

**Workforce diversity and reservation policy in Nepal:
A strategic approach to strengthening women's voice
and visibility in formal employment sector**

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Preface

As the ‘Future of Work’ is being discussed around the world, women continue to be the most under-utilised and potentially game-changing factor for fair and prosperous economic growth. Recent research shows that a reduction in the gap in participation rates between men and women by 25 per cent has the potential to increase the GDP in Asia Pacific by as much as US\$ 3.2 trillion. A recent report by the International Labour Organization and Gallup confirmed that the majority of women and men worldwide would prefer that women work in paid jobs and find it perfectly acceptable for women to have paid work outside of the home. Why then does female labour force participation still lag behind that of males in all countries of the region?

To examine the opportunities and challenges of the future at work for women, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Australian Government’s Department of Jobs and Small Business have partnered in a project called “Women and the Future of Work in Asia and the Pacific”.

The following paper was part of a competitive ‘call for proposals’ under this project. It will be one contribution into the ILO’s forthcoming ‘Women and the Future of Work in Asia and the Pacific regional report’. These selected papers are meant to provide evidence-based policy recommendations to inform decision-makers on where best to invest efforts and resources to achieve the best returns for the future of work.

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The responsibility for opinions expressed in articles, studies and other contributions rests solely with their authors, and publication does not constitute an endorsement by the International Labour Office of the opinions expressed in them, or of any products, processes or geographical designations mentioned.

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Acronym

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIN	Association of International NGOs
BOG	Basic Operating Guidelines
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GoN	Government of Nepal
IP	Indigenous Peoples
IDPG	International Development Partners Group
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organisations
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
PwD	People with Disability
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SIAG	Social Inclusion Action Group
SME	Small and Medium sized Enterprises
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Abstract

While the private sector in Nepal, although expanding, is still small to generate adequate employment opportunities, government public service, UN agencies, multilateral and bilateral agencies, and INGOs remain important hubs for employment. Started in 2007 initially focusing on the civil service, a reservation policy in Nepal has emerged as a key policy for employing women in the public service. Development agencies and INGOs working in the country have also developed workforce diversity policies to facilitate the recruitment of staff from marginalized groups including women. The role of such policies in promoting workforce diversity is little understood. This paper analyses workforce diversity and inclusion policies of governmental and non-governmental agencies and explores the importance of such policies for enhancing women's visibility and voice in the formal employment sector which would contribute to inclusive and sustainable development and policy making. It draws on the primary and secondary data of workforce diversity in government, development agencies, including INGOs. We find that affirmative action policies adopted by the government and other non-state actors for the recruitment of staff have enhanced the representation of women in the workforce. Given the deep-rooted gender discrimination and exclusionary social structures and institutions, we argue that affirmative action policies for women's representation is essential not only for creating a diverse workforce and promoting gender equality, but also for the best use of their knowledge, talent and perspectives to foster nation's inclusive development. We suggest necessary policy measures for creating visibility of women, voice and influence in policy making and development decision making and practices. This policy measure, we hope, would inform intervention strategies of governments and development agencies in Asia in making development and organizational systems that foster transformational change and empowerment of people with limited power and voice.

Key words: policy, gender, work

Executive Summary

Purpose and relevance of the paper

The main purpose of this paper is to inform policy makers, planners, and development practitioners in Asia and the Pacific region about good policy measures adopted by the Government of Nepal (GoN) and international development partners working in Nepal for employing women and marginalized social groups. This paper demonstrates the importance of affirmative or reservation policy¹ to promote workforce diversity in the public and development agencies to increase women's participation in formal employment sector. The paper then makes a strong case for developing practical measures for the effective application of affirmative action policies by governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Women and marginalized social groups are underrepresented in the government, non-governmental organizations and private sectors in Asia. Levelling an uneven playing field for them, workforce diversity and affirmative action policies intend to address persistent problems of gender discrimination, and social and political exclusions in several countries, including Nepal. Following the 10-year armed conflict which took place from 1996-2006, Nepal has been the hotspots for the development of many good policies in terms of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI). The government including several development partners are practicing workforce diversity and affirmative action policies to promote inclusion and diversity.² There have been limited efforts to analyse workforce diversity in these institutions, which offer jobs for a large number of people. We analyse the workforce diversity in government and development agencies, including INGOs in Nepal and the impacts of reservation policy on women's representation in formal employment sector.

