

# Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and Nepal

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**Abstract:-** Millennium challenge corporation (MCC) is an American ambitious project launched globally under the sight goal of infrastructure development in least developed countries but covertly it is defined as a American Indo-pacific strategy's one of the important parts. Nepal agreed on MCC compact in 2017 and it has been the time for parliamentary ratification by federal parliament of Nepal but NCP one faction is openly opposing MCC and Nepali congress and even the Oli government is lobbying for its parliamentary approval. In this scenario this article is helpful to know the actual position of Nepal in MCC.

**Keywords:-** Millennium Challenge Corporation, Indo-Pacific Strategy, Infrastructure, Cooperation.

**Objectives:** - To know the debate, discourse and discussion on MCC in Nepal.

- To suggest better ways to the Nepal government in this regard.

## I. METHODS OF STUDY

Descriptive and analytical methods of interpreting information and content analysis tools are used following secondary information available in printing and electronic media as well other text materials. Further, to conduct the study a detailed plan which would help to identify, select, and process the information about the topics as well as avenues for data collection methods has been explained. As research methodology provides techniques or strategies and specific procedures for collecting and analyzing information or data. This study has followed descriptive, analytical and explorative research design to meet the stated objectives.

Descriptive research is used extensively in social sciences. The nature of the topic is limited to choosing qualitative research design and more analytical and explanatory methods within the limit of primary and secondary data.

## II. INTRODUCTION

As being an infrastructural poor country of Asia, whose population is living a difficult life earning less than <\$3 a day, Nepal is one of the poorest countries of Asia. It is facing a huge economic crisis mostly caused by costlier transportation and inadequate supply of electricity. Decades long Maoist insurgency, a decade long political transition and the devastating earthquakes of 2015, rampant corruption deeply rooted in bureaucracy and regulation and less contractors (*Pappu construction*) further has made Nepal's development complex & challenges.

Least developed and developing countries of the world are bound to accept the foreign assistance as a recipient imposed by donor countries or agencies. The Conditional loans does not let an independent government to work independently though it aims to uplift back warded infrastructures of development and living standard of native people. U S and donor countries as well as donor agencies are imposing conditions while granting aid. During the 1980s structural adjustment, during the 1990s good governance, etc. have been the loan conditions. Belt and Road Initiatives, Indo-Pacific strategies and at present Millennium challenge corporation (US) also came with the same intention. But recipient countries of foreign loan and aid do not compromise with their sovereignty and independence at this cost. Here, In terms of MCC too Nepal should not be agreed if it comes under Indo-pacific strategy.

## III. What is MCC?

The U.S. Government agency working to reduce global poverty through economic growth is MCC. It was created in 2004 with the aim of providing time bound grants and assistance to select developing countries that meet rigorous standards for good governance, from corruption to respecting democratic rights. At the inter-American Development Bank meeting on March 14, 2002, it was the initiation taken by President George W Bush called a new compact for development with accountability for both rich and poor countries. He had pledged to increase development assistance by 50% by fiscal year 2006 that was made double in 2008 and once again doubled in 2010.

### Guiding principles of MCC:-

- **Competitive Selection:** MCC board has forwarded seventeen independent and open policy indicators to be selected for its grant.
- **Country – led solutions:** It requires selected countries to precede their own preference on launching development activities for long term development activities for long term economic growth and reductions of poverty.
- **Country-led implementation:** After being awarded, the local millennium challenge Account (MCA) shall be accountable to implement the overall plan.

