From Preferential Access to Regulatory Competitiveness: Nepal's LDC Graduation and the Legal Architecture of Post-Preference Trade

Adv. Sushila Shrestha

Faculty of Law Purbanchal University, Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Nepal's expected graduation from the least developed country (LDC) category is usually framed as a development achievement, but it is equally a legal transition. The withdrawal or reduction of LDC-specific international support measures will alter Nepal's terms of access to preference-granting markets, WTO transition rules, technical assistance, TRIPS flexibilities, and rules-of-origin advantages. This article asks whether Nepal's domestic and international trade law framework is sufficiently prepared for that transition. Using doctrinal legal analysis and policy-oriented review of secondary trade data, it examines WTO law, GSP/GSP+ architecture, SAFTA and BIMSTEC arrangements, bilateral transit dependence, and Nepalese laws on customs, investment, trade remedies, industry, and intellectual property. The article argues that Nepal's problem is not absence of formal law, but fragmentation between status-based preferences and competitiveness-based regulation. Nepal's narrow export basket, dependence on India and China, weak manufacturing base, limited standards infrastructure, and underused trade-remedy system turn graduation into a regulatory-risk event. The article contributes to international economic law by proposing a post-preference legal-readiness model anchored in treaty compliance, GSP+ preparation, trade facilitation, standards upgrading, IP modernization, transit diplomacy, and sector-specific regulation for hydropower, agriculture, tourism, ICT, and labour services. It concludes that successful graduation requires enforceable regulatory coordination, not only diplomatic negotiation or export-promotion policy.

Keywords: Nepal; LDC graduation; international trade law; WTO; GSP+; preferential market access; trade remedies; regulatory capacity

INTRODUCTION

Nepal's scheduled movement out of the least developed country category is more than a diplomatic milestone. It is a legal transition that changes the terms on which Nepal accesses markets, invokes flexibilities, receives technical assistance, and designs domestic trade policy. At the time of writing, Nepal remains on the United Nations LDC graduation track, and Nepal has also sought additional preparatory time for graduation-related adjustment.[1]

The legal stakes are substantial. LDC status has supported Nepal through preferential tariff access, policy flexibilities under WTO disciplines, transition periods in intellectual property law, and trade-related technical assistance. The WTO Ministerial Conference has adopted a decision allowing certain WTO-related support measures for graduating LDCs for three years after graduation, but that measure is limited: it does not amount to a full continuation of all LDC preferences or a replacement for domestic regulatory preparedness.[2] The WTO General Council has also encouraged preference-granting Members to manage the withdrawal of duty-free and quota-free preferences through smooth transition periods.[3]

This article therefore reframes Nepal's graduation as a problem of post-preference legal readiness. The central issue is not whether Nepal has trade laws; it does. The more difficult question is whether those laws operate together as a coherent regulatory architecture capable of supporting competitiveness once status-based preferences erode. Nepal's trade data show a familiar pattern: merchandise imports remain much larger than merchandise exports, exports are concentrated in a few products and destinations, and import dependence is particularly high for essential fuel, industrial inputs, and machinery.[22,23]

The article argues that Nepal must move from a preference-dependent trade strategy to a rules-based competitiveness strategy. That shift requires enforceable coordination among customs, standards, investment, intellectual property, trade-remedy, services-trade, and transit institutions. It also requires a treaty strategy for GSP+, SAFTA, BIMSTEC, bilateral transit access, and WTO implementation. Without this legal transition, graduation may improve Nepal's international profile while weakening the trade advantages on which vulnerable export sectors have relied.

Research Problem

The research problem is the mismatch between Nepal's formal trade-law framework and its post-LDC trade-readiness needs. Nepal has enacted or adopted laws and policies on customs, foreign investment, industrial enterprises, trade remedies, intellectual property, trade policy, and export integration.[16,17,18,19,20,21] It has also adopted national strategies to manage LDC graduation and export competitiveness.[13,14,15] Yet its export base remains narrow, its import dependence persists, and its legal implementation capacity remains uneven.

The article addresses the following research question: how can Nepal transform its international trade legal framework from a preference-dependent model into a competitiveness-based regulatory system after LDC graduation? The subsidiary questions are: first, whether Nepal's existing domestic laws and institutions are adequate to absorb the legal consequences of preference erosion; second, whether Nepal's treaty strategy is sufficiently aligned with GSP+, WTO, regional and bilateral market-access options; and third, which reforms would most directly improve legal readiness and export competitiveness.

The article's original contribution is to treat LDC graduation as a legal-capacity problem rather than a purely macroeconomic or diplomatic problem. It proposes a post-preference legal-readiness model that links WTO doctrine, GSP+ eligibility, domestic trade-law reform, standards infrastructure, trade remedies, intellectual property modernization, transit diplomacy, and sectoral regulation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on Nepal's LDC graduation can be divided into four strands. The first examines preference erosion and macroeconomic vulnerability. It stresses that graduation may reduce preferential market access, concessional support, and flexibility in complying with international rules, especially for labour-intensive and low-value sectors. The International Trade Centre and UN-OHRLLS estimate that Nepal may face export losses from tariff changes following graduation, particularly in products such as apparel, synthetic textile fabrics, and carpets.[24]

The second strand focuses on export diversification and competitiveness. Pant's analysis of Nepal's trade sector highlights weak implementation, infrastructure constraints, limited skills, quality-control gaps, and the need to strengthen both multilateral and regional trade engagement.[25] This literature correctly identifies Nepal's export weakness, but it often treats law as a background factor rather than as the institutional mechanism through which competitiveness is built.