Research methodology

This paper draws on the empirical data generated through (1) a review of recent studies done on the workforce diversity and inclusion in INGOs and public service in Nepal, (2) an analysis of workforce policy and workforce diversity employed by development partners in Nepal, and (3) an analysis of relevant policy documents and reports.

Main findings

This paper finds that the affirmative action policy applied by the government and development agencies has supported to increase women's participation in their workforces. While the civil service of Nepal is yet a highly exclusionary state organ in terms of representing women and men across various genders, castes, ethnicities and regions, it is becoming more inclusionary in recent years.

¹ We use reservation, positive discrimination, compensatory policies, affirmative action interchangeably for stylistic purpose, while we acknowledge the nuanced difference between these terms.

² GESI WG (2017) *Common Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Framework*. Kathmandu: GESI Working Group, International Development Partner Group, Nepal.

Following the reservation policy, women's entry in the civil service of Nepal has increased from 11 per cent in 2008 to 20 per cent in 2017.³ Women comprise around 29 per cent of workforce in development agencies (UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral donors) and 25 per cent of senior management⁴ – which in the Nepalese context, indicates a solid targeting of women professionals in the workforce and an opportunity for women to demonstrate their competence during the recruitment process.⁵ The workforce diversity analysis of INGOs shows that women's representation has slightly increased from 32.1 per cent in 2011 to 34.9 per cent in 2016, although disparity still continues in senior positions.⁶

Conclusions and recommendations

In a context, such as in Asia, where poverty, gender inequality and social exclusion are deeply rooted in the social institutions and structures and barriers exist for women's political and economic empowerment, one of the best ways to promote economic growth is to advance gender equality and empower women to make better use of their skills and talents.⁷ It is not only the industries that provide job opportunity for women. State and development sector agencies (UN agencies, multilateral and bilateral donors and INGOs and their local implementing partners) provide job opportunities for women and marginalized groups. As this case study from Nepal reveals, the reservation policy applied by the GoN and workforce diversity policy implemented by development sector agencies have been instrumental to increase employment opportunity for women, including historically excluded groups.

This policy intervention can be an important approach of GESI for increasing and managing workforce diversity⁸ in Asia. We argue that all agencies, including civil society, private sector actors in Asia region, should consider learning from Nepal's good policy practice for gender equality and social inclusion and develop similar policy measures to suit their own context.

³ Sunam, R. (2017) Debating reservation in Nepal: Unpacking reservation for Dalits in the civil service for the informed policy debate. A research report submitted to Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Nepal.

⁴ SIAG (2008) *Workforce diversity in international agencies in Nepal*. Kathmandu: Social Inclusion Action Group (SIAG), Nepal

⁵ Carter, J (2014) <http://blog.helvetas.org/nepal-building-a-diverse-workforce/>

⁶ FACTS Research & Analytics (2017). Final report of follow up study on the staff composition and diversity management among AIN members. Submitted to Association of INGOs (AIN), 2017.

⁷ DFAT (2016) *Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy*. February 2016, Commonwealth of Australia, DFAT.

⁸ SIAG (2008)

1. Introduction

In many countries gender equality is progressing, particularly in education. However, this has not led to better work opportunities for women. Globally, men benefit more than women from jobs and economic growth.⁹ Women highly under represent in well-paid roles and industries. They make up just 22 per cent of senior leaders in business, with 32 per cent of businesses having no women leaders at all.¹⁰ Gender inequality prevents many women from earning a decent income and limits their economic opportunities.¹¹ Globally, gender gap in the economic sector is apparent. It is estimated that it will take for another 217 years to achieve economic equality between women and men at the current rate of progress.¹² For many women, having access to decent work can create conditions for poverty reduction and empowerment in other areas of their lives. Good quality jobs or economic opportunities can provide them new skills, knowledge, exposures, and networks and improve their access to productive resources, and enhance their decision making power.¹³ For this to happen, a country's political will and policy interventions are the key drivers.¹⁴

