepticism and optimism. Although they stood for modernity and advancement, questions were raised regarding their viability and sustainability. For example, the high costs and lengthy gestation period of the Melamchi Drinking Water Project raised doubts about its viability [32]. Furthermore, a few of the previously listed projects proved to be unduly ambitious. The ambitious and intricate Karnali Chisapani Multipurpose Project, which was conceptualized in the 1980s with the goal of using the Karnali

River's water resources for irrigation and hydropower, has not yet come to pass [16].

When it opened in January 2023, the Pokhara International Airport was intended to be a major undertaking to increase travel and enhance local connectivity. Even so, the airport has encountered a number of operational difficulties. Since its establishment, the airport has been beset by problems like inadequate international flight operations, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of necessary equipment. Opponents contend that the airport's capacity to draw in foreign airlines and travelers has been hampered by inadequate planning and a lack of coordination during the implementation phase [20]. Similar difficulties have been faced by the Gautam Buddha International Airport, which was designed to act as a gateway to Lumbini, the site of Buddha's birth. Despite being finished in 2022, the airport has had trouble with few international flights and low flight frequency. Technical problems and insufficient ground handling services are examples of operational challenges that have further hampered its success. These issues draw attention to the deficiencies in the project's planning and implementation as well as the absence of a thorough plan to incorporate the airport into Nepal's larger aviation and tourism network [30].

These airports' difficulties are a reflection of larger problems in Nepal's NPPs, where projects frequently experience operational inefficiencies, cost overruns, and delays. These problems have systemic roots, including lack of technical expertise, bureaucratic red tape, and political instability. Another illustration of how protracted delays and poor planning can reduce the efficacy of infrastructure projects is the nearly three-decade-long Melamchi Drinking Water Project [27].

The amount of money allocated to national pride initiatives, which are deemed strategically significant and transformative, has been determined to be insignificant. Only 23% of the budget allotted for these projects had been spent by mid-January 2023, according to the mid-term review of the fiscal year budget. Significant under-expenditure remains, with projects like the Millennium Challenge Account Nepal and the Kathmandu-Tarai Madhes Expressway receiving less than 5 percent of the Rs 97 billion total allocated for national pride projects. The concurrent advancement of several projects is blamed for the low spending problem since it causes a shortage of resources, problems with contractor capacity, and inadequate oversight procedures. To address these issues, National Planning Commission Dr. Min Bahadur Shrestha recommends project prioritization and sequencing [17].

According to environmentalist Bhushan Tuladhar, one of Nepal's issues is that the country only views development in terms of building roads and other infrastructure projects. According to him, one of the main reasons why development projects have not taken off in the nation is that the concept has been limited to this and ignores social development. Money is not always a sign of prosperity. That was something we had to comprehend. When working on large-scale projects, we must consider the future in order to try and leave resources for

future generations, says Tuladhar. He also says it's time for Nepal to start integrating development and the environment together [22].

The failure of NPPs in Nepal draws the necessity of planning and implementing development with a holistic approach. In order to address systemic issues and support sustainable development, it is essential to strengthen governance structures, improve accountability and transparency, and encourage stakeholder involvement [11]. Moreover, NPPs can become more resilient to both internal and external shocks by putting an emphasis on capacity building, encouraging innovation, and utilizing partnerships [56].

Determining the underlying causes of the excessive delays in development project execution has become crucial. Experts emphasize inadequate planning, inadequate supervision, inadequate quality control, and a lack of interagency coordination. Furthermore, the environment and land acquisition concerns frequently create obstacles to the successful completion of projects. Similarly, a political alliance with unreliable and tarnished contractors combined with subpar engineering results in a project's quality being compromised. With a strong government in place, elected officials need to show that they are committed to development and openness about the financial transactions necessary to deter corruption and gain the public's trust. They also need to move quickly to hold obstinate bureaucrats and dishonest contractors accountable for their actions [54].

## 6. Conclusion

The National Pride Projects case study in Nepal provides clear picture about the complex nature of development issues and the difficulties involved in undertaking significant infrastructure projects. Through comprehending the fundamental reasons behind setbacks and adopting a mindset of education and adjustment, Nepal can create a stronger route to accomplishing its goals for development. Going forward, it will be crucial to make coordinated efforts to address structural flaws, encourage inclusive growth, and guarantee that NPPs act as catalysts for change and a sense of pride in the country.

Within Nepal's framework for planned development, National Pride Projects are essential to social development, economic expansion, and cultural preservation. Nepal can realize its vision of a prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable future by coordinating these projects with larger development plans. The National Pride Projects in Nepal encounter various obstacles, such as financial and technical limitations, social and environmental problems, and ineffective management. To address these issues and ensure inclusive and sustainable development, local communities, the business community, and the government must work together.

Rather than increasing the number of NPPs, the government should prioritize completing existing projects first. The government should prepare a comprehensive DPR and emphasize the timely completion of NPPs. When considering the

cases of Pokhara International Airport and Gautam Buddha International Airport, Nepal should take the air route first and try to complete all of the projects and reap the benefits. NPPs, as the name implies, have the potential to bring pride to the country by addressing all of these shortcomings.

## Abbreviations

NPPs	National Pride Projects
NPC	National Planning Commission
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
LAC	The Line of Actual Control
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
OAG	The Office of the Auditor General
TIA	Tribhuvan International Airport

## Author Contributions

Sudip Adhikari is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

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