The third strand addresses WTO special and differential treatment and LDC flexibilities. It is particularly important in intellectual property law. Adhikari's work on TRIPS and Nepal emphasizes limited technology transfer, weak R&D capacity, inadequate human capital, and the need to align IP reform with Nepal's socio-economic priorities.[26] The same debate is visible in services trade, where GATS offers theoretical opportunities in tourism, ICT and labour mobility, but developing-country bargaining power remains limited.[10]

The fourth strand concerns private-sector preparedness and institutional coordination. FNCCI materials emphasize the private sector's exposure to tighter rules of origin, reduced preference margins, and compliance costs after graduation.[27] They also point to the importance of GSP+ preparation, labour standards, investment facilitation, and public-private consultation.

The research gap is the absence of an integrated legal analysis connecting these strands. Existing discussions identify trade vulnerability, but fewer studies systematically link LDC graduation to WTO jurisprudence, GSP+ conditionality, Nepalese trade-remedy law, IP transition, customs modernization, standards compliance, transit law, and sector-specific legal reform. This article fills that gap by presenting graduation as a problem of legal architecture.

METHODOLOGY

The article uses doctrinal legal research and policy-oriented analysis of secondary trade data. The doctrinal component examines WTO agreements, WTO dispute-settlement decisions, regional and bilateral trade instruments, and Nepal's national laws. The relevant WTO instruments include GATT 1994, GATS, TRIPS, the DSU and the Trade Facilitation Agreement.[9,10,11,12,30]

The domestic legal component examines the Constitution of Nepal, customs legislation, investment law, industrial law, trade-remedy legislation, intellectual property statutes, Trade Policy 2025, the Nepal Trade Integration Strategy 2023, and the LDC Graduation Smooth Transition Strategy.[13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,32]

The policy component uses secondary data from Nepal Rastra Bank annual reports and World Integrated Trade Solution data, including merchandise export and import values, export and import partner shares, and product concentration.[22,23] These data are not used to conduct econometric testing. Rather, they are used to identify legal-risk patterns: export concentration, import dependence, narrow product diversification, and exposure to post-LDC preference erosion.

Analysis

LDC Graduation as a Legal Transition

LDC graduation changes Nepal's legal environment because many benefits attached to LDC status are temporary, unilateral, or conditional. Preference-granting states may extend transition periods, but preference schemes remain legally distinct from enforceable, permanent market-access rights. The WTO's 2024 smooth-transition decision therefore provides useful support but does not remove the need for domestic legal reform.[2] Similarly, the General Council's decision on unilateral duty-free and quota-free preferences encourages smooth withdrawal but does not guarantee indefinite market access.[3]

The GSP+ issue illustrates this point. The EU's GSP+ system provides extensive tariff relief for eligible vulnerable developing countries, but eligibility depends on ratification and effective implementation of 27 core conventions on human rights, labour rights, environmental protection, climate change and good governance.[4] Nepal's post-LDC trade strategy must therefore include legal reforms outside narrow customs law, including labour inspection, freedom of association, environmental governance, anti-corruption obligations, and treaty-reporting capacity.

WTO law reinforces the same lesson. In EC-Tariff Preferences, the Appellate Body held that preference-granting Members may differentiate among developing countries only on the basis of objective development needs and must make identical preferences available to similarly situated beneficiaries.[5] Nepal therefore cannot assume that vulnerability alone will preserve the same preference margins after graduation. It must satisfy the legal criteria of any replacement scheme.