Private sector enterprises generate large number of global employment. In 2016, the private sector employed 2.8 billion individuals worldwide representing 87 per cent of total employment.¹⁵ While the private sector actors in Nepal are expanding, especially in the agriculture, forests, water and tourism sectors, it has largely failed to generate adequate employment opportunities for women and marginalized groups. Women constitute only 18.7 per cent of the total permanent full-time worker in private sector firms in the country. They make up 17.2 per cent of leadership in the 482 firms surveyed and own only 21.8 per cent of the total firm.¹⁶ The public service, UN Agencies, multilateral and bilateral agencies and INGOs and their implementing partners (NGOs, civil society, and community organizations) remain important hubs of more formal and secure employment in Nepal. In the workforces of these organisations, women's representation has long been low. Organizational commitment to diversity and inclusiveness are yet to be reflected in the staff composition of many organizations.¹⁷

⁹ World Bank (2012) *World Development Report, 2012: Gender Equality and Development*, Washington D.C: World Bank

¹⁰ Oxfam 2016. Briefing Paper. Women and The 1% , page 6. Available at www.oxfam.org

¹¹ Ibid, page 6 Oxfam (2016) Briefing Paper. Women and The 1% , page 6. Available at www.oxfam.org

¹² World Economic Forum (2017) *The Global Gender Gap Report, 2017*, page viii.

¹³ Oxfam (2016), page 14

¹⁴ DFAT (2016)

¹⁵ ILO (2017) *World Employment Social Outlook. Sustainable enterprises and jobs: Formal enterprises and decent work*. Page 1. Geneva: International Labour Organization.

¹⁶ Enterprise Surveys (<http://www.enterprisesurveys.org>), The World Bank.

¹⁷ ADB (2010) *Overview of gender equality and social inclusion in Nepal, page 8*. Philippines: Asian Development Bank.

Nonetheless, rapid socio-political changes in the country and policy interventions tend to have created a hope for gender equality and social inclusion. The GoN has formal mandates to promote GESI as an approach to promote inclusive development and address multidimensional poverty, gender inequality and social exclusion. The sub-article of 38 (5) of the new Constitution promulgated in September 2015 reads “women shall have the rights to obtain special opportunity in education, health, employment and social security, on the basis of positive discrimination”. The sub-article of 18 (3) the Constitution promotes right to equality and commits for non-discrimination among citizens on the ground of origin, religion, caste, race, tribe, sex, economic conditions, language or geographical region and ideology.

The recent political wave with the provision of reservation for candidates from women and historically marginalised groups in the election of three tiers of governments (local, provincial and federal) has created opportunities for women’s visibility in political spheres. For example, according to the data from the Election Commission Nepal, women make up 40.96 per cent of the total 350420 elected representatives of the local government and 93 per cent of the Deputy Mayor or Vice Chairperson of 753 local government units (i.e. municipalities) are women. Twenty percent of the elected women are from historically marginalized social groups such as Dalit communities.¹⁸ This women’s representation in political sphere is an opportunity for the country’s federalization process and engaging elected women and members of marginalized groups in policymaking, development planning and budgeting in local governments.

Started formally in 2007 focusing on the civil service, a reservation policy in Nepal has emerged as a key driver for developing an inclusive nation-state by promoting inclusion of women and members of marginalized groups in the government employment.¹⁹ And, many international agencies have also been practising a similar strategy, called workforce diversity policy. However, there is a critical knowledge gap about the status of diversity of workforce in terms of gender in the Nepalese organizational landscape. How have the reservation policy and the workforce diversity policy contributed to enhance women’s participation in the workforce of the government and non-state sectors, and what are institutional barriers to implement the policy are yet to be systematically studied. This paper partly answers these important questions based on the primary and secondary data of workforce in government, development agencies and INGOs.

¹⁸ Election Commission Nepal (2017). Representation of gender and inclusion in the 2017 elections, presentation by the ECN official during the GESI WG meeting, 2 Nov 2017, Kathmandu.

¹⁹ Sunam, R. (2017) Debating reservation in Nepal: Unpacking reservation for Dalits in the civil service for the informed policy debate. A research report submitted to Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Nepal.

