

NEPAL GENDER BRIEF

– February 2019



INTRODUCTION

The World Bank announced its new Global Strategy for Gender Equality in December 2015 (World Bank, 2015). To support the Global Strategy for Gender Equality, the South Asia region launched its own Regional Gender Action Plan (RGAP). The RGAP calls for coordinated efforts across the Global Practices in three critical areas: human capital; economic empowerment; and voice and agency.

These efforts are particularly pertinent to the Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for Nepal (FY 19–FY23) which informs the World Bank's development priorities and programs for the next five years in Nepal. This CPF has three key focus areas: Public Institutions; Private-Sector Led Jobs and Growth; and Inclusion and Resilience. Gender is a cross-cutting theme across these focus areas and this is informed through a comprehensive Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Analysis.

¹ Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2011

² Global Gender Gap Index Report, 2018. World Economic Forum.
<https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018>

Nepal is at an important development juncture with the establishment of a federal government system and a new constitution in 2015. Nepal has recorded impressive results in poverty reduction (poverty rate declined from 42% in 1996, to 25% in 2011)¹. However, despite progress in reducing the overall poverty rate, wide disparities based on gender, social background, and geography persist. For instance, female-headed households are more likely to suffer from poverty than other households.

Nepal ranks 105 out of 149 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index 2018 conducted by the World Economic Forum,² indicating that there is still a critical need to focus on gender equality across various spheres. This brief presents a summary of the key gender issues in Nepal covering the areas of health, education, economic participation, political empowerment and gender-based violence.

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HEALTH

Nepal has made much progress over time in the reduction of maternal mortality ratio, reducing maternal mortality by almost three quarters between 1990 and 2015.³ Amongst low income groups, the maternal mortality ratio dropped from 796 per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 479 in 2015. Life expectancy at birth for females has also shown a positive trend rising from 63.4 in 2000 to 71.9 years in 2016. However, women's share of the population aged 15 and above living with HIV has registered an increase from 29.5 percent in 2000 to 37.5% in 2016.⁴ Undernutrition has been slower to improve and there are important inequalities in terms of access to services and reproductive, maternal, neonatal and child health, including between rural and urban areas.

EDUCATION

82.9 % of adult women have completed primary education, and enrollment gaps into primary school have been almost closed; from 64.6 in 2000 to 96.2% of girls in 2016. However, only 30.7% of women have completed a secondary education. Female students tend to drop out earlier than male students because education systems often do not consider the needs of adolescent girls but also because of community social norms that restrict older girls' access to education.⁵ There has been some notable progress made on literacy, as well as some issues of equity and access but still, as of 2018, only 48.8% of women in Nepal are literate as compared to 71.7% of males.

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

Compared to other South Asian countries, Nepal has high rates of female labor force participation: 85.4% of women are in the labor force, though there is still a severe gender wage gap in earned income. This high rate of female labor force participation is a result of high male migration and may mask other issues such as low school enrolment for girls or delayed retirement for older women. In Nepal, women's work in agriculture is mostly informal, insecure, or low-paid (CBS, 2015). Women and marginalized groups are predominantly employed in the agriculture sector making them more vulnerable to food insecurity and its adverse effects. Seventy-six % of all households in Nepal are agricultural households. While land ownership is a critical component for agricultural households, women and Dalits⁶ are also less likely than caste men to own land⁷ and they do not always have economic rights over their owned land (FAO Gender and Land Rights Database). Thus, Dalit women face double marginalization in the agriculture sector, as men tend to dominate the managerial and professional sectors (CBS, 2015).

In Nepal, laws and policies that guarantee equal rights are not implemented effectively. The Constitution grants right to obtain citizenship by identity of either father or mother but it is still difficult for a single mother to pass her citizenship to her child or to her spouse. There are no laws that mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value, or that mandates nondiscrimination based on gender in employment, hiring or promotions (Women Business and the Law Data, 2018). This legal context makes it all the more challenging for women to access high quality jobs and achieve economic empowerment through their participation in the labor force.

3 https://www.unicef.org/health/files/Nepal_PEA_-_design_version_28May15.pdf

4 World Development Indicators, World Bank, 2018

5 UNESCO Report: Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/kathmandu/education/projects/joint-programme-koica>

6 Approximately 15% of hill groups and 44% of Madhesis are landless (CBS, 2015)

7 FAO Gender and Land Rights Database; Quisumbing, Kumar, & Behrman, 2017



POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

There has been a significant increase in the representation of women at local levels of government, although stronger efforts are needed to promote women's participation in the governance process. Nepal's transition to a federal structure has created new opportunities for women's increased engagement in political life. The 2017 local government elections resulted in the election of women to 41% of positions (or 14,352 women). This success can be attributed in part to the principles of equality, equity and

nondiscrimination and participation that are explicitly included in the 2015 Constitution, as well as due to mandates imposed by the Election Commission that required 40% of nominees in the 2017 election be women. Men, however, continue to hold the majority of positions at all levels of government in Nepal. Women account for only 18 mayors (out of 753) and 64 ward chairs (out of 6,742). As of 2018, there were 32.7% of women in parliament, though there were only 3.7% of ministerial positions occupied by women (Global Gender Gap Index, 2018).

