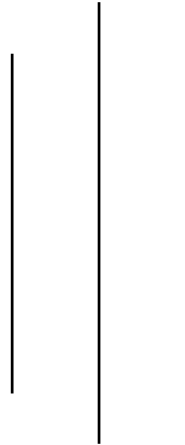




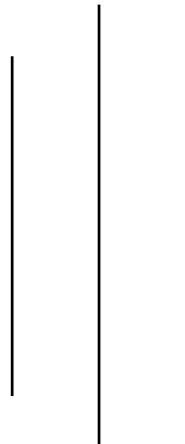
UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION

NURTURING EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAM (NEHEP)

2021/22 – 2025/26



**ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SAFEGUARD STRATEGY
FOR
STRENGTHENING CAPACITY OF BENEFICIARY INSTITUTIONS**



FEBRUARY, 2022

Acronyms

CC	Code of Conduct
COVID	Corona Virus Diseases
E&S	Environmental and Social
ESCP	Environmental and Social Commitment Plan
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
LMP	Labour Management Procedure
NEHEP	Nurturing Excellence in Higher Education Program
NHEP	National Higher Education Program
OHS	Occupational, Health and Safety
QAA	Quality Assurance and Accreditation
SDS	Safety Data Sheets
SEA/SH	Sexual Exploitation Abuse/Sexual Harassment
SEP	Stakeholder Engagement Plan
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
UGC	University Grants Commission
WB	The World Bank

1. Introduction

This strategy document is written for envisioning, implementing and monitoring an Environmental and Social Commitment Plan (ESCP) for Higher Education Institutions (HEI) of Nepal, and strengthening their capacities to do so. ESCP is a major component of '**Nurturing Excellence in Higher Education Program (NEHEP)**', which is being initiated and implemented by the University Grants Commission with the support of the World Bank.

The principal objectives of the NEHEP are to strengthen labour market relevance and quality of higher education, boost collaborative research and innovation, and enhance equitable access for underprivileged and disaster affected groups. It aims to strategically assist Government of Nepal's National Higher Education Program through four key results areas: (a) improving employability, entrepreneurship, and collaborative research; (b) strengthening governance and financing of higher education; (c) widening access to quality higher education; and (d) extending digitization of higher education.

To successfully meet the above-mentioned goals of NEHEP, it is vital that all the stakeholders involved, in particular the concerned higher education institutions, understand the importance of and institutionalize the Environmental and Social Safeguards in their institutions and workplaces. It is important that the concerned institutions have 'safeguard polices' designed and implemented so that they are able to address relevant environmental and social issues during their regular implementation and operation of various activities. These safeguards will also provide them a framework for consultation with communities and for public disclosure. Examples of these provisions can include conducting environmental and social impact assessments of their activities and projects, consulting with affected communities about potential project impacts, assessment of environmental risks and impacts, putting in place standards for labor and working conditions, implementing community health and safety measures and so on.

This strategy paper focuses on the **environmental and social aspects** of ESCP, aimed at creating a just, inclusive and equitable workplace environments at HEIs of Nepal. It outlines measures and actions to be taken for strengthening the capacities of the concerned HEIs for implementing the environmental and social safeguards measures at their institutions.

2. Core Concepts/Key Areas of Focus

Nepal's National Higher Education Program (NHEP) Framework developed by University Grants Commission for Program (NHEP) Framework aims to develop a knowledge based society and economy by making higher education scientific, innovative, research-oriented, technology friendly and, employment-oriented and inclusive. NEHEP is designed to support the national program for achieving these goals. One of the key areas of focus is the environment and social safeguards to which a commitment plan has already been developed.

As part of implementing ESCP this environment and social safeguard strategy is developed for strengthening the capacity of beneficiary institutions in particular areas. Hence, the strategy focuses on five key environmental and social safeguards actions and/or activities for achieving the stated objectives of NHEP.