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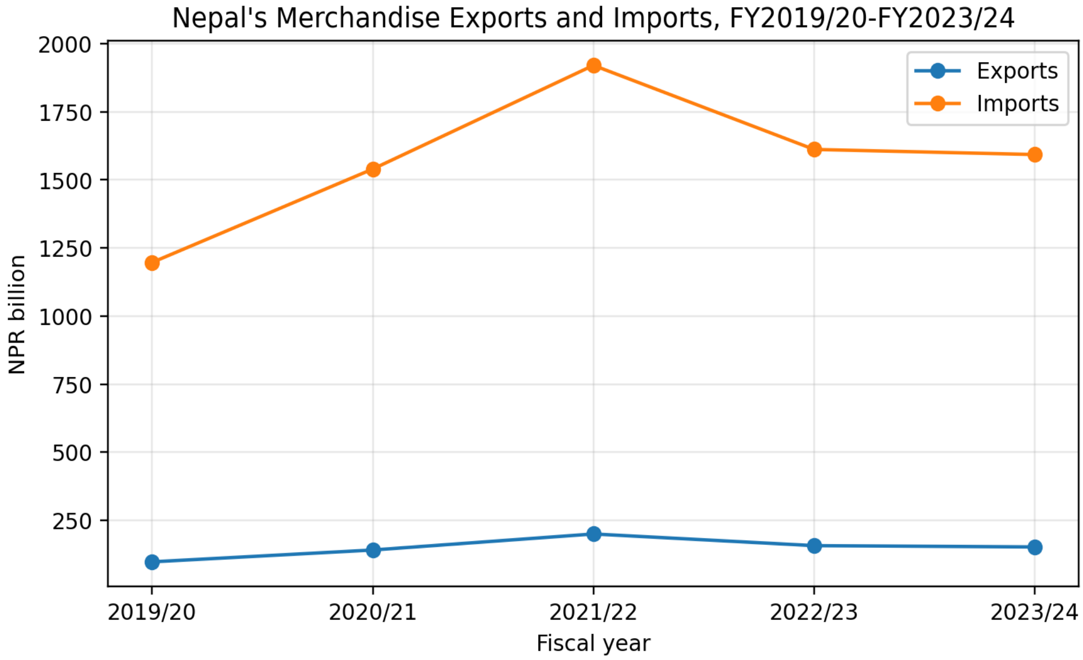

Figure 1. Nepal's merchandise exports and imports, FY2019/20-FY2023/24

Trade Structure and Legal Vulnerability

Figure 1 shows that Nepal's merchandise imports remain structurally larger than exports. Exports rose between FY2019/20 and FY2021/22, but then declined in FY2022/23 and FY2023/24. Imports also fell after FY2021/22 but remained very high relative to exports. This pattern matters legally because preference erosion affects a narrow export base while essential imports remain difficult to compress.[22]

A second vulnerability is partner concentration. In 2022, India accounted for about 71.93 per cent of Nepal's exports and 63.21 per cent of imports, while China accounted for about 13.49 per cent of imports. The United States was the second-largest export destination, but far behind India.[23] A trade system so concentrated is vulnerable to tariff changes, transit disruptions, rules-of-origin shifts, and market-specific regulatory shocks.

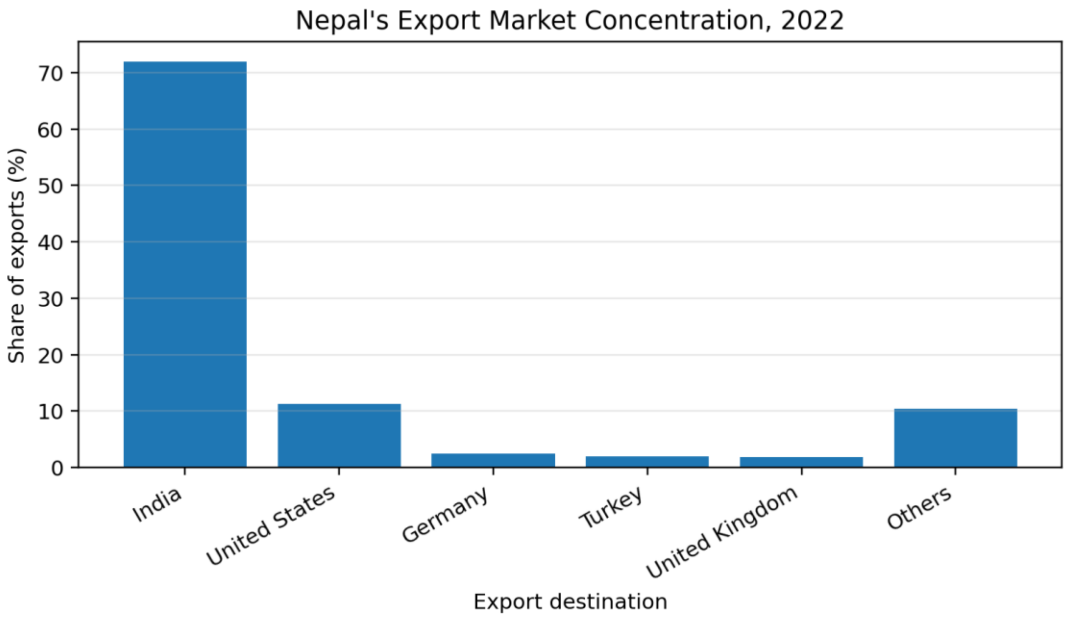

Figure 2. Nepal's export market concentration, 2022

Source: Author's chart based on World Integrated Trade Solution data reproduced in the thesis.[23]

