

Social Inclusion Practices in Local Governance in Nepal

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Abstract

This article highlights the social inclusion practices in the local election in Nepal. The concept of social inclusion becoming a major national concern in Nepal during the past 20 years. The paper is based on secondary data. It used meta-analysis of government reports, historical documents, statistics, and laws. Women, Indigenous peoples (adibashi janajati), Tarai peoples (madhesi), and occupational caste groups (dalits), who have historically been shut out of social and political life and denied access to social services, have all vigorously brought attention to this issue. The government of Nepal has promised and plans to make the state and society inclusive in response to the ongoing social movement of the excluded groups. Along with numerous national laws, policies, national plans, and development initiatives, their promises and plans are outlined in the constitution. Political debates, scholarly discussions, media coverage, and every day public discourse all frequently touch on social inclusion and exclusion. However, social inclusion and exclusion in Nepal continue to be unresolved issues. The 2015 Constitution of Nepal defines the nation as an inclusive state with provisions to ensure equal access to opportunities and resources for all. The Local Self-Governance Act (LSGA) of 1999 decentralized authority to promote people's participation in local governance. These are just a few of the initiatives Nepal has taken to improve social inclusion and local governance. The number of elected women representatives has slightly increased in the local elections 2022, about 14,402 women were elected to local units. Minorities communities, single women, and Dalits were participated accordingly in local election. To make Nepal an inclusive society and a state, respect and acknowledge social diversity, group identities, and meaningfully represent the excluded groups in state politics.

Keywords: Social Inclusion, Local Governance, Local Election, Women Minorities.

1. Introduction

Nepal's rich cultural diversity, characterized by racial, ethnic, and religious differences, is evident in its the 2021 national census identified 142 caste and ethnic communities, with a predominantly Hindu with 80 percent of the population being and 10 percent Buddhists, while the remainder is composed of Kirants, Muslims, Christians, Jains, and other minority religious groups population.

The country has over 125 language-speaking groups, making it a mosaic society with diverse ethnicities, faiths, and cultures [1]. Universal discrimination affects women from diverse cultural and Indo-Aryan groups, hindering their recognition and contributions. Studies since 1976 focus on social and economic status, but lack

women's experiences [2].

The Nepali government's Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) aimed to reduce poverty from 42% to 32%, but failed to involve women, Madhesi, Dalits, and other marginalized communities in planning and programming. The plan failed to address displacement of indigenous communities, impacting their economic life, traditional knowledge, skills, technology, beliefs, and ethnic identity. Critics criticized the focus on "Growth with Social Justice and Equity". Nepal's social exclusion, cultural discrimination, economic exploitation, and political oppression have led to impoverishment and marginalization of indigenous communities. The Panchayat regime (1960-1990) aimed to modernize Nepal and attain national

integration, promoted ethnic homogenization, while the 1990 multiparty democracy highlighted injustices. The 1991 constitution declared Nepal a multi-ethnic, multicultural state, but prohibited local languages in official business, perpetuating untouchability and gender inequality [3].

The Nepali state's political and service structures exhibit a deficit in representation for marginalized groups including indigenous peoples, women, Madhesis, and Dalits. Although a multi-party democratic system was instituted in 1990, traditional cultural norms continue to limit their rights. These groups are advocating for greater involvement in policy formulation and a state restructuring that prioritizes inclusivity, participation, and representation, aligning with the stated commitments of Nepali political parties to establish a federal democratic republic and an inclusive democracy. Nepal has adopted a federal system under its 2015 Constitution, which promotes inclusive governance through elements such as a competitive multi-party democracy, civil liberties, fundamental rights, human rights, adult suffrage, regular elections, press freedom, and an independent judiciary, as noted by [4].

Nepal's constitutional history includes mandates for women's participation in political mechanisms, including a 5% female parliamentary candidate. The 2054 B.S. local election mandated 20% female representation, and the 2072 B.S. Constitution requires 33% female representation in the legislative parliament. Local governments manage 22 exclusive functions, with federal law further expanding these authority [5].

The 2015 Nepalese Constitution established local governments with specific duties for social, political, economic, and development activities. Despite rapid social and political changes, such as the 2008 constituent assembly election, marginalized groups like indigenous peoples, women, and Dalits remain underserved. The new government faces challenges in fulfilling basic needs, maintaining law and order, rehabilitating displaced people, and reconstructing infrastructure [6].

