

## Enhancing Women's Leadership in Local Government through Training

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### ABSTRACT

*Women in Nepal comprise nearly half of the total population, yet cultural attitudes and beliefs persist, hindering their social transformation. Cross-national research and training programs increasingly recognize the impact of subjective beliefs on women's empowerment, participation, and leadership, contributing to the emergence of knowledge societies. Recent local government reforms in Nepal have introduced quotas for women in grassroots democratic institutions, reflecting a recognition of women's concerns in government agendas. However, significant gaps remain in gender balancing within government policies and reform agendas. Women's participation, particularly of Dalits and underprivileged women, in local and parliamentary elections is a vital democratic practice at the grassroots level. Thus, addressing the state of women's participation at this level is imperative, as participation and empowerment are closely intertwined.*

Keywords: empowerment, leadership, representation, parity, constitutional assembly

### INTRODUCTION

Recognizing the significance of women's involvement in decision-making processes, efforts have been made to enhance their participation and empowerment, aiming to broaden their role in national development (Constitution, 072). In Nepal, women are encouraged to contribute to the overall progress of the nation. The current constitution of Nepal, established in 2072, represents a significant step towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in political leadership (ADV.org). This includes provisions for direct election to reserved seats in local, provincial, and central-level elections.

The comprehensive advancement of a nation hinges on fully utilizing its population, encompassing both men and women. In Nepal, women constitute nearly half of the total population (ADV, 2001). However, their status is considerably lower than that of men

across all aspects of life. Traditionally, women have been associated with domestic roles, while politics has been perceived as a male-dominated arena characterized by masculine traits. There is growing recognition that national progress cannot be achieved without prioritizing the development of women development cannot be achieved. Women's equitable involvement in political affairs is crucial for advancing women overall (Govt Act, 2055). It's not merely about justice or democracy, but also a fundamental requirement for addressing women's interests effectively. Without women's active engagement and integration of their perspectives across decision-making levels, the objectives of equality, development, and peace remain unattainable (FWCW,1995:1) The systematic inclusion of women enhances the democratic foundation, efficiency, and effectiveness of local government operations (H.D Report, 1993). To adequately address the needs of both genders, local government must draw upon the experiences of women and men equally, ensuring their equal representation across all levels and areas of decision-making (Fourth world, 1995). Women's participation in decision-making is particularly crucial. Additionally, this paper will propose some corrective actions to improve this situation.

Enhancing women's leadership in local government through training has garnered significant attention in recent years. Research highlights various strategies, barriers, and outcomes related to this initiative.

In the context of its Barriers to Women's Leadership, it can be argued that several studies identify systemic barriers that hinder women's participation in local government. According to Eagly and Carli (2007), women face cultural stereotypes that undermine their leadership potential. Additionally, Paxton and Hughes (2007) note that structural challenges, such as lack of access to networks and mentorship, further complicate women's paths to leadership roles.

In the same way, for the Importance of Training Programs for women has been claimed that training programs are critical in addressing these barriers. A study by Duerst-Lahti and Kelly (1995) emphasizes that tailored training can enhance women's skills and confidence, making them more competitive candidates for leadership positions. Furthermore, research by Smith (2014) illustrates that training initiatives focused on negotiation and public speaking significantly empower women, enabling them to navigate the political landscape more effectively.

Likewise, the Impact of Training on Leadership Outcomes have been presented that the training not only equips women with essential skills but also fosters a supportive community. As noted by Bjarnegård and Zetterberg (2016), training programs can create networks that facilitate collaboration and mentorship among women in local government. This community aspect is vital for sustaining women's engagement in political roles.

Moreover, the Best Practices in Training Programs have been pointed out that the best practices in designing training programs include incorporating intersectionality and addressing diverse needs among women. According to Crenshaw (1989), understanding the varied experiences of women based on race, class, and other factors is essential for effective training. Moreover, research by Mendez and Perez (2018) suggests that experiential learning

and peer support mechanisms significantly enhance the effectiveness of these programs.