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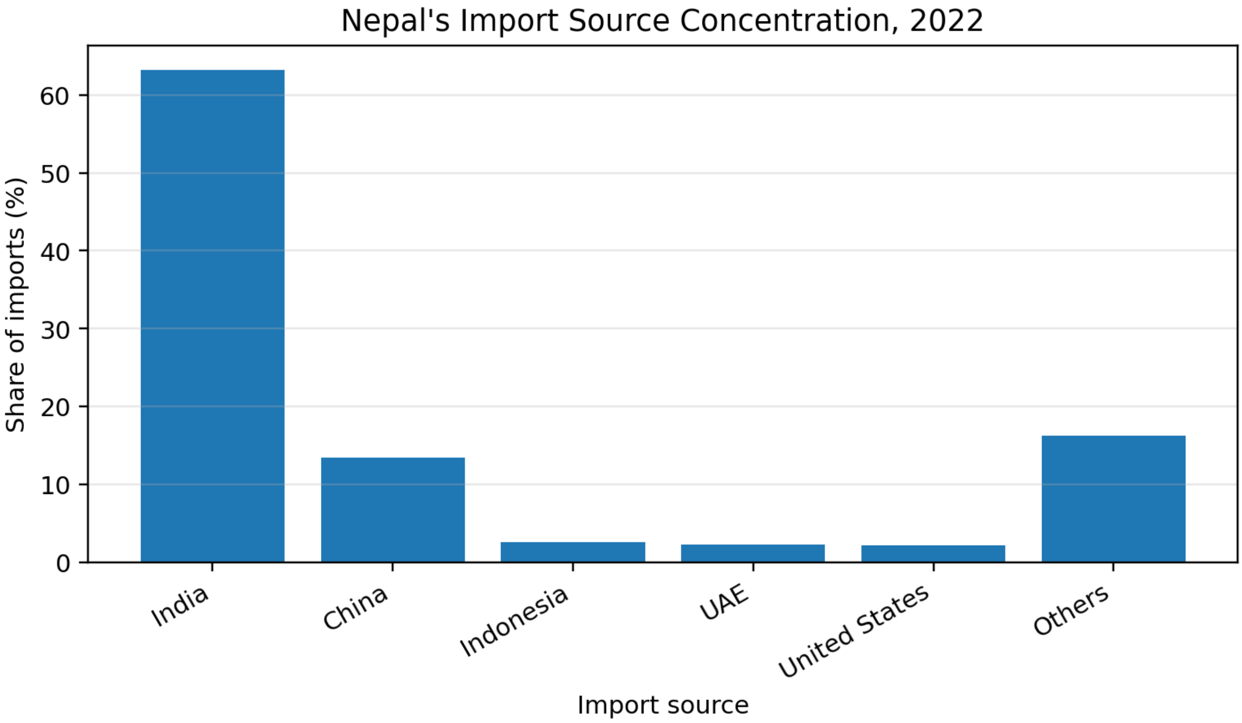

Figure 3. Nepal's import source concentration, 2022

Source: Author's chart based on World Integrated Trade Solution data reproduced in the thesis.[23]

These figures demonstrate that Nepal's graduation strategy cannot be limited to tariff preference negotiations. It must also reduce legal dependence on a single destination market and a few import sources. This requires enforceable trade-facilitation reform, standards recognition, market intelligence, export finance, logistics regulation, and more sophisticated treaty diplomacy with India, China, the EU, the United States, Japan and regional partners.

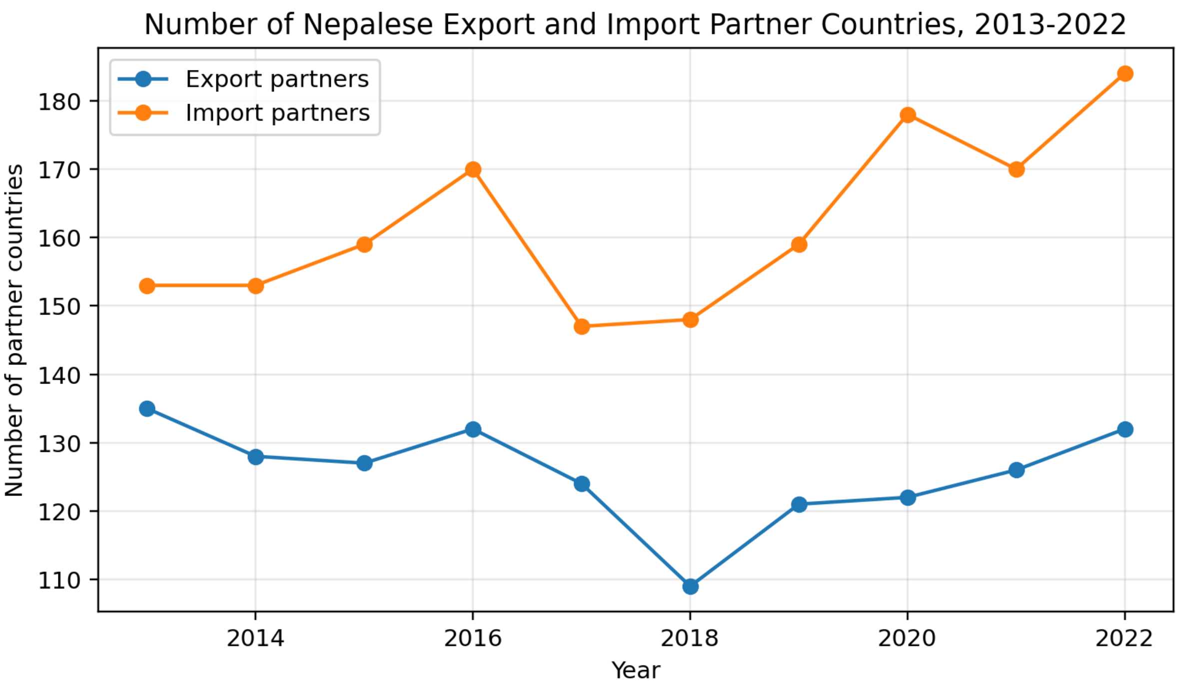

Figure 4. Number of Nepalese export and import partner countries, 2013-2022

Source: Author's chart based on WITS country-profile data reproduced in the thesis.[23]

