

Inclusive Democracy: Navigating Real-world Challenges and Implementing Equitable Governance.

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Nepal constitutionally embraces a federal republic democratic (as per the Constitution of Nepal 2015). The constitution envisions equality and social inclusion as one of the major goals for creating a democratic and just society. To strengthen this nascent democracy inclusivity should be promoted, as the aim of inclusive democracy is to create a society determined by the people themselves. *Takis Fotopoulos* has conceptualized that, "*Inclusive democracy is a new conception of democracy, which, using as a starting point the classical definition of it, expresses democracy in terms of direct political democracy, economic democracy (beyond the confines of the market economy and state planning), as well as democracy in the social realm and ecological democracy*"¹ Diverging from the notion of concentrated power, inclusive democracy underscores the principle of equitable power distribution as potentially the sole remedy for the current crisis. The root cause of the ongoing crisis lies in the concentration of power lying upon the upheld groups of individuals in varying manifestations. To effectively address this crisis, the imperative is an embrace of inclusive democracy. It signifies the eradication of institutionalized power concentration in all its facets, fostering conditions for the equitable distribution of political, economic, and other forms of power.

Nepal is a country of diverse ethnic and regional composition, and ensuring equal representation and participation for all communities in the democratic process becomes challenging, particularly when specific groups experience a sense of marginalization. The National Population and Housing Census of 2011 has identified 126 caste and ethnic communities and 123 languages and dialects in Nepal.² The marginalized groups are in dire need of integration into a broader framework of governance policies, systems, and practices.

¹Fotopoulos 2001

² National Population and Housing Census (National Report) (2011). Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission Secretariat, Central Bureau of Statistics. Kathmandu, Nepal.

The principles of inclusive democracy within a federal state should be translated into practical action through a comprehensive strategy aimed at enhancing service delivery on two fronts ensuring efficient services to reach marginalized and excluded groups, and empowering these communities to advocate for their needs. It is imperative to integrate the diverse population seamlessly into the state mechanism.

The harsh reality of Nepal is that for centuries, some social groups have received much better opportunities than compared to marginalized groups. Such opportunities are harnessed based on gender, caste, and ethnicity-based practices. The groups facing the greatest disadvantages include women, Dalits, indigenous ethnic communities, Madhesis, and other individuals from indigenous nationalities and those residing in remote areas. The multifaceted exclusion experienced by citizens of Nepal has ultimately perpetuated unequal developmental outcomes through formal or informal discrimination across all societal echelons.³

The government of Nepal has attempted to incorporate policies and programs that target the well-being and development of the often unrepresented groups but those trivial actions have failed to accommodate and prioritize inclusive democracy. The effectiveness of integrating the state policy into tangible reality hinges on the existence of appropriate institutional arrangements and their actual impact on the intended target groups.

The principles of Inclusive Democracy have been overlooked in practical implementation and there is a need to bring about substantial and meaningful transformations, ensuring the voices of the Unheard are Heard and well represented.

³Sigdel, S. and Sharma S.S (2013 December). Inclusive governance in Nepal (Policy Brief). Enabling State Policy and UKaid.