2. Workforce Diversity and Affirmative Policy for Empowering the Excluded

Nepal is a highly diverse country with over 125 different caste and ethnic groups²⁰ in the 2011 Census. Socio-economic and political status varies between these social groups. The processes of development in Nepal have failed to challenge social structures and unequal power relations that are barriers for improving social, economic, and political status of Dalits,²¹ Adivasi Janajatis, Muslims, and People with disability (PwD) and women. Women have limited access to productive resources (land, industries, houses, skills, information), although they contribute to over two thirds of labour force in agricultural production. While there has been a recent progress in women's representation and voice in planning and decision-making positions of formal and informal institutions, it is not yet satisfactory. Despite a reduced gender gap in school enrolment, the gap is remarkable in tertiary education.²² Women and girls experience a variety of gender based violence within private and public spheres. Forty eight per cent of women surveyed reported that they had experienced violence at some time in their lives in Nepal.²³ Women of Dalits, Indigenous Peoples (IPs), PwD, Muslims and Tarai region experience greater socio-economic and political exclusion because of gender, language, social system, infrastructure inaccessibility and skewed access to assets and opportunities. Having recognized social diversity vis-a-vis social/gender inequalities in the country, public and development sector agencies have begun to put affirmative action policies, including workforce diversity policies into action to recruit women and historically excluded groups in order to achieve a gender balance at all levels in their workplaces.²⁴

The affirmative action policies are an important means for promoting workforce diversity.²⁵ Diversity of workforce in an organization can promote a fair and enabling organizational culture.²⁶ A diverse workforce also strengthens the capability of organizations to represent, adapt, and respond to the needs of different social groups, including those who have historically been excluded in society.²⁷ Making an organization inclusive in terms of workforce also contributes to recognize knowledge, views and perspective of women and men staff with different social identities that ultimately promotes organizational learning process.

²⁰ Nepali population can be categorized into four major social groups: Brahmin and Chhetri (31.2 per cent), Indigenous Peoples/Adivasi Janajatis (35.3 per cent including highly advantaged ethnic group such as Newars which comprise 6 per cent and highly excluded ethnic group such as Tharu which comprises 6.6 per cent), Dalits 13.8 per cent, Muslim 4.4 per cent; and Madhesis 15.3% per cent (source: Election Commission Nepal).

²¹ The most excluded social groups in Nepal with high poverty and lower human development. Caste system and caste based social relations has led them to live in marginal socio-economic and political status.

²² UNDP (2009) *Human Development Report*: Kathmandu: UNDP Nepal

²³ UNFPA Nepal (2013) *Gender Based Violence, Factsheets*, UNFPA, Nepal. Available at www.unfpa.org

²⁴ SIAG (2008), page 3

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ SDC (2007) *Policy on workforce diversity*. Kathmandu: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Nepal

²⁷ SIAG (2008), page iii

3. Key Findings

3.1 Workforce diversity in public service

The state bureaucracy – comprising civil service and security organs – is arguably the single largest employer, offering permanent and secure jobs to over 279,000²⁸ individuals. Women make up now around 20 per cent of the total civil service workforce of about 83,000 employees.²⁹ The security organs of the state – Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and Nepal Army – have 5.7 per cent, 4.9 per cent and 3.2 per cent women in their workforces respectively.³⁰

Being employed in the bureaucracy means a lot, and more so in the context of Nepal where the private sector is small. Relative to private sectors, employment in the bureaucracy is highly secure and offers more than jobs and salaries. Non-materials benefits are not less significant. Government jobs have long been considered prestigious, and those holding such jobs exercise a great deal of decision-making power in mobilising state resources and opportunities. More women being responsible for policy making and budget can facilitate more gender sensitive allocations of resources. They being responsible for decision making level can also support for women's needs and concerns to be addressed within inclusive growth framework of a country.³¹ More women at the policy making level is critical for motivating women professionals to enter and work in the bureaucracy.³² Given this, to promote inclusive policy processes and gender-inclusive state services, women's representation in the bureaucracy, the state's permanent institution, is crucial.

Silver linings

The representation in the workforce of the Nepalese civil service in terms of gender, caste and ethnicity was much worse until 2000. For example, the civil service workforce included only 7.8 per cent women in 2000 and 7.7 per cent in 1991.³³ While three caste groups namely Brahman, Chhetri and Newar represented only about 36 per cent of the population, they held 95 per cent of total civil service jobs, over-representing also in the security forces, political parties and civil society leadership.³⁴

In 2007, acknowledging that the state bureaucracy is highly exclusionary in terms of gender and caste/ethnicity, Nepal introduced a reservation policy for women and other marginalised groups. The

²⁸ Civil service offers about 83,000 jobs (Sunam 2017), Nepal Army 92,000 jobs (<https://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/page/inclusiveness>), Nepal Police 73,000 jobs (<https://www.nepalpolice.gov.np/index.php/about-us/organization-structure>), and Armed Police Force 31,000 jobs.