In short, literature indicates that enhancing women's leadership in local government through training is both necessary and effective. By addressing systemic barriers and providing targeted training, local governments can create more equitable political environments that empower women leaders. This overview encapsulates key themes and the literature review related to enhancing women's leadership in local government through training initiatives. However, it has not been properly traced out the real position of the women empowering in the participation of the local level decision making system through the required training yet. It has been managed somehow through the policy and the legal system but it has not been aptly applied in the day to day practice and such concepts have not been explored yet and Adhikari et al. (2020) have pointed out the increasing difficulty of maintaining ecological balance for the security of humanity. Similarly, Adhikari et al. (2022) discuss the complexities surrounding the current state of government systems globally, highlighting that the situation has become largely unmanageable, as analyzed by Adhikari (2020), who focuses on the worsening condition of the environment and ecology resulting from governmental actions. In this context, enhancing women's leadership in local government through training has emerged as vital for national progress and equality as well as for the justice. However, existing research has not effectively addressed how to enhance women's participation and how to strengthen and empower women in their participation through training in the local level to promote comprehensive administrative reform and empower women equally in the level of the men in the local level decision making. This study aims to fill that research gap by exploring the following questions.

### **Statement of Problem**

Enhancing and empowering the women is one of the burning issues of Nepal. Without building the leadership quality and ability of tackling the local issues of women through training, it becomes impossible to transform and reform the social structures and the position of the women in the country. So, the research has attempted to address the following questions:

- A) How can women be empowered and enhanced the skill of them as the leaders in the local level?
- B) What are the general issues that the women have been facing as the huddles in their life in the local level?

### **Objective of the research**

The major objective of the research is to provide the necessary training to the women in the local level and to empower them in having the quality of the leadership so that they can handle the common issues of the society in the local level by themselves through the utilization of the skills that they gain through training. The research has been aimed:

- A) To explore the possible ways of empowering and enhancing the skill of leadership to the women in the local level
- B) To investigate the general issues that women have been facing as the huddles in their life in the local level

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper utilizes both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary sources include the experiences gathered from various women empowerment training sessions conducted in several districts of FWDR. Secondary sources encompass published books, reports, articles, research works, journals, newspapers, and other relevant materials. Additionally, some information was collected through internet research.

## **Significance of the Research**

The research has got its own significance for the empowerment and enhancement of the women as the leadership in the local level. It has got the aim of addressing the local issues of the women in the local level. It has given the ideas of policy making to the policy makers for the improvement of the leadership quality for the backward women and the position of the women can be transformed, enhanced, empowered and strengthened them to handle the issues raised in the local level. It has displayed the process of enhancing the leadership quality of the women and it open the eyes of the women how to be empowered.

## **OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF WOMEN**

A woman refers to an adult female human, contrasting with men, who are adult males, and girls, who are female children. The term "woman" is employed to denote differences in biological sex, cultural gender roles, or both (Wikipedia, 2005:1).

Women make up 51% of Nepal's total population. Despite this, there remains a persistent resistance to change in their attitudes and cultural beliefs, hindering social transformation (IT, 2010). While women contribute significantly to the national economy beyond household activities, many still face barriers to active participation in various aspects of life. The Government of Nepal has taken steps such as establishing the Women's Commission and implementing action plans to raise awareness of women's rights under the Constitution of Nepal, 2072. However, despite these efforts, the majority of women in Nepal still lack empowerment to fully engage in social, cultural, economic, and political activities. Gender discrimination and racial violence remain pervasive across all levels and spheres of society. The Constitution of Nepal, 2072, in Part-3, Article 18 (1,2,3,4,5) and 38, ensures equal rights for all citizens, including clear provisions for the equal status of women. Article 18 (1) states that every woman has the right to lineage without facing discrimination based on gender.

## **PARTICIPATION**

Participation mechanisms enable individuals to voice their opinions on social decisions across various aspects of human social life. This development approach emphasizes the

importance of involving marginalized segments of society in creating and implementing policies that affect their welfare (Jahan, 1997). Enhancing women's involvement in all areas of life has emerged as a significant concern in development efforts. Social, political, and economic progress relies on women's participation in decision-making processes within society. Therefore, participation involves the collective sharing of perspectives and respect for all individuals, regardless of their caste, creed, language, or socioeconomic status (Misra, 1984). The participation of women in the politics enhances their skills and they can have their own decision-making power in them that is possible through the training that they gained and apply in their day-to-day life.