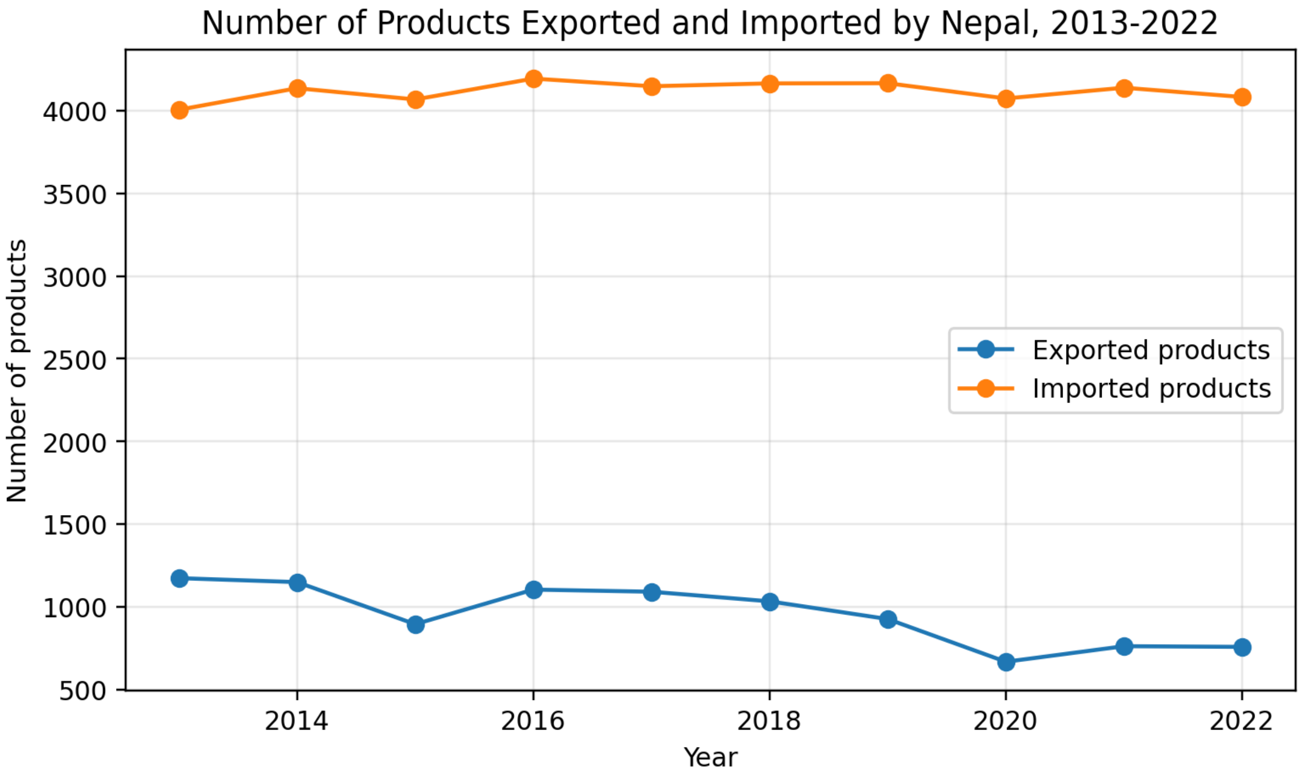

Figure 5. Number of products exported and imported by Nepal, 2013-2022

Source: Author's chart based on WITS country-profile data reproduced in the thesis.[23]

Figures 4 and 5 show the legal importance of diversification. Nepal had more import partners than export partners throughout 2013-2022, and the number of imported products remained above 4,000 while exported products fell from 1,175 in 2013 to 760 in 2022.[23] This is not merely an economic imbalance. It is a regulatory-capacity problem because export expansion depends on product standards, SPS and TBT compliance, rules-of-origin certification, intellectual property protection, and contract-enforcement support.

Domestic Legal Framework: Broad but Fragmented

Nepal's trade-related legal framework is not empty. The Customs Act 2007 regulates import and export procedures, customs valuation, duty collection and border clearance.[16] The Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act 2019 seeks to attract foreign capital and technology for export promotion, import substitution, infrastructure development and industrialization.[17] The Industrial Enterprises Act 2020 provides incentives, concessions and export-related facilities for registered industries.[18] The Safeguards, Anti-Dumping and Countervailing Act 2019 provides a domestic legal basis for trade remedies consistent with WTO disciplines.[19]

Yet these instruments remain fragmented. Customs modernization does not automatically generate standards capacity. Investment approval does not by itself produce export upgrading. Trade remedies do not protect industry unless investigation authorities have evidence-gathering capacity, procedural independence and legal expertise. Intellectual property law does not promote innovation if it remains outdated or poorly enforced. The legal gap is therefore not formal absence but weak integration between policy, legislation and institutional implementation.