2. Objectives

This article explores national and international policies and practices related to social inclusion and gender in Nepal's constitution, local elections, and local governance.

3. Method and Materials

This study uses meta-analysis and desk reviews of policy acts, journal papers, and articles from Nepal Administrative Staff College, UN Women, and National Women Commission (NWC) to examine political and social policies, local governance performance, and election trends, focusing on gender mainstreaming agenda.

4. Discussion about Social Inclusion Practices in Various Approaches

Rene Lenoir's term "social exclusion" emerged in the 1970s as a response to social disintegration and welfare state crises. It has multiple meanings and is contested across social science, political

ideologies, and national discourses. Local governance aims to provide equitable public services, support democratic participation, and improve quality of life. It transfers authority, responsibility, power, resources, and accountability from central to regional and local levels [7].

Social inclusion refers to opportunities denied to communities due to factors like caste, gender, ethnicity, genetics, religion, age, and HIV status. Social exclusion, originating in Europe, in the early 1970s refers to long-term unemployment and immigrant integration issues. In the 1980s, it was used to describe social problems resulting from economic and welfare state crises [8].

The World Bank 1992 highlights governance as managing economic and social resources for development. However, global outcomes are not satisfactory, with 475 million people in Asian regions lacking basic services. Nepal's local governance mechanisms are failing, leading to poor rural development activities and over 7 million people living below poverty line [9].

The discusses decentralization as a theoretical perspective on local governance and rural development. It explains that decentralization shifts power from central governments, enabling more efficient provision of public goods and services at the local level. An effective decentralized system relies on local authorities fulfilling their jurisdictional roles efficiently, guided by principles of closer representation and citizen choice in public services. Citizen-centered local governance is built on responsiveness, responsibility, and accountability, aiming to empower individuals through a rights-based development approach and grassroots accountability. Legal and institutional reforms are identified as necessary to facilitate local governance.

Social exclusion, a term coined in the 1980s, refers to social problems caused by economic and welfare state crises. In Nepal, after democracy was restored in 1990, complaints of marginalized groups gained traction, but ethnic and indigenous nationalities were not prioritized due to power struggles [10]. Decentralization and local governance practices have been crucial since then, requiring greater citizen involvement in policy-making and public services [11].

The Local Self-Governance Act 1999 and the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 establish a robust local self-governance system, focusing on women, children, and marginalized groups [12]. The 2015 constitution introduced new powers and jurisdictions, increased transparency, and encouraged private sector participation. It emphasized responsible governance principles, service delivery, legitimacy, and accountability, and resource allocation for desired results.

To address political marginalization and promote inclusive development, holding local elections is crucial. The constitution requires at least one woman to be nominated by each political party for head or deputy head positions, encouraging women's involvement in public life. This election will also close a long-

standing local political gap, which has persisted for nearly 20 years. The Local Self-Governance Act, which sought to grant local governments more autonomy, was overthrown during this time, leading to civil servants taking on administrative and developmental duties.

Political parties' collusive tendencies in Nepal's governance experiment led to nepotism, lack of transparency, and informal decision-making, weakening formal governance processes and fostering corruption. Elections were held after geographical division, covering general election program, electoral system, candidate qualifications, nomination process, independent candidates, polling station management, and proxy voting (Acts, Regulations, and Directives) [13].

5. Data Presentation and Discussion

5.1. Participation of Women in Nepal's Politics

The Local Government Operation Act, 2074, effective since October 15, 2017, establishes a legal framework for Nepal's newly-formed local government, based on Article 296(1) of the 2015 Constitution. It outlines authorities, duties, and responsibilities, and divides states into municipalities. The Act clarifies municipalities' rights to form local laws and regulations for environmental protection, pollution control, solid waste management, drinking water supply, and alternative energy projects [14].

Nepali women have been fighting over a century for equality and political participation, but their participation in political, social, and economic freedoms is not well documented. Women have made significant contributions to Nepali literature, art, and politics, but few have been documented in official records. Queen Rajendra Laxmi in the unification of Nepal between 1777 and 1785, Mrs. Kamala Kunwar, and Mrs. Yogmaya Neupane played significant roles in the unification of Nepal, the Nepal-Anglo War, the Dharma Rajya Movement, and the All-Nepal Women's Association.