## **LEADERSHIP**

Leadership is one of the essential skills that is required not only in the women but to all the leaders who have the interest of becoming the politicians and who have the dream of becoming the statemen for the transformation of the country and the society. In US academic settings, leadership is defined as "a process of social influence where an individual can rally the assistance and backing of others to achieve a shared objective" (Muttalib, 1983). However, from a European and non-academic standpoint, leadership encompasses a broader perspective, including a leader driven not only by communal aims but also by the pursuit of personal authority. This is a primary objective for women in Nepalese society, where many women in rural areas face challenges in expressing their aspirations due to the dominance of males. To address this issue, women should enhance their leadership abilities through various forms of training, workshops, seminars, and practical education initiatives (Shailesh and Rijal, vol.182). Leadership involves intelligence, trustworthiness, compassion, courage, and discipline. Relying solely on intelligence leads to rebellion, while focusing solely on compassion leads to vulnerability. Placing excessive trust can lead to foolishness, and relying too heavily on courage can result in aggression. Likewise, excessive discipline and sternness in leadership can lead to cruelty. A true leader possesses all five virtues in balance, each employed appropriately, enabling effective leadership (Wikipedia). Leadership development of the women is the key to be successful implementation of development works in the nation. The success of leadership development efforts has been linked to three variables.

1. Individual learner characteristics
2. Quality and nature of the leadership development program
3. Support for behavioral change from the leader's supervisor.
4. Develop the motivation and decision-making skills to the women
5. Each and everyone feel easy to carry out activities, managing and operating programs.
6. Leadership enhances economic, political, social benefits.
7. Positive output may come in the working area.

Therefore, leadership can be understood in both a narrow and broader context. Narrowly, it pertains to guiding local initiatives for specific goals. Broadly, it involves becoming a revered figure and role model for the wider public, including serving in governmental capacities. Every woman in Nepal should strive in this direction to advance her career.

## **TRAINING**

Training and development are crucial components of human resource development, gaining increasing significance due to technological advancements, heightened competition, elevated customer expectations, and the imperative to reduce costs. Globally, there's a growing need to equip workers with skills for emerging roles. This article will delve into the rising demand for training and development, and its impact on both individuals and employers.

### **Training Policy**

- (a) Embed training initiatives as a fundamental aspect of personnel management.
- (b) Link training initiatives with the performance evaluations of elected, nominated, and appointed officials across central government, provincial government, local levels, and public institutions.
- (c) Align training programs with the developmental agendas of the government.

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

It refers to a structured societal unit characterized by unity. Local government, by definition, denotes a governmental entity operating within a sovereign state, primarily handling local matters. It is overseen by local authorities and is subordinate to the state government (Jahan, 1997-92). In political context, it focuses on overseeing the administration of a particular geographical region, serving as a political subdivision of a nation, state, or other significant political entities. It functions as the representative of the state while carrying out its duties, making it an essential component of the political governance framework within a country. As a legal entity with legal personality, it embodies a legal principle (Muttalib and Khan, 1983.2). the local government is the governing the local people and it provides the service and necessary support to the local people from the local level in their best possible to please the local people. It generates the possible awareness in the life of the women and it even forms the necessary planning and conducts the necessary workshop as well as the seminars so that the life style of the local women can be changed (WONCC/UNDP, 2001). In fact, changing the life style of the women means changing the entire social structures and even the living standard of the entire people living in the local level. It is believed that empowering and enhancing the leadership of the women in the local level means transforming the life the life of all the people who are dwelling in the local level.

## **Constitutional Provision**

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nepal acknowledges the fundamental rights of all citizens, regardless of gender, religion, caste, or ethnicity. It includes provisions for advancing the interests of marginalized communities. Relevant sections of the constitution concerning women's participation are outlined in the following statements.

Part 3, Articles 16 to 48 outline Fundamental Rights and Duties, while Part 27, Articles 252 to 254 address the National Women Commission. Article 38 focuses on the rights of women, stating:

1. Women are entitled to equal rights of lineage without discrimination based on gender.
2. Women have rights concerning safe motherhood and reproductive health.
3. Protection from various forms of violence and oppression, including physical, mental, sexual, or psychological abuse, based on religious, social, or cultural norms. Perpetrators of such acts are subject to legal punishment, and victims have the right to compensation.
4. Women have the right to participate in all state structures and bodies based on proportional inclusion principles.
5. Women are entitled to special opportunities in education, health, employment, and social security through positive discrimination measures.
6. Spouses have equal rights in property and family matters.

By encompassing the aforementioned articles and sub-articles, the constitution prioritizes the inclusion of women in democracy and local governance (Uly, 1005). It's noteworthy that there's equal participation in elections at all levels, ensuring significant roles for women in key positions. For instance, if a male holds the position of president, a female automatically assumes the role of vice-president at the central, federal, and provincial levels, and vice versa. Legislative hindrances to advancing gender equity and equality in social, political, and economic spheres are absent. The constitution ensures equal rights for women and includes specific provisions to safeguard marginalized segments of society.