1) *Assess and manage overall environmental and social risks and impacts*

For this, all HEIs need to:

- Establish E&S unit within the implementing organization UGC
- Provide adequate technical and managerial assistance to relevant workers and contractors

2) *Develop a plan for improved labour working conditions at the beneficiary HEIs*

Participating HEIs are required to:

- Develop a labour management procedure for the HEIs
- Develop and implement occupational, health and safety (OHS) regulations and or protocols

3) *Develop a plan for resource efficiency and pollution prevention and management*

This envisions that HEIs:

- Develop standard operating procedures for management of e-waste and solid waste generated by the Project during its lifetime
- Develop an implementation plan for management of waste and hazardous materials generated by the Project during its lifetime

4) *Develop a plan for Community Health and Safety Measures for the beneficiary HEIs*

This envisions project implementing HEIs carry out at least five following activities:

- Develop and implement Community Health Specific Procedures for COVID-19 and similar other pandemics
Develop and implement Code of Conduct (CC) for respective institutions on community health and safety issues
- Develop mechanisms to address and reduce cases of sexual abuse and sexual harassment across all HEIs
- Organize sensitization and awareness raising programs regarding Sexual Exploitation Abuse and **Sexual Harassment (SEA/SH) for all the employees including top management of the institutions** Develop and implement grievance redress mechanism.

5) *Develop a plan for stakeholder engagement and information disclosure*

This envisions the following actions for HEIs:

- Update and implement the stakeholder engagement plan (SEP)
- Develop an information sharing mechanism on environmental and social risks and impacts of HEIs
- Develop/strengthen a grievance redress mechanism for the HEIs

Apart from the above mentioned actions, the program will also address issues of impacts of related to land acquisition, restrictions on land use if such cases arise during project implementation. It will also pay particular attention to address the issues of indigenous people, and cultural heritage in and around project sites.

3. Objectives, Activities and Outputs

In order to achieve the above goals effectively and in a timely manner, the following activities (given in Table 1.1) have been specified. These activities will be conducted at different time periods across the beneficiary HEIs during the 5-year project period. Since the exact number of the beneficiary HEIs is difficult to predict at this time, the activities will start with the institutions that have already received Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) from the UGC so far. Focus will also be on universities, colleges and campuses where infrastructural development and construction projects are going on. As one of the initial activities, the top leaders/decision makers of the HEIs related to program activities will be invited to attend orientation programs to familiarize them about the key issues this project aims to address during the project period. The table below gives the details of activities, responsible institutions, indicators, means of verification and including

risks and assumptions in order to implement the general strategy during the project implementation period. More specific activities, events, and timelines will be separately prepared as the number and characteristics of HEIs become clearer and as the project progresses.

Table 1: Objectives and Activities

Number	Goals/Activities	Institution	Indicators	Means of Verification	Assumptions and risks
Objective 1: Assess and manage overall environmental and social risks and impacts					
1.1	Establish E&S unit within the implementing organization	UGC	An E&S Unit is formed within UGC, with experts hired as consultants. Focal person assigned for both E and S components	Team formed by August 2021	Experts will be willing to participate in the team, but may be unavailable at the needed time
1.2	Provide adequate technical and managerial assistance to relevant workers and contractors	UGC	A secretariat is established at UGC that provides the needed assistance	Secretariat (Reform Unit) established at UGC by August 2021	Lack of adequate and qualified manpower at UGC
Objective 2: Develop a plan for improved labour working conditions at the beneficiary HEIs					
2.1.	Develop a labour management procedure for the HEIs	UGC, team of E&S Experts, and concerned HEIs	Every beneficiary HEI has a LMP developed	LMP practiced at each HEI	Staff and employees not fully aware of LMP and its importance
2.2	Develop and implement occupational, health and safety (OHS) regulations/protocols	UGC and concerned HEIs	Every beneficiary HEI has an OHS protocol developed	OHS protocol implemented at each beneficiary HEI	Staff and employees not fully aware of OHS protocols

Objective 3: Develop a plan for resource efficiency and pollution prevention and management					
3.1	Develop standard operating procedures (SOP) for management of e-waste generated by the Project during its lifetime	UGC, and HEIs	Every beneficiary HEI has a Solid Waste and hazardous material management unit formed	Every beneficiary HEI has an e-waste management plan	HEIs may lack the dedicated team of experts in the field or less prioritize the work
3.2	Develop SOP for waste and hazardous materials management	UGC and HEI	Waste and hazardous materials management plan in-place	HEI records, waste and hazardous materials management plan implemented	-
3.3	Provide orientation and training on e-waste, solid waste and hazardous material management	UGC and Experts	Training provided to number of HEIs and their employees	UGC records, HEI employees trained with waste management skills and knowledge	Experts not available, HEIs do not fully participate
3.4	Develop plan for segregation of wastes at HEIs, and encourage 3R principle (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) of waste handling	Concerned HEIs	Increased segregation practices of wastes at HEIs	Every beneficiary HEI is adopting the 3R principle (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle) and is implementing solid waste segregation	HEIs may be lacking in capacity and resources
3.5	Promote use of eco-friendly bags (made of biodegradable materials like paper, clothes, etc.) instead of plastics bags	UGC and concerned HEIs	Increase in use of eco-friendly bags	HEI records on distribution of bags to students, staff and faculties	Eco-friendly bags may be costly (in the short run)