These women resisted British invasion attempts and led demonstrations against discriminatory practices, advocating for "good governance. Yogmaya Neupane (1867–1941) was the first to directly engage and confront the ruling elite for women's rights. Neupane led demonstrations against discriminatory practices and called for Dharma Rajya, which in the religious state of the day meant "good governance. Thapa (2012) contends that while numerous women have made contributions to Nepali literature, art, and politics—including Ambalika Devi, Lok Priya Devi, Chandrakala Devi, Mangaladevi, and Divya Koirala—very few of these contributions have been documented in official records [15].

Yogmaya, a revolutionary, faced opposition from the ruling class for her three marriages during a time when widow marriage was considered unforgivable. She petitioned Prime Ministers for alms and dharma-rajya, but was detained and imprisoned. Yogmaya petitioned Prime Ministers Bir Shumsher, Chandra Shumsher, and Juddha Shumsher [16].

Her demands were not fulfilled, despite Prime Minister Juddha

Shumsher's assurances to the contrary. In order to burden the ruler's conscience with the deaths, Yogmaya and her 204 supporters planned mass immolation. Despite her political views, Yogmaya was the first woman in Nepal to receive a jail sentence. Nepal has experienced sociopolitical changes over the past 20 years, largely attributed to women. Despite their significant contributions, Nepali women's contributions have not been well documented [17,18].

The Nepalese Constitution aims to foster a prosperous, just, and non-discriminatory society through proportional inclusion and public participation. Its preamble explicitly prohibits all forms of discrimination and oppression. Article 38 grants women specific rights, including equal rights and special opportunities based on positive discrimination and proportional inclusion, along with the right to compensation and protection from violence. Article 18 further ensures special legal provisions for the protection, empowerment, and development of various disadvantaged groups, including women from socially or culturally backward backgrounds, Dalits, indigenous people, minorities, Madhesis, Tharus, Muslims, the oppressed class, Pichhada, the marginalized, children, senior citizens, gender and sexual minorities, people with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged Khas Arya (Article 18).

Nepal's national policies, including the 15th plan, national gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) policy, and the Local Government Operation Act, 2017, incorporate GESI provisions. The 15th plan (2019/20-2023/24), prioritizes institutionalizing Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) across all governmental levels. Nepal's 16th Plan (2024/25-2028/29) marks a significant development by extensively addressing the needs of sexual and gender minorities (SGMs).

It targets structural transformation for gender equality and social justice, improved labor market equality, and the elimination of harmful practices affecting SGMs. Key objectives include the identification and classification of SGMs, integrating their concerns into Sustainable Development Goals under the "Leave No One Behind" approach, and ensuring their participation in policy formulation. The plan also outlines efforts in balanced development, improved judicial access, positive discrimination, and entrepreneurship promotion for SGMs, with an appeal for resources from government, donors, and the UN (NASC, 2022).

Nepal's 2015 Constitution established a federal republic with a three-tier governance system (federal, provincial, and local) aimed at promoting economic prosperity and social justice. Local governments are tasked with public service management and policy representation for citizens. The constitution includes progressive provisions for excluded groups, such as women and Dalits, emphasizing the importance of their meaningful participation in policymaking to ensure inclusive governance and support goals like the Sustainable Development Goals [19].

6. Women's Participation in Local Election

Data on women's representation in elections in Nepal shows varying trends: In the 1959 parliamentary election, six women

candidates lost while 109 men were elected. The 1986 Rastriya Panchayat Election saw three women elected out of 140 members. By 1991, only 3.4% (seven) of 205 legislative representatives were female. In 1999, 19.4% (806) of 4146 local elected representatives were women, and 5.85% (12) of 205 parliament members were women. In the 2008 Constituent Assembly, 30 out of 601 members were female. In the 2013 Constituent Assembly, 4.1% (ten) of 240 elected candidates were female.

6.1. Local Election 2017 and 2022

Compared to the number of female representatives who won in the 2017 elections, the percentage of female candidates in 2022 was

even lower. In the May local elections, there were substantially fewer female candidates than male candidates, according to an Election Commission report. Only 37.84 percent (57,705) of the 152,465 applicants for 35,221 positions across 753 local units were female. Candidates for the two required female ward members are included in the number of women. Approximately 41% (14,352) of the local representatives elected in the 2017 elections were female. In 2022, there were even fewer female candidates than the number of female representatives elected in 2017.