CEOs

**Paul Applegate** (a private business person with experience of mitigating emerging market investments.



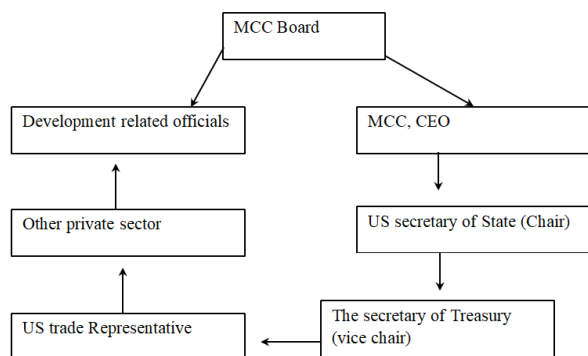
**John Danilrich** (private Business person who had served as a U.S Ambassador to Costa Rica from 2001-2004 and US Ambassador to Brazil on Nov 20, 2009.



**Daniel W. Johannes.** (An Ethiopian-born American business person, the present CEO)



**Jonathan Nash** (Acting CEO)



**17 indicators to be eligible for MCC grant**

Any country who secures median scores is considered eligible for this assistant. All 17 indicators are compiled by third parties with no connection to MCC; MCC grants are

made without considering politics. Really, it is very much pious if, actually, it avoids unhealthy power politics. Probably this is the appreciating part of MCC because most previous aid programs were dedicated to attain the donors political gain. It is perhaps the most innovative aspect of MCC, as previous foreign aid missions were plagued by political considerations. It emphasizes good economic policies in recipient countries. It was the firm trust of The Bush administration that development aid works better in countries with good economic policies, such as free markets and for avoiding corruption. Countries meeting the following criteria of eligibility must apply for a grant with a particular project.

**MCC indicators are:-**

S.N	Indicator	Category	Source
1	Civil liberties	Ruling Justly	Freedom House
2	Political rights		
3	Voice and accountability		Word Bank Institute
4	Government effectiveness		
5	Rule of law		
6	Control of corruption		
7	Immunization rate	investing in people	
8	Public expenditure on health		
9	Girl's primary education completion rate		UNESCO
10	Public expenditure on primary education		UNESCO and national sources
11	Natural Resource management		CIESIN / Xale
12	Inflation rate	Economic freedom	International monetary Fund WEO
13	Trade policy		Heritage foundation
14	Land rights and access index		IFAD/IFC
15	Regulatory quality		World Bank Institute
16	Fiscal policy		national sources, crossed checked with IMF, WEO
17	Business start up		IFC

**MCC compacts and thresholds program in recipient countries:**

This aid is granted only to these countries who score highly on the indicators issued by MCC head office as a selection criteria. Even though this grant can be given to the low scorer countries if they follow free, fair and just elections. Here, the contradiction between its objectives and plans can be easily seen that there is political color hidden behind the curtain of the grant.

- Morocco
- Mozambique
- Nicaragua
- Senegal
- Sri Lanka
- Vanuatu
- Mali - 2006 (\$461 million for irrigation)
- Gambia -Suspended due to not getting 50% criteria even (2006, June 16).
- Jordan - Full grant though it lacked political freedom and civil rights.
- Uganda opposition party appellee for stopping grant raising question of commotion
- Malawi Qualified for full compact in 2007
- Mauritania became threshold eligible.

**MCC Eligible countries**

- Armenia
- Benin
- Bolivia
- Cape Verde
- El Salvador
- Georgia
- Ghana
- Honduras – (1<sup>st</sup> MCC grant receiver) by 2004
- Lesotho – (1<sup>st</sup> MCC grant receiver)
- Mali
- Mongolia

**Threshold eligibility**

To secure an MCC grant, the eligible country should secure a minimum score of threshold demarcated by MCC authority. The below given countries have already been eligible to get MCC grants. They are:-  
 Jordan – Revived a threshold program aimed at democracy and trade totaling \$ 25 million.

Yemen – Was suspended due to failure to meet indicators but after conducting democratic election and economic reforms, it become eligible again.

Malawi – Selected for a compact agreement

Mauritania – Selected for threshold agreement

Albania - Selected

Paraguay - Selected for second stage threshold agreement.

Zambia - Selected

Swaziland – US ambassador to Swaziland highlighted the progress on the MCC indicators over the last few years and encouraged the country to work toward eligibility, as a US policy.

