

UN WOMEN SOUTH ASIA COUNTRY REVIEW SERIES ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

# WOMEN'S

## Political Participation at the sub-national level in

# NEPAL

A Mapping Study

## Research in UN Women Programme, 'Promoting Women's Political Leadership and Governance in India and South Asia'

In 2009, the Royal Norwegian Embassy, India signed an agreement with Unifem, now UN Women, South Asia Regional Office to initiate a three-year programme entitled 'Promoting Women's Political Leadership and Governance in India and South Asia'. The programme aims to empower elected women representatives in local governance to make public policy and resource allocation patterns responsive to women's human rights. The programme covers 5 countries of South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan). In India, the programme is co-owned by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India.

The Programme has been designed with the spirit to capture the specific issues and challenges with regard to women's political empowerment that each country experiences. This is a demand driven programme that seeks to understand and address issues of women's participation in local governance from the grassroots perspective. Generation of a body of knowledge on women's political leadership and governance in India and South Asia is one of the key outcomes of the programme.

There are two main purposes of the research component of the programme –

- (a) To build a body of knowledge on women's political leadership and governance in India and South Asia – this is especially significant since no on-going programme on women's political empowerment in the South Asia region is working at the grassroots level – down at the level of the village councils. This being the value addition of the programme in the region, and there being very little existing policy literature which analyses governance at its fundamental grassroots institution; this programme provides an opportunity to develop innovative and unique literature based on experiences from the programme on strengthening village councils – the structure of local governance closest to ordinary citizens – to enable women as equal and fair participants and decision makers at the local level.
- (b) As we build this body of knowledge, the data gathered from field experiences will in turn help to inform programme implementation and fine tune the intervention strategies as the programme progresses. Such a large and complex programme is, by nature, dynamic, and hence useful feedback in terms of baseline data, focused studies such as barriers and promoters of women's political leadership and governance in India and South Asia throughout the course of the programme will be useful for the programme interventions.

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UN Women supports United Nations Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. Its stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the United Nations system's work in advancing gender equality.

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NIBR's core competence is in urban and regional research in selected policy areas.

# Women's Political Participation at the Sub-national Level in Nepal

*A Mapping Study*

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## Abbreviations

APM	All Party Mechanism
CEDAW	United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CBO	Community based organisation
DDC	District Development Committee
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy
IPC	Integrated Planning Committee
LGCDP	Local Governance and Community Development Programme
LSGA	Local Self Governance Act of 1999
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NEFIN	Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
VC	Village Council
VDC	Village Development Committee
WCF	Ward Citizens Forum

## Indigenous Words

<i>Banda Satra</i>	Closed door session of a village meeting
<i>Dalit</i>	Low caste
<i>Janajati</i>	Ethnic group
<i>Jana Andolan</i>	Popular mass movement
<i>Khula Satra</i>	Open session of a village meeting
<i>Madhesis</i>	People residing in the southern plains, the Terai

# 1

## Background

The objective of the three year programme “Promoting women’s political leadership and governance in India and South Asia” managed by UN Women is to improve the quality of women’s representation at the sub-national level to enable women to make policies, programmes and practices gender responsive. The programme should

- (i) Support efforts to change the macro level policy, legal and regulatory frameworks,
- (ii) Increase the allocation of resources to women through planning and budgeting, and
- (iii) Improve downwards accountability.

The programme’s research component should identify research questions based on a participatory and consultative process with stakeholders. The Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) has been commissioned by UN Women to carry out research in collaboration with South Asian partners.

This paper on Nepal frames the issue of women’s political participation at the local level in the context of a broader process of social inclusion and democratic development. From 1996 to 2006, the civil war focused political attention on the Maoists’ demand for a new federal Constitution and on models for power-sharing. The local level has received a lot less attention and local elections have not been held since 1997. Nevertheless,

despite the absence of elections at the local level, broad based civil society mobilisation has taken place, women from diverse backgrounds have entered the Constitutional Assembly, Nepal has made progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and gender responsive budgeting was instituted in Nepal from the financial year 2007-08.

This paper outlines key issues of relevance to women’s political participation at the sub-national level in Nepal and refers to important contributions that document these aspects of women’s political participation. The paper has been divided into five parts:

- (i) The status of women’s political participation, with an emphasis on the situation at the local level
- (ii) How civil society organisations work for women’s rights
- (iii) Allocation of resources for women,
- (iv) The interventions of selected development partners, and
- (v) Tentative research questions.

It has been written to serve as a background for interviews and discussions in Nepal about a research agenda for women’s political participation and is based on a review of documentation, previous NIBR research in Nepal, and on interviews with selected development partners undertaken in February 2012.