Recent policy reforms show movement in the right direction. The WTO Trade Policy Review for Nepal records reforms including the E-commerce Act 2025, Customs Tariff Act 2024, revision of trade and integration strategies, and implementation of the Safeguards, Anti-Dumping and Countervailing Act.[14] These reforms should be consolidated into a legally binding post-LDC trade-readiness framework with measurable indicators, inter-agency duties and annual parliamentary reporting.

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Legal-Readiness Matrix

Legal problem	Current framework	Core gap	Post-LDC implication	Priority reform
Preference erosion	LDC Smooth Transition Strategy; WTO transition decisions	No enforceable domestic mechanism translating transition commitments into sector-level obligations	Loss of tariff advantages, stricter rules of origin and weaker market margins	Adopt a Post-LDC Trade Readiness Act or Cabinet-level binding framework
GSP+ eligibility	Labour, human-rights, environment and governance laws; EU GSP+ application route	Convention implementation and monitoring capacity remain uneven	EU market access will depend on compliance, reporting and monitoring	Prepare a GSP+ compliance roadmap and labour-inspection reform package
Customs and rules of origin	Customs Act 2007; Customs Tariff Act 2024; TFA obligations	Digital procedures, certification and risk-management capacity need strengthening	Exporters may fail to satisfy post-preference origin and documentation rules	Modernize e-customs, origin certification and authorized economic operator systems
Standards, SPS and TBT	Food Safety and Quality Act 2024; accreditation and standards reforms	Testing, certification and mutual recognition remain underdeveloped	High-value agro and niche exports may be blocked by non-tariff barriers	Invest in accredited laboratories, traceability and conformity-assessment agreements
Trade remedies	Safeguards, Anti-Dumping and Countervailing Act 2019	Limited practical use and weak investigative capacity	Domestic industries may face injurious imports without effective remedies	Create an independent, professionally staffed trade-remedy authority
Intellectual property	Patent, Design and Trademark Act 1965; Copyright Act 2002; TRIPS	Outdated IP architecture for GI, traditional knowledge and technology transfer	Loss of LDC-specific TRIPS flexibility may expose legal capacity gaps	Modernize IP statutes and protect GI, traditional knowledge and compulsory licensing

Table 1. Legal-readiness matrix for Nepal's post-LDC trade transition

Source: Author's synthesis from Nepal's domestic legal framework, WTO Trade Policy Review materials and EU GSP+ requirements.[4,13,14,16,17,18,19,20,21,30]

WTO Jurisprudence and Nepal's Legal Strategy

Although Nepal has not been an active user of WTO dispute settlement, WTO jurisprudence matters because it defines the legal boundaries within which Nepal must design post-LDC trade strategy. The following cases are especially relevant.

WTO decision	Core legal principle	Relevance for Nepal
EC-Tariff Preferences	Preference-granting Members may differentiate among developing countries only on objective development needs and must make equivalent preferences available to similarly situated beneficiaries.	Nepal must legally satisfy the eligibility conditions of any post-LDC preference scheme rather than relying on vulnerability alone.

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WTO decision	Core legal principle	Relevance for Nepal
India-Quantitative Restrictions	Balance-of-payments and development-related justifications remain subject to legal review and evidentiary discipline.	Any Nepalese import restriction or BOP measure must be evidence-based, temporary and procedurally defensible.
Turkey-Textiles	Regional trade arrangements do not automatically justify measures inconsistent with WTO obligations.	SAFTA, BIMSTEC or bilateral arrangements must be used consistently with WTO law and should not become legally vulnerable substitutes for competitiveness.
Russia-Traffic in Transit	Transit restrictions and security-related justifications may fall within WTO legal scrutiny.	As a landlocked country, Nepal should treat transit predictability as a legal market-access issue, not merely a logistical issue.

Table 2. WTO jurisprudence relevant to Nepal's post-LDC transition

Source: Author's synthesis of WTO Appellate Body and Panel reports.[5,6,7,8]

Regional and Bilateral Trade Law

Regional trade law offers opportunities but cannot substitute for domestic competitiveness. SAFTA provides a regional legal platform for tariff liberalization in South Asia, while the BIMSTEC Framework Agreement on Free Trade Area seeks progressive liberalization of goods and services, investment facilitation and closer economic integration.[28,29] However, Nepal's trade within South Asia remains highly concentrated with India, and regional arrangements have not yet produced broad diversification.

Bilateral transit and trade arrangements with India remain central because Nepal is landlocked. GATT Article V recognizes freedom of transit, but practical access depends on bilateral routes, customs cooperation, railway services, port access and border infrastructure.[9] The legal strategy should therefore prioritize transit predictability, documentary simplification, digital clearance, and enforceable mechanisms for resolving border delays.