²⁹ Sunam (2017)

³⁰ UN WOMEN (2015) *Progress of women in Nepal (1995-2015): Substantive equality is non-negotiable*. Kathmandu: UN WOMEN, Nepal

³¹ World Economic Forum (2017), page 27-30

³² Radha Wagle, Soma Pillay & Wendy Wright (2017) Examining Nepalese Forestry Governance from Gender Perspectives, *International Journal of Public Administration*, 40:3, 205-225, DOI: 10.1080/01900692.2015.1091015

³³ UNDP (2009) *Human development report: State transformation and human development*, Page 164. Kathmandu: UNDP Nepal

policy was a collective outcome of long struggles of marginalised groups including women and Dalits, frequent political uprisings, and aid agencies' support for social inclusion.³⁵ The amendment in the 1993 Civil Service Act includes the provision of reservations for women along with Dalits, Janajatis, Madhesi, people with disability and people from backward regions by allocating 45 per cent of the total seats allocated for open competition in the civil service.³⁶ The amended Act has not only reserved seats for women for employment in the civil service, but also increased the age limit to 40 years for them. For others, 35 years is the maximum age for entry into the civil service. Through reservation quotas, about 3,000 women have joined the civil service³⁷ and are now working as civil servants holding different positions of authority in the bureaucracy. As elsewhere Nepal's affirmative action policy is not free from criticism. Critics suggest that reservation has benefitted women from the privileged castes and ethnic backgrounds, and thus women from rural areas and under privileged caste/ethnic groups are excluded.³⁸ While there is lack of a multi-year analysis of beneficiaries of women reservation by caste, ethnicity and disability, preliminary evidences suggests that women from the privileged social groups have benefitted more than others. In 2015, 48 out of 50 women officers recruited under reservation seats for three civil service sectors –administrative, revenues and accounting – belonged to Brahmin and Chhetri.³⁹

While women's representation in the Nepal's bureaucracy is still low, the situation is improving following the adoption of the reservation policy. And, it is not like what Jamil and Dangal noted in 2009: "A typical bureaucrat in Nepal is male. Male representation in the bureaucracy is around 90% or more".⁴⁰ As noted earlier, women now make up of the 20 per cent of the total workforce in the current civil service (excluding security forces).

The rise in women's employment in the bureaucracy in recent years is in the most part linked to the affirmative action policy adopted by the Nepali state. Women's representation in the civil service has increased from 11 per cent in 2008 to 20 per cent in 2017 (which is 16434 out of 83201).⁴¹ Despite a rise in women's share in the civil service workforce, their representation at higher decision making

³⁵ Druzca, K. (2017) Talking About Inclusion: Attitudes and Affirmative Action in Nepal. *Development Policy Review*, 35(2), pp. 161-195.

³⁶ Of the total reserved seats, 33 per cent are allocated for women, 27 per cent for Janajatis, 22 per cent to Madhesis, 9 per cent to Dalits, 5 per cent for people with disability and 4 per cent for backward regions. Nepal's affirmative action policy is broader and encompassing, facilitating the inclusion based on not only caste/ethnicity and gender but also disability and geographical disadvantage.

³⁷ Women, regardless of their caste, ethnicity or economic class, are eligible for competition within the reservation seats allocated for women. Women can also compete for any positions announced under open competition.

³⁸ MOGA (2016) *Women in Civil Service*. Kathmandu: Ministry of General Administration (MOGA); Paudel, B. (2013) *Inclusion in Civil Service: Issues and Initiatives*. Kathmandu: Ministry of General Administration, Project to Prepare Public Administration for State Reforms (PREPARE).

³⁹ Neupane, T (2015) आरक्षणमा 'एलिट' को कब्जा (Elites capturing reservation seats) <http://archive.himalkhabar.com/125672>

⁴⁰ Jamil, I. and R. Dangal (2009) The state of bureaucratic representatives and administrative culture in Nepal. *Contemporary South Asia* (17), 193-211, page 199

⁴¹ Department of Civil Personnel record, cited by Prithvi Man Shrestha, at <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/printedition/news/2017-02-12/women-applicants-outwitting-men-in-psc-examinations.html>

and policy levels remains relatively low – only around 5 per cent in gazette first and second classes (see Table 1).