Over the last two decades, Nepal has undergone monumental political change, culminating in the Constitutional Assembly elections in May 2008. The changes have been driven by popular mobilisation, most notably the popular mass movement of April 2006 – *Jana Andolan II* – and by the military mobilisation of the Maoists (UCPN-Maoist). Women have played an important role in establishing the power of the streets and were also active in the Maoist movement that had equality between the sexes as one of its objectives. Women, however, did not participate to the same extent as men did<sup>1</sup> and leadership positions were mainly held by men. For example in *Jana Andolan II*, 33 per cent of men in Nepal and 14 per cent of women participated (Hachhethu, Kumar et al. 2008). Nevertheless, almost four years after the Constitutional Assembly elections, high caste men have continued to hold sway in the political parties. At the same time, the Constitutional Assembly has offered a unique platform for advancing the rights of women.

This broad based mobilisation process created new political spaces for women and the Constitutional Assembly elections offered a platform for women to work out a more comprehensive political agenda. The female members of the Constitutional Assembly have fought for 50 per cent representation at all levels of state institutions, equality in citizenship, the right to inheritance, the right to reproductive health, and special provisions for women in health, education and employment (IDEA and NLS 2012). Nepal signed the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1991.

The participation of women has to a large extent been discussed within the broader framework of social

inclusion. Exclusion in Nepal has been based on gender, ethnicity, caste, religion, and lately, also region. In the post 1990 discourse on exclusion, women, *Dalits* (caste), *Janajatis* (ethnicity), Muslims (religion), and *Madhesis* (region) are referred to as the excluded. For example, in a survey on the state of democracy in Nepal, 2007, 88 per cent of citizens perceived women as socially excluded (Hachhethu, Kumar et al. 2008). Perhaps not surprisingly a large majority of the survey respondents backed the use of special provisions in the Constitution for backward communities.

The state administration and politics have been dominated by Brahmin males who make up around 15 per cent of the population. All other groups in Nepal commonly are referred to as ‘excluded’. On 30 May 2007, the Constitutional Assembly decided that there should be 33 per cent representation of women at all levels of the state. According to a 2009 report, 11 per cent of civil servants are women, and 30 per cent of them hold posts at the non-gazetted third class level. Women hold only 2 per cent of senior level posts (Renaissance Society Nepal et al. 2009).

The Interim Constitution of January 2007 says that all persons should be equal before the law, no woman shall be discriminated against in any way because of her gender, and women should have the right to participate in the state structures on the basis of the principles of proportional inclusion. Women were listed alongside Dalits, indigenous ethnic groups, the Madhesi communities and the oppressed and backward groups (Renaissance Society Nepal et al. 2009) reflecting the Constitution makers’ fundamental concern for formulating an inclusive Constitution.

<sup>1</sup> In 2006, after ten years of military struggle, the CPN (Maoist) military wing had 35 per cent participation from women; the political wing had 15 per cent, and the state and militia 40 per cent. In 1996, women’s participation was 2-3 per cent.



## The status of women's political representation

A number of measures to increase the participation of excluded groups at the local and national level have been introduced following the adoption of the democratic Constitution of 1990. An overview of important statistics can be found in two recent publications supported by international donors, one on the representation of women in party politics (Renaissance Society Nepal et. al. 2009) and one that offers an overview of the women's movement and statistics on women in the Constitutional Assembly (IDEA and NLS 2012). The provision for 33 per cent representation of women in the Constitutional Assembly represented a significant improvement on the 1999 general elections where 6 per cent women were elected. The 1999 elections were an improvement on the 1991 and 1994 elections when each time only 3 per cent women were elected. As a result of the 33 per cent provision, 197 women became members. The concern for inclusive representation and the measures put in place to secure this objective resulted in the election of women from diverse ethnic and caste backgrounds<sup>2</sup>.

### 3.1 The Constitutional Assembly and women's representation

Often when wars end, new political spaces for women open up as the rules of the political game are being rewritten. Nepal is in the midst of such a transformational process. IDEA and Nepal Law Society recently published a comprehensive report on 'Women Members of the Constitutional Assembly' that includes a biography of all the 197 women members of the Constitutional Assembly, offering unique insights into

their backgrounds (IDEA and NLS 2012). In the report, the Vice Chairperson of the Constituent Assembly, Purna Kumari Subedi, refers to the two most important challenges faced by women:

- (i) To ensure 'proportional representation in policy making and in implementation in all mechanisms of the state' and
- (ii) To ensure the right of women to property and inheritance.

The coordinator of the Women's Caucus lists the right of women to inheritance, equal right to property, the right to dignified life, and citizenship in the name of the mother as important achievements made by the Women's Caucus, and other political movements. There has been a lot of focus on the women members of the Constitutional Assembly and a number of development partners support the Women's Caucus and inter-party networks. Nevertheless, despite the progress made, many decisions continue to be made by men behind closed doors.