Product Concentration and Value Addition

Rank	Top export products, HS-6 level	Exports (US$ thousand)	Top import products, HS-6 level	Imports (US$ thousand)
1	Soya-bean oil, excluding crude and fractions	186,905.71	Petroleum oils and preparations, excluding crude	2,281,003.78
2	Palm oil, excluding crude and liquid fraction	186,001.52	Petroleum gases and other gaseous hydrocarbons	516,422.71
3	Carpets and other textile floor coverings	84,665.89	Crude soya-bean oil	347,768.88
4	Cardamoms	46,642.78	Semi-finished products of iron or non-alloy steel	288,973.80
5	Felt, not elsewhere specified	38,132.14	Ferrous products obtained by direct reduction	259,395.12

Table 3. Nepal's top five export and import products at HS-6 level, 2022

Source: Author's table based on WITS country-profile data reproduced in the thesis.[23]

Table 3 shows that Nepal's leading exports are concentrated in edible oils, carpets, cardamom and felt, while the largest imports are petroleum products, gas and industrial inputs. This reflects a structural problem: Nepal exports a limited range of semi-processed or niche goods and imports essential energy and industrial materials. A post-LDC legal framework should therefore focus on value addition, product certification, branding, geographical indications and rules-of-origin compliance.

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Sectoral Opportunities: Hydropower, Agriculture, Services and IP

Hydropower is Nepal's most important long-term export opportunity. Government materials estimate Nepal's theoretical hydropower potential at about 83,000 MW, with a smaller but still substantial economically feasible potential.[31] Hydropower exports, however, require more than generation capacity. They require bankable power-purchase agreements, environmental licensing, cross-border electricity rules, transmission access, benefit-sharing mechanisms, investment protection and regional energy diplomacy.

Agriculture and agro-processing remain central to rural livelihoods and export diversification. Tea, coffee, cardamom, herbs, spices and organic products can support niche exports, but only if Nepal strengthens SPS compliance, traceability, packaging, certification and branding. The legal framework should connect agricultural policy with customs, food safety, intellectual property, and trade-promotion institutions.

Services trade is also crucial. GATS recognizes trade in services across modes, including Mode 4 movement of natural persons.[10] Nepal's strengths in tourism, ICT, education, health services and labour mobility should be pursued through recognition of qualifications, ethical recruitment standards, social-protection portability, data governance and digital-commerce regulation.

Intellectual property reform deserves particular attention. TRIPS transition periods for LDCs have allowed Nepal additional flexibility, but graduation will sharpen the need for compliance and domestic capacity.[11] Nepal should modernize the Patent, Design and Trademark Act 1965 and strengthen copyright enforcement while preserving policy space for access to medicines, traditional knowledge, geographical indications and technology transfer.[20,21,26]

CRITICAL DISCUSSION

Nepal's LDC graduation presents a paradox. The country has met development criteria through improvements in human assets and reduced vulnerability, but its productive and export structures remain fragile. This produces what may be called the graduation paradox: formal development progress can reduce international support before domestic competitiveness has matured.

A second problem is the preference trap. LDC preferences can help exports, but they may also reduce the urgency of regulatory upgrading. When market access is granted because of status, firms and agencies may postpone investments in quality control, rules-of-origin documentation, standards testing, logistics and brand development. Graduation exposes the cost of that delay.

A third problem is institutional accountability. Nepal has many trade-related institutions, but no single legally empowered authority appears responsible for ensuring post-LDC trade readiness across customs, standards, GSP+ compliance, investment, IP, trade remedies, services and transit. Without such coordination, reforms remain fragmented and private-sector compliance costs increase.

Comparatively, Bangladesh and Lao PDR face similar preference-loss challenges, but Nepal's landlocked geography, smaller industrial base, high dependence on India, and strong services potential make its legal transition distinct. Nepal should not copy a manufacturing-led transition model without adapting it to hydropower, agro-processing, services, digital trade, transit diplomacy and niche high-value exports.

The deeper implication for international economic law is that formal graduation does not erase structural inequality. WTO rules assume legal equality among Members, but legal capacity remains uneven. Nepal's experience shows that development status should be understood not merely as income classification, but as institutional ability to convert trade obligations into market access, domestic competitiveness and enforceable rights.

CONCLUSION: POLICY AND REGULATORY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Nepal's graduation from LDC status should be understood as a transition from status-based preferences to law-based competitiveness. The country possesses a broad legal framework, but it remains insufficiently integrated for post-LDC conditions. The policy implication is that Nepal must treat graduation as a national legal-reform agenda, not simply as a diplomatic process.

