

Gender Inclusion in Local Governance: Lessons from Successful Initiatives: Examining best practices for promoting gender equality and representation in decentralized decision-making.

Nepal declared its transition from a unitary to a federal system in 2065 by marking a significant shift in its governance paradigm in 2072 with the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal 2072 B.S. The introduction of federalism brought about many implementation challenges, some significant positive outcomes and crucial consequences and lessons. This research focuses on gender inclusion in local governance and the analysis spans implementation challenges, controversies, case laws, and administrative behaviour in an effort to contribute to the broader discourse on inclusive democracy.

Nepal's commitment to gender inclusion encounters pragmatic hurdles in implementation. Despite various constitutional provisions, the translation of gender-inclusive policies into practice faces obstacles as the variations in the devolution of powers across provinces contribute to an uneven execution of gender-related initiatives. Additionally, disparities in resource allocation challenge the ability of local governments to effectively implement gender-inclusive programs, highlighting the necessity for an equitable distribution framework. Nepal has implemented the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) strategy from 2021- 2023 under the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA). UNDP supported the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA) to develop a guideline to implement the Innovative Partnership Fund and the Strategy on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion. Now being used by over 400 local bodies, the Strategy is effectively promoting inclusion in the planning, monitoring and reporting of the local governments.

The government of Nepal has implemented several policies and practices to promote gender equality in local governance. Some of the policies are that quota systems reserve a percentage of seats for women, ensuring their representation. The inclusion of Women for representation has ensured 33.1% of Women Members of Parliament in the Federal Parliament, while the provincial and local assemblies have 36.3%, and 41% Women MPs, respectively. Despite the implementation of the quota system to ensure women's representation in local governance bodies several issues such as tokenism, lack of genuine empowerment, and resistance from traditional power structures hinder the full integration of women into decision-making processes.

Capacity-building initiatives to empower women leaders through training programs. Nepal segregates and allocates its budgets under gender-responsive and gender-neutral budgets which seems a great initiative to achieve GESI as well as for the empowerment of women. However, it has not been able to provide concrete evidence of how the allocated budgets are being utilized for the achievement of the goals.

In navigating the intricate tapestry of federalism, Nepal stands at the crossroads of gender inclusion and decentralization. With the efforts of the Government, the Gender Development Index of Nepal has reached 0.692. However, the deep-rooted socio-cultural norms often impede women's active participation in local governance. Effective implementation of the strategies for addressing and overcoming these barriers, including community awareness programs, is essential to fostering a more inclusive political environment. Hence, the proper execution, continuous dialogue, adaptation, and collaborative efforts, Nepal can chart a course towards a more gender-inclusive and participatory democracy within its federal structure.

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