### 3.2 Political parties and women's representation

The report 'Women's Political Participation, Empowerment and Inclusions in Nepal' (Renaissance Society Nepal 2009) details women's participation in party politics in Nepal. Out of 30,000 party members surveyed, 10 per cent were women. Sixty seven per cent of them belonged to the high caste Brahmin and *Chhetri* groups. Hardly any women held leading posts at the district or national level. Nor did the political parties

<sup>2</sup> Janajatis constitute 36 per cent, Brahmins 22 per cent, Madhesis 16 per cent, Dalits 11 per cent and Chhetris 11 per cent of the population.

have institutional mechanisms in place to increase women's participation in terms of policy documents or practical programmes. The report recommends that the political parties should work towards a target of 33 per cent women in each party unit.<sup>3</sup> Men and women alike single out discriminatory social and family factors as the main reason for the poor representation of women in political parties. Respondents propose measures to increase empowerment (35 per cent of respondents), training (19 per cent) as well as policy changes as the main ways forward to enhance women's political participation. The report recommends conducting massive awareness programmes for women to overcome the traditional notions of women's role in politics. It also points out that little research has been done on women's political participation in Nepal.

### 3.3 Participation of women at the local level

The absence of elections at the sub-national level for the last decade sets Nepal apart from the other

countries in South Asia. This has meant that the three tier sub-national governance structure has functioned without elected representatives and their role has been temporarily assigned to civil servants. Moreover, a number of mechanisms have been put in place to ensure popular participation in the annual planning process and in project implementation. Policy makers have been concerned about fostering inclusive representation so mechanisms for inclusion have been designed to include ethnic, caste, religious, and disadvantaged groups – in addition to women.

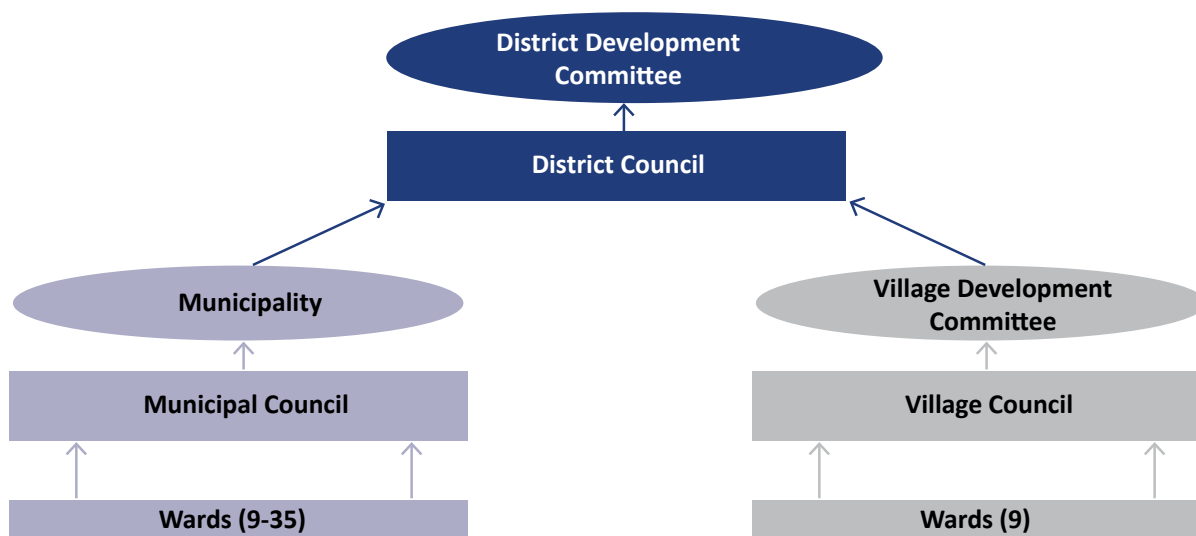
The basic building blocks of Nepal's sub-national structure for direct representation through elections are

- (i) Wards
- (ii) Village/municipal councils
- (iii) District councils

There are around 40,000 wards, 3915 village councils, 58 municipalities and 75 district development councils in Nepal.

According to the Local Self Governance Act of 1999 (LSGA), 20 per cent women should be elected from

**Figure 3.1: Local elected bodies in Nepal**



**Note:** For the purpose of election to the District Development Committee a district is divided into various *Illaks* (areas) and from each Illak there is representation in the District Development Committee

<sup>3</sup> At the same time the report argues for proportionality which suggests that in the long term, the target should be 50 per cent women representation in all party units.

each ward, however, elections have not been held to local bodies since the LSGA was adopted in 1999. In 1997, 7.7 per cent women were elected, up from 0.58 per cent in 1992 following a provision made in 1997 that each ward should elect one woman to the Village Development Committee (VDC) (Lama, Khakurel et al. 2011).