First, Nepal should adopt a legally binding Post-LDC Trade Readiness Framework. This instrument should assign duties to specific ministries and agencies, set deadlines, create sectoral indicators, require public reporting and establish a private-sector consultation mechanism. It should convert the Smooth Transition Strategy into operational legal responsibility.[13]

Second, Nepal should prepare a GSP+ compliance roadmap. This should identify every required convention, assess implementation gaps, prioritize labour inspection and freedom of association reforms, and create a treaty-reporting unit. The roadmap should be prepared before preference loss becomes commercially disruptive.[4]

Third, Nepal should modernize customs and rules-of-origin compliance. Digital clearance, origin certification, risk management, authorized economic operators and post-clearance audit are essential for post-preference trade. These reforms should be aligned with the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement.[30]

Fourth, Nepal should strengthen standards, SPS and TBT infrastructure. Export law should be linked to accredited laboratories, conformity assessment, traceability and mutual-recognition arrangements. Without these institutions, high-value agriculture and niche manufacturing will continue to face non-tariff barriers.

Fifth, Nepal should build a professional trade-remedy authority. Anti-dumping, countervailing and safeguard measures are lawful only when evidence, procedure and injury analysis meet WTO standards. Nepal's 2019 trade-remedy statute should therefore be matched by investigative capacity, transparent regulations and judicial review.[19]

Sixth, Nepal should modernize IP law. It should protect geographical indications, traditional knowledge, branding and creative industries while preserving development-sensitive flexibilities such as compulsory licensing and access to medicines.[11,20,21]

Seventh, Nepal should use sector-specific regulation to promote hydropower, agro-processing, tourism, ICT, education, health services and labour mobility. Hydropower law should address cross-border electricity trade; agricultural law should integrate food safety and traceability; services law should support recognition of qualifications and digital exports.[10,31]

Finally, Nepal should strengthen regional and bilateral trade diplomacy. SAFTA and BIMSTEC should be used strategically, but Nepal's immediate legal priority remains predictable transit and market access through India, supplemented by route diversification through China and wider engagement with the EU, United States, Japan and other markets.[9,28,29]

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Alternative Article Titles

LDC Graduation and Post-Preference Trade Law: Nepal's Search for Regulatory Competitiveness

From Preferential Access to Legal Readiness: Nepal's Trade-Law Challenges after LDC Graduation

Nepal's LDC Graduation in International Economic Law: Trade Preferences, Regulatory Capacity and Post-Status Competitiveness

Appendix B: Statement of Novelty and Contribution

This article contributes to international economic law by reframing Nepal's LDC graduation as a legal transition rather than a narrow economic milestone. Existing scholarship usually emphasizes preference erosion, export vulnerability, private-sector preparedness or macroeconomic adjustment. This article integrates those concerns into a single legal-readiness framework that connects WTO law, GSP+ conditionality, domestic trade legislation, trade remedies, intellectual property, standards compliance, regional arrangements and transit law. It argues that Nepal's principal challenge is not the withdrawal of preferences alone but the absence of a coordinated regulatory architecture capable of converting market access into competitiveness. By applying WTO jurisprudence on tariff preferences, quantitative restrictions, regional trade arrangements and transit, the article shows how graduation transforms Nepal's exposure to legal risk. The proposed model gives policymakers a concrete reform agenda for post-LDC competitiveness, while offering scholars a case study of how formal development classification interacts with legal capacity in the multilateral trading system.

Appendix C: Suitable Target Q1 Law Journals

Journal of International Economic Law - strong fit if the WTO doctrinal analysis is expanded.

World Trade Review - suitable for WTO law, trade policy and development-oriented analysis.

International and Comparative Law Quarterly - possible fit if the comparative section is strengthened.

Journal of World Investment & Trade - suitable if investment-law and hydropower/FDI analysis is expanded.

Appendix D: Suitable Target Q2 Law Journals

Journal of World Trade - suitable for WTO, GSP, trade preferences and LDC graduation analysis.

Global Trade and Customs Journal - suitable if customs, rules of origin and trade facilitation are emphasized.

Legal Issues of Economic Integration - suitable if SAFTA, BIMSTEC and EU GSP+ are expanded.

Journal of International Trade Law and Policy - suitable for a policy-facing legal article on Nepal's trade transition.

Note: journal quartiles change over time. Verify current Scopus/SJR or Web of Science indexing before submission.

Appendix E: Likely Reviewer Criticisms

The article may still appear policy-heavy unless the WTO doctrinal analysis is deepened.

Reviewers may request a stronger comparative section on Bangladesh, Lao PDR, Maldives or Samoa.

A Q1 reviewer may ask for more precise data on tariff exposure by destination market and product line.

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The domestic-law analysis may need section-by-section interpretation of key Nepalese statutes.

The article should clarify whether recommendations are legally binding reforms, administrative reforms or negotiating priorities.

Appendix F: Specific Revisions to Improve Publication Prospects

Add a comparative table on Bangladesh, Lao PDR and Samoa showing how graduating or graduated LDCs managed preference erosion.

Expand the discussion of EC-Tariff Preferences and GSP+ eligibility into a full doctrinal section.

Add product-line tariff exposure for the EU, China, Turkey, India and the United States.

Convert endnote-style references into the target journal's exact OSCOLA, Bluebook or house style before submission.

Include interviews or stakeholder consultation with exporters, customs officials, trade lawyers and FNCCI representatives if empirical strengthening is desired.

Add a statutory reform annex mapping proposed amendments to each Nepalese law.