



# National Governance Symposium 2025

***'DOING DEVELOPMENT DIFFERENTLY'***

## **DATA: Using Integrated Statistics for Effective Policymaking**

STUDIO BRIEF





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## Executive Summary

Nepal has made significant investments in generating statistical and administrative data across government institutions and tiers. However, these data assets are not yet systematically integrated, consistently accessible, or routinely used to inform policymaking and service delivery. Policy decisions often continue with limited reliance on evidence, while fragmented systems, weak interoperability, and unclear data-sharing arrangements prevent institutions from fully leveraging existing data.

The core challenge, therefore, is not data scarcity but **institutional fragmentation, weak governance of data systems, and misaligned incentives for evidence use**. In the context of federalism—where planning, budgeting, and service delivery responsibilities are increasingly decentralized—these gaps undermine policy coherence, resource targeting, and accountability.

This policy brief argues for an **integrated reform approach** that links unique identifiers and social registries, enforces interoperability across tiers, expands privacy-safe and tiered data access, and strengthens incentives and capabilities so that evidence use becomes routine in governance rather than dependent on individual projects or champions.

## Background and Context

The Data Policy Studio convened senior policymakers, statisticians, researchers, and evidence practitioners to examine how integrated statistics can strengthen decision-making in Nepal's federal governance system. Discussions moved deliberately beyond data availability to interrogate why existing data are underused and how institutional arrangements shape evidence uptake.

Participants highlighted persistent fragmentation between administrative and statistical systems, limited interoperability across institutions and tiers, uneven integration of evidence into policy formulation and approval processes, and weak feedback loops between data producers and decision-makers. Particular emphasis was placed on the underutilization of local-level administrative data, despite the constitutional mandate for decentralized governance.

The discussions underscored that effective data reform under federalism requires a **three-tier, bottom-up data architecture**, where local governments both generate and use data for service delivery, while contributing to provincial and federal planning and monitoring.

## Rationale for Public Action on the Problem

Five interrelated bottlenecks currently constrain data-driven policymaking and service delivery in Nepal:

### 1. Weak Institutional Incentives for Evidence Use

Evidence and research are not consistently embedded in routine policy processes. Approval systems, performance assessments, and career incentives rarely reward data-informed decision-making, leading to selective or symbolic use of evidence (Nepal Economic Forum, 2023).

### 2. Fragmented and Siloed Data Systems

Administrative and statistical datasets are dispersed across institutions, often developed for narrow programmatic needs. The absence of clear data-sharing rules and interoperable systems limits reuse and integration, increasing duplication and inefficiency.

### 3. Underutilization of Administrative Data and Local-Level Gaps

While some reporting systems are digitized, administrative data are underused for planning and performance management. Coordination with local governments remains uneven, weakening bottom-up statistical flows essential for federal governance (UNESCAP Report, 2023).

### 4. Limited Accessibility and Usability for Non-State Actors

Researchers, NGOs, and INGOs face constraints in accessing usable datasets, compounded by inconsistent metadata, irregular updates, and unclear access protocols. This limits independent analysis and policy-relevant research.

### 5. Weak Government–Academia and Evidence Partnerships

Although there is interest in applied research and capacity building, institutional mechanisms to connect researchers with policy priorities and implementation needs remain underdeveloped, reducing evidence uptake.

## Policy recommendations

### 1. Adopt an Integrated Data and Evidence Reform Package

Move beyond fragmented dashboards and standalone open-data efforts toward a coherent, system-wide evidence ecosystem that supports decision-making across government.

This can be achieved by integrating unique identifiers, interoperable data standards, clear access and governance rules, and sustained investments in institutional capacity, with a designated lead authority and strong privacy safeguards.

### 2. Establish Interoperability as a Core Public Sector Standard

Fragmented data systems across agencies and tiers undermine evidence-based policy and service coordination. This can be achieved by mandating common data standards, APIs, and interoperability protocols across federal, provincial, and local governments, aligned with existing digital governance and e-government frameworks.

### 3. Expand Open and Tiered Data Access with Privacy by Design

Transparency and data protection must advance together to build citizen trust and enable responsible data use. This can be achieved by proactively publishing non-personal datasets with standardized metadata and update schedules, while creating tiered access mechanisms for sensitive data through anonymization, secure data environments, and controlled access for accredited users.