In addition to, or in the absence of, elected bodies a number of mechanisms have been introduced to facilitate popular participation and influence the annual planning process. Most of them have not made use of quotas to ensure representation. The important mechanisms have been:

- (i) Open (and closed) planning meetings at the village level,
- (ii) The All Party Mechanism (APM) at the village and district level,
- (iii) Integrated Planning Committee (IPC) at the village and district level,
- (iv) Ward Citizens Forum (WCF) at the ward level,
- (v) Various sub-committees at the district level where representation from women's organisations is mandatory,
- (vi) User committees.

We know little about the impact that these mechanisms have had on women's participation and influence, in part because they are recent and in part, because a systematic study has not been done. The following pages on women's representation in these mechanisms present data based on a study carried out by the Institute for Integrated Development Studies and NIBR and is based on data from five districts in Nepal (Dhungel, Sapkota et al. 2011).

The push to involve people in planning and development at the local level began in the 1960s when the government established a countrywide network of local bodies. The Constitution of Nepal 1962 established a three-tier system: village/town panchayat, district panchayat and zonal panchayat (the zonal level was later abolished).

However, the structure remained highly centralised and the local bodies were treated more as extended arms of the government than as autonomous legal entities. In 1990, the panchayat system was formally discarded and a new, democratic Constitution introduced. The existing two-tier system was retained with a change in name whereby the panchayats became development councils. With the adoption of the LSGA of 1999, the idea of inclusive democratisation was brought to the local level. The LSGA sets out a system for inclusive, popular participation in local planning and decision-making built on principles of democracy, transparency and accountability to the local population, as well as the inclusion of formerly disadvantaged groups. It prescribes a participatory and bottom-up planning process consisting of 14 steps through which people's voices are to be heard and local levels plans are to be linked with national planning processes.

In 2009, the Government of Nepal introduced the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Policy to make the local governance system gender responsive. Along with the GESI, a comprehensive operational framework has been put in place consisting of the Grant Operational Guidelines (2009) to secure the representation and resource allocation for women and socially excluded groups, the Minimum Condition Performance Measures (2008) that include gender sensitive indicators, the Social Mobilisation Guidelines that address gender, and the Audit Guidelines (2010). The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Unit was set up within the Ministry of Local Development to provide technical input and oversight. Gender focal points were also to be set up at the district level. Moreover, programmes that address social inclusion and gender issues were to be given priority.

### **3.3.1 Women's participation in planning meetings at the village level**

At the village level, open planning meetings take place to discuss matters related to annual plans in a broad sense and determine broad guidelines for the selection

of projects. Village-level meetings in the form of a *Khula Satra* (open session) have been initiated over time to act as the village council. Representatives of organisations for women alongside ex-elected representatives, representatives of the political parties, Dalit, ethnic and indigenous groups, disabled persons, teachers and other active persons at the village level, the heads or staff of the village-level unit of government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are invited to this session. In the study districts, on an average of 14 per cent of the participants in the meetings were women, varying from 4 to 23 per cent across districts.

However, the actual decision on projects is made in the *Banda Satra* (closed-door session) on the second or third day of the meeting. In the closed-door session, a small group discusses the programmes for the annual plan in a much more relaxed manner and makes the decisions taking into account different factors, such as needs, resources and demands of the various sections and areas, including the marginalised sections, the poor and disadvantaged areas. In such meetings, the VDC Secretary and other members of the VDC, members of the APM, members of the political parties and other local influential persons are invited to help make the decisions.

### 3.3.2 The All Party Mechanism

A temporary arrangement in the form of an APM was created in 2007 through the Interim Constitution at both the village and district levels with a view to providing advice to government employees who manage the VDC and District Development Council (DDC). The Government of Nepal issued a directive on 9 July 2009 stating that the APM would comprise of representatives of all the political parties that contested the First-Past-the-Post during the election to the Constituent Assembly held in 2008. The APM was abolished in late 2011.

The NIBR report showed that women make up only around three per cent of representatives in the APM

at the village level and are not represented at all at the district level.<sup>4</sup> When asked about the poor representation of women and Dalits in the APM, women members responded that “the political parties are always fascinated with them when they need to achieve a purpose”, and once that purpose is achieved women are forgotten and neglected. The political parties, on the other hand, claimed that women and Dalits could not be included in the APM, mainly due to a lack of time as women are required to fulfil their household obligations and Dalits are engaged in earning their daily livelihood.