## **Role of Elected Women's Participation**

The formation of urban and rural municipalities is legally supported by the Local Government framework. However, there's a lack of specification regarding the roles, powers, and responsibilities of women members within this framework. Following the promulgation of Nepal's new constitution in 2072, priority was given to women, Dalits, underprivileged groups, and marginalized communities to involve them in decision-making and government policymaking processes. The constitution also mandated a minimum of thirty-three percent representation for women in all sectors (Constitution, 2072). Despite this, women's participation in the local government system has historically been minimal.

However, recent local elections have demonstrated a significant increase in women's participation. This reflects the growing leadership, empowerment, and active involvement of women in various positions across urban and rural municipalities nationwide.

### **Obstacles to Women's Participation in Nepal**

The participation of women in local development faces several obstacles:

- Women elected to local government bodies have limited involvement.
- They are not assigned specific duties.
- Newly elected local bodies lack provisions in new local autonomous acts.
- Despite constitutional guarantees of equal rights, women are not perceived as equals.
- Laws do not clearly define women's roles and responsibilities.
- Patriarchal attitudes towards women create pressure and hinder their participation.
- Many women face limitations due to lower educational attainment and social, religious, and cultural restrictions.
- Women are underrepresented in decision-making bodies.
- They often face harsh treatment from colleagues and society.
- They often face harsh treatment from colleagues and society.
- Lack of cooperation from men in local government poses a significant barrier to women's effectiveness in decision-making.

### **Policy Recommendation**

In Nepal, women face a lower political standing compared to men, largely due to their disadvantaged socio-economic status. This status is perpetuated by societal norms in a male-dominated culture, which often restrict women to household roles (WONCC/UNDP, 2001). Consequently, women have limited access to educational, economic, and other opportunities provided by the state and society. These factors collectively contribute to the low levels of women's participation and leadership.

Certainly, the allocation of reserved seats for women in elected positions is a significant stride towards women's empowerment, fostering their participation and access to decision-making roles in numerical terms (ADV.org). However, for the local movement to progress, it's imperative to ensure women's meaningful engagement in the decision-making process.



To further empower women and enhance their leadership, the following recommendations could be considered.

- Clear delineation of women's roles and responsibilities should be outlined in the manuals and directives of local government.
- Equitable distribution of tasks among male and female members is essential.
- Heightened awareness campaigns should be conducted to inform women about their marginalized status in society and the necessity for improvement.
- Government and non-governmental organizations should implement specific programs aimed at raising awareness among grassroots-level women.
- Utilization of mass media for educating and mobilizing public opinion towards recognizing the advantages of women's full participation in national development is crucial.
- Monitoring the status, conditions, and rights of women should be prioritized.
- Various opportunities for leadership and empowerment training should be provided to women.

## **Conclusion**

Women have secured a legitimate presence in rural political institutions, although they remain a minority, which can help elevate their marginalized status. However, merely occupying political positions does not automatically ensure that women effectively represent the interests of the community. While the 33% quota for women is a significant step towards empowerment in all sectors of the Nepalese government, it's evident that achieving the goal of women's empowerment will require more than just this quota. Additional support measures such as education, training, employment opportunities, and participation across all sectors must be guaranteed to women in Nepal. This would enable them to attain economic self-reliance and independence.

In conclusion, the provision allowing for the direct election of women members has opened up a new opportunity for participation in the decision-making process within the grassroots democratic institution. Therefore, the level of women's involvement in this context is critical and warrants special focus to empower them, as participation, leadership skills, and empowerment are intricately connected. Thus, it is imperative to ensure the rigorous enforcement of laws for the benefit of Nepalese women. It has become quite necessary to enact the required rules, codes and legal provisions in the constitution for the women so as to empower and enhance their leadership skills. The women related planning and programs have become to be heeded from the government level and encourage the women to be participated automatically through the motivating policies in enhancing the personality and leadership quality especially in the local level. The Local Development Training Academy (LDTA), Pradesh Sushasan Kendra as well as the government agencies and

institutions for training delivery has been found to be strengthened and empowered for the better role in providing the women related training programs time and again in the local level by making the yearly Calander by informing to those women who have been found to be remained as unnoticed dwelling in the backward society and in the remote areas as well as in the marginalized situation.

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