#### 4. Embed Routine Evidence Use into Core Government Systems

Data availability alone does not translate into better policy unless its use is institutionalized. This can be done by embedding evidence-use requirements into planning, budgeting, procurement, and performance management systems, ensuring that data informs routine policy decisions and service delivery improvements.

#### 5. Align Incentives and Capacities for Evidence-Informed Governance

Behavioral and capability gaps limit the uptake of data in everyday governance. This can be done by strengthening analytical and communication skills across all tiers through targeted capacity building, promoting government–academia partnerships, and aligning incentives so performance assessments reward meaningful use of evidence rather than compliance alone.

## Policy and Legal Alignment: Priority Reform Areas

### 1. Establish a Unique Identifier–Based Integrated Social Registry

Nepal has an existing legal and operational foundation through the National Identity Card and Registration Act, 2076, supported by the Privacy Act, 2075.

#### Policy Action:

Link the National ID number to a single, government-owned social registry that programs across tiers can reuse for targeting, monitoring, and coordination. Clear rules should define access rights, permissible uses, and safeguards to protect privacy and prevent misuse.

### 2. Enforce Interoperability and Cross-Tier Data Sharing

The Digital Nepal Framework identifies interoperability as a key enabler, but implementation remains uneven and largely voluntary.

#### Policy Action:

Make interoperability enforceable through mandatory common standards and formal data-sharing agreements across agencies and tiers. Implementation should begin with a limited number of high-value systems and scale progressively as institutional capacity and trust strengthen.

## Conclusion

Nepal's transition to federalism heightens the need for integrated, bottom-up data systems that support planning, budgeting, and service delivery across all levels of government. Moving beyond fragmented, project-based initiatives toward a coherent data governance framework requires aligning interoperability, privacy safeguards, institutional incentives, and local capacity. An integrated approach to data reform is therefore central to strengthening evidence-based policymaking, accountability, and citizen-centered governance.

## References

Pant, S. (2023, March 8). Evidence-based Policymaking in Nepal. [Nepaleconomicforum.org](https://nepaleconomicforum.org/evidence-based-policymaking-in-nepal/). <https://nepaleconomicforum.org/evidence-based-policymaking-in-nepal/>

UN ESCAP. (2023). Strengthening the National Statistical Capacity to Implement Data Integration Approaches.

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## About National Governance Symposium

The National Governance Symposium (NGS) 2025 was convened on 12th December 2025 at the Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC), Lalitpur, as a multi-stakeholder policy dialogue platform bringing together senior government officials, private sector leaders, civil society actors, researchers, and practitioners. Organized jointly by Governance Lab and NASC in collaboration with the Office of Prime Minister and Council of Minister, Ministry of Finance and National Planning Commission, the Symposium focused on the overarching question: **“How can we Do Development Differently?”**

The Symposium was structured around four interconnected Policy Studios: People, Money, Data, and Technology - reflecting the core resources required to strengthen public institutions and improve development outcomes in Nepal. Each studio, with their respective Knowledge Partner, combined practitioner presentations with moderated policy dialogue, emphasizing practical insights and implementable reforms rather than theoretical debate.

## About Data Session

### *Using Integrated Statistics for Effective Policymaking*

**Chair:** Mr. Rabibal Pantha, Secretary, National Planning Commission

**Moderator:** Ms. Supun Dahal, Daayitwa Fellow 2025 (OPMCM)

**Presenters:** Ms. Jenna Allard and Mr. Apurva Subedi, Inclusion Economics Nepal

**Speakers:**

- Dr. Bishma Kumar Bhusal, Joint Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers
- Mr. Khomraj Koirala, Joint Secretary, National Planning Commission
- Mr. Dhundi Raj Lamichhane, Deputy Chief Statistician, National Statistics Office
- Ms. Arpita Nepal, Co-founder and Advisor of Research & Development, Samriddhi Foundation
- Dr. Santosh Adhikari, Head of Economics Department, Kathmandu University School of Arts

## Knowledge Partner

Inclusion Economics Nepal





Poderspective by Daayitwa Abhiyaan



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