Yet, there are examples of informal mechanisms set up by political parties to ensure women's representation at the local level, and women's political networks have been formed to advocate for representation of women and their interests. This may indicate that changes are underway in political parties at the local level.

### 3.3.3 Ward Citizens' Forum: 33 per cent women

The GESI Policy of 2009 of the Ministry of Local Development provides for representation of women at the local level through the Ward Citizens' Forum (WCF) where women should make up 33 per cent of the members. The WCF members are mobilised to take part in the annual planning process through meetings that are facilitated by government-employed social mobilisers. The role of the social mobiliser is to ensure a level playing field through a facilitated process in which women should be given an equal voice.

### 3.3.4 Integrated Planning Committee: 33 per cent

The Integrated Planning Committees (IPC) is to be set up at the VDC and DDC levels as advisory bodies. The groups represented in this committee are the political parties in the APM (one representative from each political party), NGOs, community based organisations, other organisations, women-related organisations,

<sup>4</sup> The study was carried out in Taplejung, Jhapa, Sindhuli, Lamjung, Bardiya and Accham.

ethnic, indigenous and backward community-related organisations and children's clubs. This structure means that women's organisations should be represented in the development planning process. The IPC should coordinate sector programmes and prepare the district development programme.

### 3.4 District Level Representation by Women's Organisations

Women's organisations are invited to take part in the district level meetings that decide on annual plans. Women's participation was on average 10 per cent in the five districts covered by the NIBR report, ranging from a high of 14 per cent in Achham to a low of 9 per cent in Taplejung. The district level meeting is chaired by the highest ranking civil servant in the district, the Local Development Officer. Invitees include political party members, civil servants, professionals from the district, organisations for Dalits, disabled, ethnic and indigenous groups and others. In some instances, decision-making takes place behind closed doors on the day after the open meeting at a meeting attended by party members and influential men.

To ensure that the voices of all sections of society are heard during the planning process, the government has made provision for different committees at the district level. The government's GESI Policy stipulates the creation of the District Level Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Implementation Committee. The committee is to be made up of civil servants from the district; representatives from civil society; women's organisations as well as groups traditionally considered excluded on the basis of their ethnic, caste or religious background. This committee should meet once in four months, monitor all decisions made on gender, children

and excluded groups and provide progress reports to the DDC. This committee has a mandate similar to the *Dalit Utthan Samanwaya Samittee* (Dalit Upliftment Coordination Committee) and *Adivashi/Janajati Zilla Samnanwaya Samiti* (Indigenous and Ethnic District Coordination Committee).

#### 3.4.1 User committees

User committees are required to have 33 per cent women members, and one of the three management positions should be held by a woman. However, political parties control the user committees and very few women hold leadership positions. Women are generally included to make the committees appear inclusive, but only as a formality, as their role is limited mainly to endorsing decisions made by the influential members of the committees. Conflicts are common during the formation of the committees because the local politicians want to include their own supporters in the decision-making positions (Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer) of the committee. The conflict among local leaders of different political parties can be particularly intense over the post of Chairperson. Despite the formality of village meetings with the compulsory participation of the project users, representatives of political parties and the VDC Secretary play a prominent role in the formation of the committee. Representatives of the major political parties decide among themselves who will become the Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. Thus, to avoid conflict in the committee's formation, political parties share the powerful positions among themselves, so that one party's representative holds the position of Chairperson, another party's representative holds the position of Secretary and the third party's representative holds the position of Treasurer. This process leaves little room for women's representation.

## Civil society organisations working for women's rights

The post-1990 period has seen a surge in ethnically based political mobilisation and to a lesser extent in caste and gender based mobilisation (Hachhethu, Kumar et al. 2008; Hangen 2010). In a survey of four districts of Nepal the NIBR found that 16 per cent of women held organisational membership, a number equal to that of men (Aasland and Haug 2009). Issues of multiple identities and inter-sectionality, or how different identities influence each other, are important in order to understand the patterns of mobilisation of women from diverse ethnic, caste and religious backgrounds. For example, the majority of women in the Constitutional Assembly, 63 per cent, perceive a lack of unity among themselves due to their diversity, "which has led to a lack of attention towards gender/women's issues in the Constitutional Assembly" (Lama, Khakurel et al. 2011). Women members of the Constitutional Assembly reflect Nepal's diverse ethnic and caste mix, with 36 per cent belonging to ethnic groups, 16 per cent being Madhesi and 11 per cent being Dalit. The Women's Caucus in the Assembly was organised to bring together women on women's issues (Lama, Khakurel et al. 2011).