#### MCC grant allocated countries

Country	Program	Amount
Albania	Albania Threshold program stage II	\$13850000
Armenia	Armenia compact	\$15731000
Benin	Benin Compact	\$307298040
Burkina Faso	Burkina Faso compact	\$480943569
Cape Verde	Cape Verde Compact	\$110078488
Cape Verde	Cape Verde compact II	\$66200,000
EL Salvador	El Salvador compact	\$460940000
Georgia	Georgia compact	\$395300000
Ghana	Ghana compact	\$547009000
Guyana	Guyana Threshold program	\$6711000
Honduras	Honduras compact	\$205000000
Indonesia	Indonesia Threshold program	\$550000000
Jordan	Jordan compact	\$275100,000
Jordan	Jordan Threshold Program	\$250000000
Kenya	Kenya Threshold program	\$12723000
Kyrgyz Republic	Kyrgyz Republic Threshold Program	\$15994000
Lesotho	Lesotho compact	\$362551000
Liberia	Liberia Threshold program	\$15073050
Madagascar	Madagascar compact	\$109773000
Malawi	Malawi compact	\$350,700,000
Malawi	Malawi Threshold program	\$20920000
Mali	Mali compact	\$460811164
Moldova	Moldova compact	\$262000000
Moldova	Moldova Threshold program	\$24700000
Mongolia	Mongolia compact	\$284911363
Morocco	Morocco compact	\$697500000
Mozambique	Mozambique compact	\$506924053
Namibia	Namibia compact	\$304477816
Nicaragua	Nicaragua compact	\$113500000
Niger	Niger Threshold Program	\$23066914
Paraguay	Paraguay threshold Program	\$34645092
Paraguay	Paraguay threshold Program II	\$30300000
Peru	Peru Threshold Program	\$35585000
Philippines	Philippines compact	\$433910000
Philippines	Philippines Threshold Program	\$20685000
Rwanda	Rwanda Threshold Program	\$24730000
Sao Tome and principe	Sao Tome and Principe threshold program	\$7362426
Senegal	Senegal compact	\$540000000
Tanzania	Tanzania compact	\$698136000
Tanzania	Tanzania Threshold program	\$11200000
Timor – Leste	Timor-Leste threshold program	\$10496000
Uganda	Uganda Threshold Program	\$10446180
Ukraine	Ukraine Threshold program	\$44970000
Vanuatu	Vanuatu compact	\$65690000
Zambia	Zambia compact	\$354757640
Zambia	Zambia Threshold program	\$22735000
Nepal	Nepal compact 2014/15	\$40-50 million
Nepal	Nepal Threshold program 2014/15	\$40-50 million+\$130 million of Nepal govt.

(<https://nepanomy.com> >Nepal economy) accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> Jan 2020.

### MCC and Nepal

Nepal government coordinating with the MCC authority can launch its development activities assisted by MCC under Office of Millennium Challenge Nepal (OMCN). Feasibility studies and the foundation of the MCC program development, and inform the size, scope and suitability of the overall program that MCC will consider funding. MCC and The government of Nepal worked together to prioritize critical infrastructure needs in the power and road transport sectors in Nepal, which were identified as key constraints to economic growth in a joint analysis by Himesh Dhungel MCC country director for Nepal (<https://sartby.np.usembassy.gov/news-of-events>).

To launch the power project feasibility studies is a key milestone reached by the government of Nepal and MCC enabling them to move forward developing a five-year compact? MCC and the Government of Nepal signed a \$ 10 Million compact development funding grant agreement in July 2016 in order to facilitate program design and preparation including project feasibility studies.