6.2. Candidate Nomination in The Local Elections 2022

Positions	Total	Women (N)	Women Percent (%)
Mayor	3494	266	7.61
Chair	3387	198	5.84
Deputy mayor	2156	1549	71.84
Vice-chair	2401	1788	74.46
Ward chair	35255	1050	2.97
Women member	26448	26448	100
Dalit women member	23843	23843	100
Ward member	55471	2563	4.62
Nepal	152455	57705	37.85

Source: Local Election Results, 2022

The Local Elections Act's Section 17(4) mandates that women hold at least 50% of the positions of chairman, vice chairman, and head or deputy head of a party. This clause, however, does not apply when a party nominates just one candidate, which lowers the

representation of women. This shows that the parties have relied on legal provisions to encourage women's participation rather than upholding the spirit of the constitution regarding women's reservations.

Elected Positions	Local level election, 2017		Local level election, 2022	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
President of District co-ordination committee	2	75	4	73
Vice-President of District co-ordination committee	46	31	32	45
Mayor/Chairman of Local Level	18	735	25	728
Deputy mayor/Vice-Chairman	700	53	568	185
Ward Chair	61	6682	67	6676

Source: Compiled from Election Results, 2017 and 2022

There are now somewhat more elected female representatives. 14,402 women were chosen to serve in local units in the 2022 elections. With 25 women elected to chief positions, there are now slightly more women in chief positions. In the 2017 elections, the figure was 18. Nevertheless, with 564 women elected to the positions in 2022, there are now fewer female deputies. During the 2017 elections, this figure was 700 [20].

7. Inclusion of Endangered Community in Local Election

In Nepal, approximately 700,000 indigenous women experience disabilities and lack proportional representation in state structures. For example, indigenous people constitute 16.07% of civil service

workers, with women making up only 4.38% of this group. Political party central committees also show significant underrepresentation, with only 11 indigenous women on the UML's 202-member committee and three on the Nepali Congress's 80-member committee. Ethnic and linguistic minorities are also poorly represented in elected office and face challenges participating in the electoral process due to a lack of awareness of their rights and a failure by political parties to integrate them into national development and governance, hindering their ability to exercise constitutional rights [21].

Nepal officially recognizes 125 ethnic groups, with 98 designated as minority castes (representing less than 0.5% of the total population). Ten of these, including the Kusunda and Hayu, are classified as endangered [22]. The text posits that adequate representation for endangered castes is challenging when minority castes, in general, are underrepresented in positions of authority. Examples are provided of limited local government representation for the Kusunda community and several members of the Hayu community in recent elections.

The document examines the demographic and political representation of endangered communities in Nepal, such as the Kisan, Meche, Lepcha, Raji, Kuswadia, Raute, Surel, and Bankariya. It highlights disparities in representation, noting the Kisan com-

munity in Jhapa lacks elected officials, while the Meche and Raji communities have limited representation.

The Kuswadia's nomadic lifestyle and the Raute community's lack of citizenship impede their political participation. The Surel community has seen one member join a political party, and the Bankariya population is unconfirmed. Indigenous peoples constitute 35.7% of Nepal's population, yet the low representation of minority and endangered groups, particularly women, in government is criticized as a failure to meet constitutional and international social inclusion mandates.

The local election 2022 showed that some of the person elected minority and endangered communities.

Elected Endangered Community Candidates in Local Level Election 2079				
SN	Name	Position	Representing Party	Name of local body
1	Ananta Hayu	Ward Chairperson	CPN UML	Katari Municipality
2	Ram Bahadur Hayu	Member	NC	Ramechhap-7
3	Khem Bahadur Rai Hayu	Member	CPN UML	Kamalamai Municipality-3
4	Laxmi Kumari Hayu	Member	CPN UML	Golanjor Rural Municipality
5	Pashupati Sunuwar (Surel)	Woman Member	CPN UML	Gaurishankar Rural Municipality-5
6	Khadga Bahadur Raji	Member	CPN UML	Bhajani Municipality-5
7	Bhim Bahaddur Raji	Member	CPN UML	Bhajani Municipality-9
8	Rajkumar Lopcha	Ward Chairperson	CPN UML	Rong Rural Municipality-4
9	Akash Lopcha	Member	CPN UML	Municipality-5
10	Vishu Lal Meche	Member	CPN UML	Mechinagar Municipality-12
Elected Dalits as Municipal Heads of Local Bodies in Local Level Election 2079				
	Dev Kumar Nepali	Mayor	CPN UML	Dhorpatan Municipality
	Bechan Das	Mayor	CPN UML	Bidreha Municipality
	Pushpa Badi	Mayor	CPN(Maoist Center)	Chaurjahari Municipality
	Dhan Bahadur BK	Chairperson	CPN (Maoist Center)	Tarakhola Rural Municipality
	Sher Singh Parki	Chairperson	CPN (Maoist Center)	Alital Rural Municipality
	Dhung Raj Bishwokarma	Chairperson	CPN (Maoist Center)	Tapli Rural Municipality
	Khadka BK	Chairperson	CPN (Maoist Center)	Chaukune Rural Municipality
	Dambar Bahadur BK	Chairperson	CPN (Maoist Center)	Khajura Rural Municipality
	Jhag Bahadur Bishwokarma	Chairperson	CPN UML	Sarumarani Rural Municipality