3.6	Develop a manual for eco-friendly, efficient and cost effective management of all kinds of waste produced the HEIs	Concerned HEIs	Easy to understand manuals, posters and pamphlets produced	HEI records	Documents produced are not easy to understand, costly
3.7	Document and prepare record keeping forms for listing potentially hazardous wastes sources and develop safety data sheets (SDS) to keep at the storage location for those waste	UGC and concerned HEIs	HEIs have developed record keeping forms to document the generation of hazardous wastes	HEI documents and registers	Prepared documents are not user-friendly
3.8	Organize programs to raise awareness and build capacities of students, staff and faculties for developing knowhow on solid and liquid waste management	UGC and concerned HEIs	Multiple number of capacity building programs organized	Program schedule and HEI records	

Objective 4: Develop a plan for Community Health and Safety Measures for the beneficiary HEIs

4.1	Develop and implement COVID 19 specific Community and Health Specific Procedures	UGC and concerned HEIs	Every beneficiary HEI has a COVID 19 specific Community and Health Specific Procedures developed	Every HEI is implementing COVID 19 specific Community and Health Specific Procedures	HEIs lack in capacity for developing and implementing the health specific procedures
4.2	Develop and implement Code of Conduct for UGC/HEIs on community and safety issues	UGC and concerned HEIs	Code of Conduct prepared at UGC/HEIs	Record of Code of Conduct implementation	-

4.3	Develop mechanisms to address and reduce cases of sexual abuse and sexual harassment across all HEIs	UGC/ Team of Experts	SEA/SH related guidelines and policies made by the HEIs	SEA/SH guideline is implemented in all the beneficiary HEIs	Understanding of SEA/SH varies sharply across different groups/cultures etc., difficult to change behaviour even after understanding the concept
4.4	Organize several sensitization and awareness raising programs regarding SEA/SH all the employees, including top management of beneficiary HEIs	UGC, experts on SEA/SH behavior	HEIs participate in SEA/SH sensitization and awareness raising programs	HEI records	
4.5	Develop and implement grievance redress mechanisms	UGC and concerned HEIs	HEIs have grievance redress mechanisms in place	HEIs records	HEIs do not have capacity to address grievance redress mechanisms

Objective 5: Develop a plan for stakeholder engagement and information disclosure					
5.1	Update and implement the stakeholder engagement plan (SEP) for building and maintaining a constructive relationship with the HEIs	UGC	A systematic approach to stakeholder engagement with the beneficiary HEIs is established	Beneficiary HEIs are engaged with UGC in a regular manner for updating and implementing the project goals	
5.2	Develop an information sharing mechanism on environmental and social risks and impacts to HEIS	UGC	Appropriate project information on environmental and social risks and impacts is disclosed the HEIs in a timely, accessible and appropriate manner and format	HEI/UGC records	
5.3	Develop/strengthen a Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) for the HEIs	UGC/HEIs	Every beneficiary HEI has a unit formed as part of grievance redress mechanism	Employees of the HEIs are able to submit their grievances to the designated unit	There are institutional delays in forming the GRM at the HEIs

4. Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms

UGC will form a Monitoring Committee consisting of experts and professionals to monitor and report the outcomes of the Environmental and Social Safeguard Plan of HEIs based on the indicators and means of verifications mentioned above. The Committee will be responsible for the carrying out activities as per the monitoring protocols developed. Specific focus will be given to build capacities of the beneficiary HEIs to enable them to effectively implement the activities and prepare necessary reports.

5. Expected Outputs/Outcomes

By successfully implementing the activities as per the goals of NEHEP, the beneficiary HEIs will have their capacities built. This capacity building is expected to address the environmental and social issues of respective institution in a timely and efficient manner. The long term goal will be to contributing to achieving the objectives of NEHEP i.e. enhancing quality of higher education, boosting collaborative research and innovation, increasing equitable access for underprivileged and disaster affected groups, and strengthening employment-oriented education.