An agreement related to the MCC compact aimed at Nepal's development and eradication of poverty was signed amidst a function held in Washington DC in 2017AD. Nepal's minister for finance Gyanendra Bahadur Karki and MCC acting CEO, Jonathan Nash signed the agreement. On this occasion, the US deputy government has been able to lend support in upgrading the life standard of the people of low income countries through economic development. He further added that the agreement of US and Nepal has reached the top level after this agreement. It was the hope of US authority that the compact will be helpful to Nepal for its economic growth through long term infrastructures of development. And Mr. Karki opined that the agreement as a foundation stone in the backdrop of 70 years of diplomatic relations between Nepal and America (Adhikari, 2016).

#### MCC Budget scheme

- \$ 500million US + \$130 Nepal government
- 5 year project
- Project 213 k m of electric transmission line 318 k m 400 KVA High Voltage lines then high capacity
- The expansion of road networks ( 300km)
- Quality enhancement of major highways under long term/ sustainable vision

Stations, including building across the alignment and maintenance of maximum 300 km starters' road 26 Sept, 2019, Nepal pledges to complete MCC project procedures (<https://www.sharesansar.com>). MCC rebased its fiscal year 2017 scorecards overall Nepal has passed 16 out of 20 indicators. Out of 82 countries, MCC created scorecards for, 33 countries passed while 49 loans were not passed (<http://therisignepal.org.np>). It was designed to increase the access to electricity and lower the cost of transportation in Nepal. Their investments will help the Government of Nepal better deliver critical services to its people, ease the movement of goods around the country. And open up new opportunities for private investment. Strengthening the reliability of key infrastructure will put the country's

economy on a firmer growth trajectory, advance stability, support regional security, and reduce poverty. An additional \$ 130 million from the government of Nepal support of the compact – the highest up – front contribution from a partner country – enables MCC's investment to have an ever greater impact. It justifies the participatory development appraisal that creates ownership of stakeholders in development tasks done prior.

### US Justification of MCC Nepal project

History made by the people of Nepal through the country's federal, provincial and local government's elections since its new constitution was adopted last year in 2015, including the first local elections in over 20 years. From the plains of Terai to the terraced hills and High Mountains, millions of citizens cast ballots for Local, Provincial and National Representatives. Exercising their democratic right to choose their own leaders with around 70 percent of eligible voters, the people of Nepal sent a strong message that they are ready to march ahead in a new democratic era i.e., transparency, accountability, stability, and responsive governance. Nepal is now firmly going ahead on a path of grabbing this moment for all round prosperity of the people living in each and every nook and corner of the national territory to take steps to create greater economic opportunity.

Economic and political instability faced by Nepal since long have probably ended. Now it is the right time to get rid from the vicious circle of poverty and backwardness through the help of MCC grant. Nepal government should prepare the feasible environment for easy implementation of MCC because it could be the milestone for rapid and sustainable economic growth of rural people possibly enhanced by future sale of surplus hydro- electricity and use of cheap and reliable road transportation Fatema (2018) opined:

" MCC has engaged in a \$ 500 million compact with Nepal (<https://www.devex.com>). With a constitution in place and elections completed, Nepal has the potential to enter a period of political stability, one that can allow its leader to prioritize creating an environment that supports economic growth and private investment. The recent signing of a large energy project that will bring in billions of dollars from the private sector is a needed boost. Fighting corruption is equally important, and by enhancing transparency in government decision making, prosecuting corrupt officials, joining the international open Government partnerships supporting media freedom and investigative journalism, and allowing civil society to thrive, Nepal's new leaders can contribute to the creation of a climate that will attract investors".

US MCC authority further has claimed that Nepal's new government has unique opportunities to increase economic growth and enhance regional connectivity through partnership with the United States millennium challenge corporation. Through MCC compact 80 percent Nepali citizens will be benefited in one hand and it will light Nepal's bright future. Further the compact focuses on road

maintenance to support the movement of goods and people. Due to poor road infrastructure and a challenging geography Nepal has one of the highest costs of transport in the region.