Source: Local Election,2022

8. Single Woman

A single woman is defined by widowhood, age 35+, divorce, separation without divorce, or abandonment. Single women face issues including geographical inequality, lack of education, ignorance of rights, financial burdens, social discrimination, familial rejection, and limited access to justice. In the 2022 local elections, 86 single women were elected from various political parties (UML: 24, NC: 52, Maoist: 9, CPN-S: 1).

Nepal has 498,606 widows, with 9,000 widowed during conflict, and 146 widows were elected in the 2074 B.S. local elections. National plans and census data address unmarried women, and a protection fund exists for impoverished single women.

A total of 146 widows were elected to various positions in the local election held in 2074 B.S. The 10/11th Five-Year and Interim Plans for Nepal address the issue of unmarried women. Data on unmarried women has been gathered since the National Census in 2068 B.S. For underprivileged and impoverished single women,

a single women's protection service fund has been established in collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens. Single Women elected Positions.

Single Women Elected Positions		
SN	Post	No of Seats
1	Vice Chairperson	13
2	Deputy Mayor	8
3	Ward Chairperson	1
4	Member	64
5	Total	86
Source: Local election, 2022.		

Unmarried women have been elected to various political positions across multiple provinces in Nepal. Province One saw the highest number with 20 elected officials, including ward members, deputy mayors, and vice-chairpersons of rural municipalities. Madhesh Province elected five women, Bagmati Province elected five, Gandaki Province elected 14, Lumbini Province elected 14, and Karnali Province elected seven. Far Western Province reported one elected woman. The positions held include ward members, deputy mayors, ward presidents, and vice-chairpersons.

face significant disadvantages across political, social, cultural, educational, and economic spheres. Untouchability remains prevalent, with Dalit women disproportionately affected by caste discrimination. Between Kartik 2077 and Ashoj 2078 B.S., 61.11% of recorded caste discrimination and untouchability incidents targeted Dalit women. The Local Level Election Act, 2073 B.S., mandates the election of at least one Dalit woman ward member in each of Nepal's 6,743 wards, ensuring a minimum representation of Dalit women in local governance.

9. Dalit Women

Dalit women, comprising 15% of Nepal's female population,

Elected Dalit Women (mandatory positions) in Local Level Election 2079 B.S.

SN	Parties	Number seats
1	Nepali Congress	2554
2	Nepal Communist Party (UML)	2295
3	CPN(Maoist)	973
4	Janata Samajbadi Party	296
5	CPN-S	180
6	LO Sa PA	113
7	RPP	54
Source: Local election,2022		

The Constitution states that a proportional representation system will be implemented in all State structures, along with other laws and commitments pertaining to inclusion and the proportional system. However, the Dalit community lags far behind, according to the results of the local level member election in 2079 B.S. In other words, this community has only gained roughly 1% of the key positions in this. In addition, women are in worse shape. Nine

members of the Dalit community were elected to municipal deputy positions, but none of them were women. Nevertheless, out of the 15 Dalits elected to deputies, 11 were women. Also, this data supports the idea that women are only 'alternative' to men.

Elected Dalit Candidates in Municipal Deputy position in local election 2079 B.S.