Table 1: Number and percent of women staff by positions in civil service

Categories	Total positions	Women representation	
		No	% in each class
Special class or above	60	0	0.00
First class	488	25	5.12
Second class	3320	160	4.82
Third class	10624	1087	10.23
Non-gazetted	27936	3973	14.22
Classless	19192	1487	7.75
Health service	19442	7885	40.56
Judiciary	306	8	2.61

(Source: Ministry of General Administration (MOGA), data as of 10 January 2016)

With the government’s directives, the security sector including the Nepal Police, the Armed Police Force, and the Nepal Army have also adopted the affirmative action policy and reserved 20 per cent of the total seats allocated for open competition for women. While the workforce of these security institutions predominantly includes men, in recent years following the political and policy change in the country, these institutions are in the process of transformation to become more gender inclusive at least in their recruitment. Nonetheless, there are challenges deeply rooted in patriarchal mind-sets and behaviors for the gendered restructuring of the security sector.⁴² There is a long-held understanding in the security sector that women are physically weak and thus unfit for police or army and the sector values more physical strengths than other qualities favoring men over women. The institutional behavior is masculine and gender consideration is far from adequate in the security forces. Gender-sensitive physical infrastructures are yet to be developed. Addressing these concerns may attract more women and also provide a better gender-inclusive environment for those already working in the security forces.

3.2 Workforce diversity in development sector agencies

Over 30 development partners (UN Agencies, multilateral and bilateral donors) are collaborating with

⁴² See also Awasthi , G. D. and R. Adhikary (2012) *Changes in Nepalese Civil Service after the Adoption of Inclusive Policy and Reform Measures*. Kathmandu: Support to Participatory Constitution Building in Nepal, (SPCBN)/UNDP

the GoN. They work with various implementing agencies (INGOs, national NGOs, civil society, academic and research institutions). Development partners and their implementing agencies are the main sources of employment as they hire local staff for the implementation of sectoral programmes/projects in addition to their own expatriate employees. For example, a national flagship programme in the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation supported by three bilateral donors was able to recruit 810 staff; 40 per cent of them were women recruited by the implementing partners of the programme due to the application of the workforce diversity policy. The following sections highlight the status of workforce diversity in development partners and INGOs.

Workforce diversity in development partners

Various development partners have institutional mandates to promote gender equality, social inclusion and workforce diversity. They have committed to workforce diversity and inclusion by agreeing on the Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs).⁴³ Some agencies (e.g. UN WOMEN, SDC, and USAID) have a specific written policy reflecting affirmative action in the recruitment processes. For instance, through the workforce diversity policy, SDC and its projects recruit people from diverse social backgrounds. It considers gender, caste, ethnicity and region as important criteria in the recruitment process and accords high priority for women from marginalized groups. SDC Nepal follows a targeting approach both in workforce and programmes/projects beneficiaries stating that at least 50 per cent of total beneficiaries should be women.⁴⁴ Results are impressive – women make up over 47 per cent workforce of SDC in 2016. Dalits, marginalized ethnic groups and advantaged caste/ethnic groups make up 12, 33 and 56 per cent of the SDC workforce respectively.⁴⁵

Women constitute only 29.3 per cent of the total workforce in the 30 development partners surveyed by Social Inclusion Action Group (SIAG) in 2008. The 2008 workforce data reveals that the representation of women at senior management, middle level management, administrative and program support staff, and other support staff levels stands at 25, 32.2, 41.1 and 7.2 per cent respectively.⁴⁶ Of the total women staff in the workforce, only 1.6 per cent is of Madhes/Tarai origin.⁴⁷

Workforce diversity in International Non-Government Organizations (INGOs)

⁴³ Based on principles agreed internationally and in Nepal, the UN, Donors (European Commission, Danida, SDC CIDA, Norwegian Embassy, UKaid/DFID, AusAID, JICA, GIZ, Embassy of Finland, SNV and Association of International NGOs in Nepal (AIN) have adopted a 14 points Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs) for development and, if necessary, humanitarian assistance in Nepal. The BOGs points 2,3,4,5, 6 and 14 refer to non-discrimination.

⁴⁴ SDC (2013) Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Nepal, 2013-2017. Bern: Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

⁴⁵ National population of Dalits is 13.8% (CBS 2011).