The US ambitious plan to be penetrated in poor countries' development activities legally is MCC which includes matching fund to maintain up to 300 km of roads and incentive the government to allocate more resources for periodic maintenance this will complement existing efforts by other to build new roads and in the process, pump up additional economic growth. It will also benefit the residents of local communities who will have better options for getting their goods to market with the preparation of groundwork for the compact to enter into force, businesses are already benefiting from new opportunities to work in Nepal in areas such as design and engineering services, financial services, project management, and construction. Companies are seeing new potential for investing in Nepal, including business and trade opportunities for U.S firms too.

### Discourse on MCC in Nepal

The government is preparing to move the MCC compact by passing a resolution motion declaring that the American assistance program is not part of any military strategy and Nepal will not join any military alliance. But American officials say it certainly is a part of the US Indo-pacific strategy (Baral, (2019). The Nepal government says it will accept the MCC but not the IPS. The American ambassador says if Nepal rejects the grant, it will go to some other country, and Nepal will lose out.

The US embassy official in Kathmandu Carl Rogers has said that the MCC is definitely linked with the US designed Indo-pacific strategy (27 December, 2019). Likewise US Assistant secretary of state MS. Alice Wells on Feb. 10, 2019 clearly reiterated in one of her statements that MCC is an integral part of the IPS – Indo-pacific strategy (<http://telegraphnepal.com>). But our leaders are claiming that MCC is not part of IPS.

Ruling CPN had hotly debated MCC during the recent standing committee meeting with the erstwhile Maoists and Madav kumar faction is opposing it saying it should only be passed if it becomes clear that it is not part of the Indo-pacific strategy floated by America. One Minister assured that the government is also careful whether MCC is related to the Indo-pacific strategy. PM Oli is more careful than anybody else that Nepal will be in a difficult position on joining a military alliance because we cannot see the pressure of China and India if we join the American military strategy.

Similarly, PM Oli is also equally concerned that Nepal should not stop financial assistance nearly on grounds of suspicions. We will focus on the issue that we have agreed on. We will reserve the rights to revoke the MCC compact if conditions outside agreement that can harm the country are brought (Bagale, 2020). Chinese ambassador Hou Yanqi said that China does not agree with Nepal to be a party to MCC if it is a part of Indo – pacific strategy. If not so, she encourages the Nepal government to ratify MCC through

parliament because China welcomes any foreign economic support to Nepal.

The Nepali congress has stood firmly in favor of the agreement and has asked the ruling party to not create any hindrances for its ratification. The opposition party has even so far as to say that it would be "Suicidal for Nepal to reject the agreement" (Ghimire,(2020). MCC – Nepal has clarified that the US government has been providing a compact grant for infrastructure developments in Nepal through the MCC and has appealed for timely ratification of the MCC compact. The MCC-Nepal, established under the ministry of finance through Nepal's own legislative process as a development Board, has appealed for the timely parliamentary ratification of the compact which will ensure Nepal's access to the funds for the timely completion of the infrastructure projects to be provided by MCC. (22 December, 2019, MCC grant not a part of Indo-pacific strategy- MCA-Nepal (<https://nepal.foreignaffairs.com>)).

But now, it has always been late to make up its mind by the Nepal government on accepting or rejecting MCC. Though Nepal signed the MCC Nepal Compact in 2017 when NC and CPN Maoist Centre was in power but the communist factions of Nepali political forces are opposing MCC. Dev Gurung the NCP leader openly criticized it and Bhim Rawal also strongly opposed it. Because of the fear of anno of Northern neighbor communist fractions are not openly being ready to accept MCC because they have taken communist China as their political ally and friend without vested interest. Nepalese communists see the MCC compact as a part of the US Indo-pacific strategy (IPS), which is aimed at countering China in the region.