SN	Parties	Number seats
1	Nepali Congress	2554
2	Nepal Communist Party (UML)	2295
3	CPN(Maoist)	973
4	Janata Samajbadi Party	296
5	CPN-S	180

6	LO Sa PA	113
7	RPP	54
Source: Local election,2022		

The exact overall number of victorious candidates from various communities cannot be determined. Many women elected, even among the total, live in extreme poverty. According to the Election Commission, four women were elected ward heads, three as presidents, 79 as deputies, 73 as vice-chairpersons, one as ward chairperson, and 3% as other members. Major parties' female membership percentages, excluding required positions, were: Congress 2.98%, UML 3.45%, Maoist 2.83%, CPN (Unified Socialist) 4.25%, and Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) 2.60% (NWC, 2022).

10. Discussion and Conclusions

The concept of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in Nepal emerged from activism in the 1970s, evolving into demands for equal rights and proportional representation, particularly after the restoration of democracy in 2046 B.S. The ensuing liberal political climate enabled various minority groups, including women, to articulate their rights. Nepal's Constitution of 2072 B.S. (2015) solidified principles of proportionality, inclusivity, and participation, making GESI a cornerstone for all state policies. Prior to this, the Interim Constitution of 2063 B.S. had already called for state restructuring based on proportional inclusion. The 2015 Constitution guarantees equality and allows for special provisions for disadvantaged communities, including women, Dalits, and various ethnic and minority groups. Electoral laws, such as the Local Level Election Act, 2073 B.S., mandate significant women's representation in local government positions, requiring 50% nominations for leadership roles and encouraging female candidates for ward presidencies. Directives for the 2079 B.S. local elections further reinforced gender and social inclusivity in candidate nominations and election management.

In the municipal election, 135,409 candidates ran for 35,221 positions. Of them, 55,719 were female, and 14,466 of them were successful in different roles. This is the data from the most recent local election. In this election, 135,409 candidates ran for 35,221 positions. Of them, 55,719 were female, and 14,466 of them were successful in different roles. Women have thus been elected to 25 out of 753 local levels as mayors or chairs, and 568 of them have been elected deputy mayors or vice chairs. Likewise, only 442 women were elected to other positions when 69 women were elected as ward chairs. In the same way, 6620 Dalit women and 6742 women were elected as women members. In 123 positions, Dalit women did not run for office, and one ward has an open position as a result of the lack of female candidates.

On the one hand, political parties manipulated the requirement that women run for mayor or chairperson or deputy or vice-chairperson by claiming political cooperation, understanding, or partnership. However, women's opportunities were limited to "deputy" positions if they were required by law to run for either of

these two positions. The percentage of women elected to positions as head of the municipality for political parties such as Congress, UML, Maoist, JSP, CPN-(S), and LSP was 4.43%; however, this percentage is 77.47% for deputy mayors and vice chairs.

Women were elected 71.95 percent as ward vice-presidents, and 2.60 percent were elected as ward presidents. This demonstrates unequivocally that women have been limited to "deputy."

Remember that the definition of deputy is "a prefix indicating minimal, assistance expression" according to the Nepali Comprehensive Dictionary. In reality, though, the deputy position is only required when the head is not present, unless there are specific legal requirements. For this reason, women in particular should either exert pressure to advance to executive or main positions or seek to give deputy positions more authority.

It was demonstrated by the 2079 B.S. local level member election. In particular, leaders of political parties seriously considered ways to avoid placing women in leadership roles. For instance, it is stated in the Local Level Election Act, 2073 B.S. that candidates running for both mayor and deputy should not be the same gender. Making sure that two people of two different genders are elected to these two distinct positions is the goal of this. But because the political parties interpreted this clause to suit their own agendas, they claimed that it only applied to candidates from the same party and not to those from other parties. As a result, men were elected to both of these positions.

11. Conclusions

Nepal's decentralization efforts since 1990 have aimed to increase local participation in development, guided by the Local Self Governance Act 1999. However, challenges like the absence of elected bodies, limited stakeholder capacity, and normatively designed programs have hindered responsiveness, responsibility, and accountability in local governance. The 2015 constitution established 744 local levels with redefined jurisdictions and increased stakeholder involvement in project planning and implementation.

While the constitution mandates women's participation in state agencies, societal patriarchal structures and androcentric worldviews present obstacles. Electoral representation is crucial for female political leadership, though the 2017 local elections saw only 18 women elected as Deputy Mayors/Chairs out of 753 positions, highlighting a lack of female representation within political parties and government. Combining women's leadership with social justice, capability development, institutional promotion, and policy reforms is suggested as a beneficial approach [23-33].

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