⁴⁶ SIAG (2008), page 8

⁴⁷ Ibid, page 16

As of 2014, 39,759 national NGOs⁴⁸ and as of 2017, 254 INGOs are present in Nepal.⁴⁹ These organizations work on various issues of development, including social, environmental, political and economic fields in partnership with development partners, private sectors and government agencies. According to the Foreign Aid Commitment vs Disbursement Data source of the Ministry of Finance, the funding disbursement to Nepal by INGOs is USD 144.8 million, which is 14.5 per cent of the total their committed foreign funds of USD 997.4 million in 2015/16.⁵⁰

Many NGOs and INGOs have adopted GESI policy in line with the Comprehensive Peace Accord 2006,⁵¹ the Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007 and the Constitution of Nepal 2015. Although there is no analysis of workforce diversity in NGOs of Nepal, a study from UNHCR reveals that women comprise of around 40 per cent of the total staffing.⁵² However, women largely underrepresent in the senior level positions in the national NGOs and civil society organizations.

The baseline survey of 97 INGOs carried out in 2010 by the Association of INGOs (AIN) in Nepal on workforce diversity reveals that 67 per cent of the INGOs surveyed developed a workforce diversity policy that favours the recruitment of women and marginalized groups in the job. The survey showed women staff comprised 32.1 per cent of the total staffing.⁵³ In 2016, the AIN assessed the change in the workforce of INGOs since the 2010 baseline study. The results showed a slight increase of women in the workforce from 32.10 per cent in 2010 to 34.90 per cent in 2016. However, gender disparity continues in decision-making positions, as women make up around 25 per cent of the senior positions in 2016 while it was 24.3 per cent in 2010.⁵⁴

4. Opportunities and Barriers

The application of workforce diversity and affirmative action policies within the broader GESI framework of the government has created opportunities for women and historically excluded groups to gain access to jobs in the public service and development sector agencies. The recognition and the development of such policies by private sectors – the emerging sector for employment in Nepal and elsewhere, especially in tourism, agriculture, water and forest sectors – women and marginalized social

⁴⁸ Karkee, R and J. Comfort (2016) NGOs, Foreign Aid, and Development in Nepal. *Front. Public Health* 4:177. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2016.00177

⁴⁹ AIN (2017) AIN Strategic Plan 2017-2019. Kathmandu: Association of International NGOs in Nepal

⁵⁰ Foreign Aid Commitment vs Disbursement, Aid Management Platform, Ministry of Finance cited by AIN (2017), page 7

⁵¹ The 10 year conflict (civil war) was brought to an end by a comprehensive peace accord agreement in 2006. One of the reasons of conflict was historical social exclusion of certain social groups, including women in state structures and functions.

⁵² UNHCR, Eastern Region of Nepal 2011 and Annual report, Multi Stakeholder Forestry Programme 2016.

⁵³ AIN (2010) *Staff composition and diversity management among AIN members: Baseline study*. Kathmandu: Association of International NGOs in Nepal (AIN).

⁵⁴ FACTS Research & Analytics (2017).

groups will have more employment opportunities. For example, in the forest sector, private sector provides about 90,000 formal full time jobs annually, and community based organizations, including community forestry user groups provide about 31,000 jobs. It is estimated that the forest-based industries alone can generate over 400,000 full time jobs under conservative scenario. It can go up to 1.4 million jobs under optimistic scenario.⁵⁵ There are also opportunities for development partners to invest in educating and empowering women from marginalised groups for accessing employment and take up the employment responsibilities effectively.

However, there are some challenges for women to gain employment in the civil service and non-government sector, including private sectors. As discussed earlier, women highly under-represent in public, development partners and INGOs workforce, despite the GoN's reservation policy and some development partners' and INGOs' workforce diversity policy. First, despite the fact that some development partners and INGOs introduced various tools and guidelines for promoting gender equality and social inclusion in Nepal, many of them yet to embrace workforce diversity policy in the first place. And, the commitment to GESI of even those which are applying affirmative action policies is limited as many of them are yet to explicitly set targets for improving women's representation in the workforce. In this regard, the GoN seems rather progressive which has recently proposed 50 per cent of the reservation seats in civil service jobs for women. An organization can be only diverse and inclusive when it formalizes and implements a policy that supports workforce diversity and women's inclusion at all levels organizational hierarchy.⁵⁶

Second, men and people from already privileged social groups over-represent in the public and development agencies in general and in senior management level positions in particular. In such a situation, the political commitment in the leadership position is critical to develop and implement workforce diversity and affirmative action policy.⁵⁷ Third, while there has been public awareness on the need to promote gender and social inclusion in programming and institutional arrangements, policy makers and decision makers still have concerns over the implications of affirmative action in the public, private and development agencies sectors. This is in part linked to a gap in knowledge and policy understandings about the implications of affirmative action policy on inclusive and sustainable development and policy making.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper has explored the workforce diversity status in public service and development agencies, including INGOs. We found that reservation policy applied by the GoN has supported to increase women's participation in the civil service workforce from 11 per cent in 2008 to 20 per cent in 2017.