However, despite opposition, on Prime Minister Oli's insistence, the MCC compact was registered in the house of representative on July 15, 2018, though it is yet to be tabled for ratification (Balachandra, 2020). Foreign minister Pradeep Gyawali clarified that Nepal would not join any non-military alliance if it targeted any country let alone a military alliance. Likewise deputy prime minister and minister for defense Ishwor Pokharel has clarified that Nepal won't participate in any kind of military alliance. He further said that the MCC part to be given by the USA to Nepal is in parliament and It will be decided by analyzing every angle so that there would be no compromise on national interest and policy.

He further said that there was no need to link the MCC and the US led Indo-pacific strategy. On the requirement that Nepal needs to enter into an agreement with India on power trade, Gyawali said that it was Nepal upgrading East-West and Karnali highways under the \$500 million MCC assistance. Therefore some sort of understanding with India is required for these projects. Moreover, we have already reached understanding with India and Bangladesh, inching closer towards a trilateral agreement (<https://the.himalayan.times.com>). Minister for foreign Affairs Pradeep Kumar Gyawali made the commitment on behalf of the Nepal government in a meeting with the vice president of Millennium Challenge Corporation. Mr. Gyawali informed

the MCC officials that Nepal has enlisted the project to be implemented with funding support from MCC as the national pride project. In course MCC representatives requested Mr. Gyawali to complete procedure by the mid of June 2020 and he replied that Nepalese parliament will endorse MCC compact project by the upcoming winter session on 25<sup>th</sup> sept. 2019. He assured the US authorities that the Nepal government would rapidly complete all the works required for the implementation of the energy and transport projects under MCC highlighting the initiatives as a symbol of Nepal U S cordial relation. Under the project, MCC and the Government of Nepal will work together to prioritize critical infrastructure needs in the power and road transport sectors in Nepal, which were identified as key constraints to economic growth in a joint analysis. MCC compact is considered significant for alleviating Nepal's poverty as well as for propelling sustainable socio-economic development.

Politicians in Nepal are divided over the MCC's links with the U.S' Indo-pacific strategy and provisions that say the agreement will prevail over Nepal's laws in case of conflicts. During the recently concluded standing committee meeting of the ruling Nepal communist party, leaders appeared sharply divided over whether the federal parliament should verify the US MCC's Nepal compact. A section of party leaders strongly stood against parliamentary ratification of the compact, arguing that that the MCC is part of Washington's Indo-pacific strategy, which has military components that are aimed at countering China, a friendly neighbor. They have opposed the compact's requirement of house approval, as the compact says that it would prevail over Nepal's existing laws in case of conflicts.

However other section of the ruling party, led by P.M Oli, has lobbied in favor for the compact and wants the ongoing session of the House of Representatives to ratify it. The primary opposition Nepali congress to has argued that the agreement be approved without any delay (Ghimire, 2020). But fortunately or unfortunately due to internal hullabaloo in the ruling party it failed to be approved by federal parliament within stipulated time by MCC- US authority.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

MCC is the biggest amount granted to Nepal for a specific project by a bilateral development partner. But the MCC project has become the centre of a row between two factions of CPN and stalled proceedings at the central committee meeting of the ruling party raising questions about Nepal's credibility. The major chunk of the grant is supposed to be spent on the Kathmandu, Hetauda, Butwal 400 KV transmission line which will eventually evacuate electricity generated from hydropower plants on the Budi Gandaki, Trisuli, Kali Gandaki, Marsyangdi, Kosi and Tamakoshi corridors. Other components will go upgrading key highways.

However, at the NCP central committee there was intense debate between those for and against the MCC. Some prominent leaders like Bhim Rawal, Dev Gurung and

Yogesh Bhattari objected to the MCC on grounds that it was a part of the US Indo-pacific strategy that they see as being directed against China. Those who are in favor of MCC see it blindly whereas those who are opposed criticize it linking it with American-Indo-pacific strategy. In such controversies, the government should think carefully that no aid comes without strings attached. But it should be clever enough to be paid like this for its own benefit without compromising national sovereignty and neighborhood's political and strategic sensitivity. As well as that, we should not lose our credibility with the US government too.

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