The women's movement has been mobilised with the objective of preventing violence and discrimination against women, ending domestic violence and trafficking, equal access to health, education and property, and the right to obtain citizenship through matriarchal lineage (Lama, Khakurel et al. 2011). Ahead of the finalisation of the new Constitution, equal citizenship rights and proportional representation have become the most debated issues. Issues of untouchability, dowry, and discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, caste, religion and region divide

rather than unite women. This seems to have led to a situation whereby women's organisations are divided along ethnic, caste, and religious lines. Advocacy across groups, in particular between Dalit and other women's organisations has been difficult to establish. Instead women's organisations have been set up in parallel to existing organisations, for example the umbrella organisation for ethnic groups, NEFIN, has set up a women's organisation.

At the local level, there are numerous CBOs, such as savings and credit groups, forest user groups, water user groups, school management committees, and mother's groups. Survey data from five districts of Nepal suggests that participation in women's groups is the most common form of organisational membership. Five per cent of households had members involved in women's groups (Aasland and Haug 2009). Most of these groups are engaged in various forms of savings and credit programmes. There are different kinds of CBOs and some operate under the auspices of the government. For example, many of the numerous credit and savings groups that operate throughout Nepal are run by the government under the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Services. Others are funded by Nepalese and international NGOs.

As a result of their participation in CBOs, combined with other factors such as higher school enrolment and Maoist mobilisation, many observers comment that Nepalese women have become much more aware about their rights. The exact nature of this phenomenon and how it translates into participation in the public sphere is less clear. However, research suggests that women, through their participation in CBOs, have become more



active in approaching and engaging with institutions in their local communities. Hence, women have not only become more aware, but their voices have also become more effective as a result of participation in CBOs (Aasland and Haug 2009).

Finally, a striking feature of women's *local participation* is its inclusive character. Women from all caste, ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds are members of CBOs. In contrast to other forms

of participation, participation in CBOs seems to be relatively independent of women's socio-economic and socio-cultural backgrounds (Aasland and Haug 2009). This implies that CBOs could offer a platform for women to raise issues across caste, ethnic and religious lines. However, problems of scaling up and creating nationwide networks at the local level are significant and effective national level networks with effective vertical linkages are rare.

## The interface between civil society and political parties

Large political parties whose representatives have not been elected for the last decade have dominated politics and decision-making at the local level. People at the local level feel the absence of local elections has been the main stumbling block to improved accountability (Dhungel, Sapkota et al. 2011). Although several institutional mechanisms have been put in place to facilitate direct participation in planning processes and women's organisations have been invited to take part, little is known about their impact.

Most civil society organisations are associated with political parties. This is also reflected in the Constitutional Assembly where many of the women have their own NGOs or are active in civil society organisations. The link between civil and political society applies not only to high level political leaders, but also to women in civil society. The same women tend to be active in both civil society and political society and the NIBR survey

shows a very high correlation between participation in political parties and participation in CBOs and NGOs (Aasland and Haug 2009). The exact relationship between political and civil society participation is not clear and further study is needed.

The most powerful background variable in explaining high levels of women's socio-political participation is education. High levels of participation require features that are linked to educational levels, such as basic literacy skills, leadership skills, and a standing in the community. This suggests that women's participation could improve as their educational levels improve if other barriers are absent. Interestingly, however, moderate levels of socio-political participation are not linked with education and this suggests that socio-political mobilisation in Nepal has been broad-based and inclusive of caste, ethnic and religious groups that have been traditionally marginalised (Aasland and Haug 2009).



## 6

## Allocation of resources for women

In addition to designing an institutional framework for women's participation in local level planning, the Government of Nepal has introduced a number of measures to ensure that resources benefit women. Since 1956, Nepal's national planning processes have revolved around the Five Year Plans. The 7<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan, 1985-90 had a section on women for the first time, reflecting the international attention given to women's role in the economy and the interest in micro-credit programmes. These programmes helped women gain social recognition and gave them a voice in intra-household decision-making (Acharya n.d.). Women's participation in CBOs and NGOs in forest, agriculture and micro-credit programmes has since been emphasised as a way of including women in local governance and of reaching the poorest (Acharya n.d.). Coinciding with the dramatic political changes that took place in Nepal, the 10th Plan (2007-10) set out to engender the macro development framework to make it inclusive of women and marginalised groups. Moreover, the Plan aimed to increase women's participation in general, and in state decision-making structures in particular.

Gender responsive budgeting was introduced in Nepal from the fiscal year 2007-08. It aims to support gender mainstreaming and empowerment in planning, programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation and uses participation, capacity building, benefit sharing, access to employment and workload as indicators of gender sensitivity (MoE, UNESCO et al. 2010). Programmes are given scores based on the indicators, and subsequently the share of the government's budget that is gender sensitive can be determined. The introduction of gender responsive budgeting was 'preceded by a series of gender and gender budget audits of several sectors and intensive

preparation within the Finance Ministry with assistance from UNIFEM' (Acharya n.d.).