⁵⁵ The conservative scenario assumes the products and services are utilized with modest changes to the sector, taking into account the recent positive trends in investment. The optimistic scenario assumes forests are managed using science and at least some significant value chain improvements (Source: Private sector involvement and investment in Nepal's forestry sector: Status, prospect and ways forward. Kathmandu: Multi Stakeholder Forestry Programme, 2015, p 25).

⁵⁶ FACTS Research & Analytics (2016)

⁵⁷ UN WOMEN (2015)

There has been also a slight improvement in the inclusion of women in the state security forces. The workforce diversity analysis of development agencies and INGOs shows that women make up around 29 per cent and 34.9 per cent respectively.

We have demonstrated that affirmative action policies are important to redress gender injustices and to institutionalise the process of inclusive and sustainable nation building through facilitating women's access to employment in various sectors.⁵⁸ While the civil service of Nepal is yet a highly skewed state institution in terms of the representation of different genders, castes, ethnicities, regions and abilities, it is becoming more inclusionary in recent years following the adoption of affirmative action policies. We argue that reservation policies are instrumental to increase women's employment opportunity in all agencies, including state, non-state and private sector actors in Nepal. Globally, women are underrepresented in jobs and economic activities.⁵⁹ It is not only the industries that provide job opportunity for women. The public service sector and development industries, including INGOs and development partners, can offer job opportunities for women and historically excluded social groups. As this paper reveals, the reservation policy applied by the Nepal's government and workforce diversity policy implemented by some development partners are important measures of gender equality and social inclusion for promoting diversity in workforce.⁶⁰

However, it is not enough just to have women's engagement in the public service, their effective participation in policy making and decision-making need to be reinforced through gender awareness training, gender budgeting and gender mainstreaming training and other mechanisms that policy making and the allocation of resources is gender responsive.

Drawing on Nepal's good policy measures of gender and social equality, affirmative action policies have not only increased women's representation and visibility in government employment and the employment in development industries, it has also created opportunities for women to express their voices in their organisations which can potentially make a difference in development and institutional transformational process in the country's federalization systems. Given this, we suggest that policy makers and decisions makers from public and private sectors in countries of Asia should consider upscaling of such policies.

As private sector firms offer a large number of employment⁶¹, developing favorable policy for private sector's engagement, or enabling criteria for the private sector in case they want to compete in winning the government bids/projects should be promoted.

⁵⁸ Middleton, T. and S. Shneiderman (2008) Reservations, Federalism and the Politics of Recognition in Nepal. *Economic and Political Weekly* 43 (19):39-45.

⁵⁹ World Bank (2012) and see also World Economic Forum (2017)

⁶⁰ SIAG (2008)

⁶¹ ILO (2017)

Organizing policy events at regional level to discuss promising practices on workforce diversity, gender equity measures including women's employment and leadership in the public, development and private sectors may generate political commitments towards inclusive and gender responsive policy measures.

Existing studies on reservation focus on the recruitment process and representation of women in the bureaucracy.⁶² Future research should move beyond these, incorporating the impact of a rise in women's representation in civil service and security forces on the way policies/decisions are made, the quality of service delivery, and citizen's perceptions and their experiences of service delivery. Moreover, another area of research is how has affirmative action policies changed the broader gendered social and political understandings in the society and the process of democratization and social inclusive nation-state building.

There are stark gender differences among women. The workforce and affirmative action policies need to consider diversity among women, and policies to educate, engage and empower women from socially discriminated and marginalized groups should be promoted. Providing internship for women candidates from highly marginalized groups and Dalits communities, and mentoring and in-service training for all women staff would strengthen their leadership capacity.⁶³

Disclaimers: Manohara Khadka, the principal author of this paper, works for Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Nepal. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of SDC.

⁶² see also Awasthi and Adhikary (2012); UN WOMEN (2015)

⁶³ SIAG (2008)