Newly-elected women do not receive the same level of exposure and training on their roles and have to balance unpaid domestic work with their careers. This makes it challenging for them to understand and fulfill mandates.⁸ Recent research points to several capacity issues such as balancing time, understanding and fulfilling mandates, maneuvering the socio-cultural environment within which they have to operate, and infrastructure limitations that impact women differently than they do men (Asia Foundation, 2018). Additional efforts are crucial to enhance the participation of women in political life. Women also need exposure on how to mitigate possible backlash towards the new system that ensures their participation. The autonomy given to sub-national governments (SNGs) may result in either the adoption of inclusive policies or alternatively may create opportunities to resist or counteract those very policy initiatives that are pro-inclusion. Legal provisions such as election quotas have resulted in an increase of elected women than in previous



Source: <https://womendeliver.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Nepal-Womens-Political-Participation-Political-Parties-September-2013-.jpg>

decades, but women are still significantly underrepresented in key positions.

Similarly, the decision on the availability of services for women and other socially marginalized groups may differ according to the availability of financial resources, priorities of SNGs, strength of women/civil society advocacy, and political allies. The Local Government Operation Act 2074 (2017) outlines functions of municipalities, which includes gender equality and inclusion, responsibilities and planning processes. However, there needs to be further clarity on how such provisions will be implemented in practice. At the SNG level, officials need to be sensitized and trained on how to manage resources that focus on the needs and priorities of women and the marginalized. Whilst the changes to the enabling environment are encouraging, implementation of policies and regulations remain weak and there is limited institutional capacity on the ground.

⁸ Asia Foundation, Nepal's Locally Elected Women Representatives: Exploratory Study of Needs and Capacity, 2018. Retrieved at: <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/nepals-locally-elected-representatives-exploratory-study-of-needs-and-capacity-assessment/>

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

In Nepal, GBV is the leading cause of violence-related deaths. In 2017, 149 people were killed as a result of GBV of which 140 were women. According to the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2016, 23% of women have reported experiencing physical violence and 7% of women aged 15-49 have experienced sexual violence. Despite some legislation to address GBV, there remain issues of weak capacity, inadequate response mechanisms and inconsistent implementation of policies.⁹ Women who are employed are more likely to experience violence than women who are not employed; over 50 percent of Nepalese women have experienced sexual harassment at work (Solotaroff & Pande, 2014).

In Nepal, a 2012 GBV study (Nepal Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, 2012) revealed that 61.3 percent of women who had experienced violence had not shared their experiences with anyone. Very few women reported seeking help from institutions such as the police, the health system, and NGOs. Early marriage is also prevalent in Nepal which has one of the highest rates (for both girls and boys) in Asia. Although the legal age of union for both sexes is 20, more than a third of young women aged 20-24 report that they were married by the age of 18, and just over one in ten by 15 (CBS, 2015).

Whilst there has been some progress in legislation to address GBV, violence against women continues to be widespread, with weak implementation of existing policies, nonfunctional machineries and inadequate response mechanisms.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Findings from the GESI assessment highlight challenges that marginalized groups in Nepal face daily. It is evident that they are particularly disadvantaged with regards to participation in governance, accessing services, employment, and asset ownership. They also exhibit lower health and education outcomes. The findings of this analysis are reflected in the new CPF and will be incorporated into dialogue with clients at the country level —which will go a long way towards ensuring that the inequalities faced by women, minority ethnic and caste groups, sexual minorities, and others will be specifically targeted by forthcoming World Bank operations.

For more information, please visit:

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nepal>

⁹ The Nepal Peace Monitor Annual Review 2017, Nepal Monitor

¹⁰ The Nepal Peace Monitor Annual Review 2017, Nepal Monitor

GENDER REFLECTED IN NEPAL'S NEW CPF

(AS INFORMED BY THE GESI ANALYSIS)

GENDER IN NEPAL'S NEW CPF

PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

1. Enhancing women's access to public services; increasing accountability from service providers

PRIVATE SECTOR-LED JOBS AND GROWTH

1. Expanding employment opportunities for women
2. Improving technical and vocational skills
3. Reducing discriminatory practices in the workplace

INCLUSION AND RESILIENCE

1. Reducing women and girls' vulnerabilities to gender-based violence, health shocks and natural disasters

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