The LSGA provides for a block grant system to the districts. Under the block grant system, 10 per cent of allocations are earmarked for poor women. This allocation is part of a targeted programme for the empowerment of women, children, youth, Janajati, Dalits and disabled people. It is mandatory for local bodies to allocate 35 per cent of the capital grant received from the government for programmes targeting these groups. Data suggests that women and Dalits in particular, have not been able to use the funds, mainly due to illiteracy and the complicated procedures for preparing programme proposals and receiving approval for funding. Women who were consulted said that despite their requests they were not given any support in preparing proposals either by the VDC or by other capable persons (Dhungel, Sapkota et al. 2011). This allocation is required to be used for inclusive programmes, and it is essential that common programmes that benefit the majority of people are formulated. However, the formulation of common programmes has been a challenge mainly due to diverse demands and limited funds. Therefore, most of the money was used either for educational purposes or for other local level development activities such as rural roads and electrification in other VDCs (Dhungel, Sapkota et al. 2011).

The Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS) has carried out a study on gender sensitivity in local level planning processes that go into more detail on gender sensitive budgeting at the local level. This study is part of the project 'Gender Responsive Decentralised Governance in Nepal' funded by the Asian Development Bank.

Development partners frame gender issues within the broader context of social inclusion, inclusive growth and peace building, whereby gender alongside caste, ethnicity, and religion constitute one aspect of social exclusion. Donor agencies have implemented a number of programmes to empower women economically, to support their effective political participation, and to ensure women's participation in local level planning processes. Development partner support in the area of local governance has converged around the Local Governance and Community Development Programme (LGCDP), the Nepal Peace Trust Fund and more specifically, local peace committees, and more in general support for women's participation through adherence to the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820. Moreover, many development partners support civil society organisations who implement projects and programmes at the local level.

The LGCDP targets women through the block grant system whereby women should receive 10 per cent of allocations. In addition, the training modules for social mobilisers who facilitate participatory planning processes include modules on gender issues. The Ministry of Local Development has adopted a GESI Policy and has established a separate unit on gender. The LGCDP involves a participatory planning process whereby women have quotas in the WCFs, women's CBOs are represented in the IPCs, and women are consulted in planning meetings, in particular through the Citizens' Awareness Centres at the settlement level where the representation of women is high. The Citizens' Awareness Centres have been set up to mobilise excluded groups to take part in the planning process for the allocation of the block grant. Perhaps

the main institutional weakness is that there is no mechanism in place for tracking targeted funds.

Local peace committees should have 33 per cent female representation in line with the government's policy that women should have 33 per cent representation in all organs of the state. However, the peace committees have taken time to function effectively and their performance has been uneven. Nepal's Action Plan On Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 aims to achieve 'equal, proportional and meaningful participation of women in every decision-making level of conflict transformation and peace building processes' (GoN and MoPR 2011).

Nepal's development partners say they have mainstreamed gender and treat women as a cross-cutting issue, which means they aim to consider the impact on women in all their interventions. Maximum attention has been focused at the national level and on women in the Constitutional Assembly, and relatively little attention has been paid to strategically addressing issues of how to support women's political participation within a new decentralised structure. Nevertheless, the LGCDP offers a framework for nation-wide and systematic support in this area for those donors who plan to continue their support for LGCDP.

The following points summarise the work carried out by selected development partners, and their concerns.

1. Development partners have provided support for women members of the Constitutional Assembly, especially during the period preceding and following the Constitutional Assembly elections. Support included capacity building on various aspects of politics

and leadership, facilitation of meetings with powerful male leaders etc. In particular, UNDP, UN Women, and International IDEA have been involved in this work where substantial results have been achieved.

2. To many development partners mainstreaming means inclusion of women in their programmes, for example in the form of participation by women in planning and implementation or women being beneficiaries of projects. Precisely what participation entails is less clear: do they have a say in the major decisions on location and allocations or do they simply take part in project implementation? Moreover, strengthening the capacity of women in various forms, for example their awareness of rights, business skills and leadership capacity, is a common component in project design. Some donors specifically targeted vulnerable women, such as widows.
3. The link between economic and political empowerment was highlighted by several donors. These donors stressed that economic empowerment is a precondition for the voice of women and their effective political participation. In practice, they carried out micro-credit programmes and business development programmes.
4. The development partners have also funded civil society organisations in order to support women's empowerment and political influence through the creation of alliances, such as Norway's support for the Inter Party Women's Alliance and Sankalpa. Both programmes aim to strengthen women's voices at all levels of decision-making, from the local to the central, while at the same time recognising the cultural constraints on the effective political participation of women. For example, families prioritise participation by men over women through the practice of family votes and community/block votes. This practice is likely to make it harder for political parties to attract women voters through women friendly policies, as not only women, but the family or community need to be convinced.
5. Several development partners noted that achievements have been made in laying the foundation for numerical representation, while meaningful representation is far from a reality. Such substantive democratic representation is particularly challenging in Nepal due to the norms and traditions that favour men over women, and where constituencies are deeply suspicious about the competence of women, and their suitability in general for political office.
6. In addition to cultural barriers that apply to all women, there are constraints that affect poor women, such as a lack of money for transport and the non-availability of sitting allowances which means that women are not compensated for taking time off from work.
7. Development partners tend to work either with civil society organisations or with local government even though linking the two is important. This is true particularly in relation to LGCDP where strengthening local accountability mechanisms is a priority for development partners, both rights based civil society programmes that strive to hold governments accountable and government service delivery programmes could benefit from such synergies.
8. Despite the progress made in the area of political representation, women's groups stressed the importance of working on the new election system, party constitutions, and representation of women within political party organs.
9. Finally, there was a practically unanimous agreement about the need to work with men. Many held the view that men's traditional attitudes towards women are the main barrier to women's access to political space and positions. Consequently, the key is changing men's behaviour and involving them. The new UNDAF places more emphasis on changing attitudes in order to reach its overall objective of addressing the root causes of vulnerability. The UNDAF framework identifies influencing social attitudes to decrease discrimination and empower vulnerable groups as one of its outcome areas aimed at achieving equality among Nepalese citizens.

There is broad consensus that issues pertaining to the political rights of women have been successfully included in the Constitution-making process, and that substantial progress has been made with respect to legislation and policies. Women benefit from formal, transparent and accountable governance structures. Quotas have been made to break with traditional patterns of political representation both at the national and local level. Nevertheless, the challenges are holding elections at the local level, implementing the ambitious policies and guidelines on inclusion and gender, changing attitudes towards women's political participation, and advancing the representation of women in political parties.

The main question that remains is how the new Constitution will help further women's rights. Key issues in the run up to a decision on the new Constitution are proportional representation and equal citizenship rights. The call by the Women's Caucus of the Constitutional Assembly for proportionality

becomes more complicated by demands for affirmative action by ethnic, caste and other marginalised groups. The new election system at the sub-national level is likely to be based on a combination of proportional representation and affirmative action for a number of formerly excluded groups.

One aspect on which there is almost universal consensus in the Constitutional Assembly is that Federal Nepal will have a three-tier governance structure: central government, state/provincial governments and local governments. The importance of the local government is also emphasised in the Interim Constitution, 2007. Like the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990, this Constitution speaks of ending discrimination and exclusion and creating an inclusive and democratic country with a role for local bodies in the development of the country. So far, little attention has been paid to the local level while the battle has been over control of the central government institutions.

The research questions listed below reflect gaps in knowledge about how numerous new, inclusive institutions and policies affect women's political participation in a political situation in which the fundamental rules of the game are still contested. The questions are intended to offer ideas for further discussion.

- Women have limited representation and even more limited influence in the planning process at the local level. What are the necessary conditions for women's substantive representation in the local planning process?
- Once a new Constitution is agreed on and elections held, how does women's representation change in terms of who participates, what they represent, and how representation take place?
- What will be the impact of women's representation? Will service delivery and governance in general be more responsive to women's needs? Will traditional cultural norms and behaviour change?
- What kinds of strategies and support have been effective in supporting women's voices?
- What are the conditions under which women's social capital through CBO membership strengthens women's political participation?
- What are the conditions under which civil society and political parties strengthen each other?

## Appendix: List of people interviewed

### Asia Foundation:

Sajana Maharjan Amatya, Srijana Chettri

### Asian Development Bank:

Siddhanta Vikram, Suman Subba

### CIDA:

Muni Sharma

### DANIDA:

Lis Kristensen, Maria Nielsen, Yasoda N. Shrestha, Manju Lama

### DFID:

Charlotte Duncan, Karuna Onta

### Forum of Women Journalists and Communicators:

Babita Basnet (group meeting)

### GIZ:

Claudia Polzer, Milu Shree Shakya, Bijaya Rajbaidya Shrestha

### International IDEA:

Leena Rikkila Tamang

### Norwegian Embassy:

Kristine Storholt

### Sahavagi:

Meena Achariya (group meeting)

### Swiss Development Corporation:

Yamuna Ghale

### UNDP:

Jørn Sørensen, Rohan Edrisinha, Hideke Hadziatic

### UN Women:

Durga Khatiwada, Roshani Poudyal, Sharu Joshi Shrestha, Yamun Yadav

Women's Caucus, Constitutional Assembly

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