

A Study on Lowering Factors of Women's Representation to Decision-Making Positions in Local Governance of Nepal

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Abstract

The decades-long Nepal's women's movement has achieved constitutional and legal rights ensuring the representation of women at decision-making levels. The Local Level Election Act, 2017, provisions to lodge 50 % candidacy of women by a political party among key posts either chief or deputy posts of local levels. But women's representation remained deficit by 3.19% in 2017 and about 21.25 % in 2022. Males held both the key posts in 160 local levels according to a result of the local election in 2022. This paper aims to analyze the legal impact and hindering factors to achieving the intended progress of gender equality. The study was based on a literature review, secondary data analysis and media content analysis and the data were studied from the local election of 2017 and 2022. It was found that the main factors were legal loopholes, political dynamics and political parties' coalition while lodging candidacy in the election, patriarchal value-based gender power structure, relation and exercise that affect supply and demand side both and the study also revealed that the representation of women reduced in the vital positions of the local level in 2022 compared to 2017. The findings would be useful to the women movement in Nepal for evidence-based voicing, to lawmakers to address the legal loopholes and to the political parties to explore options for increasing opportunities for women leaders to reach to key posts in the elected bodies including local levels.

Keywords: Decisive; Intersectionality; Key posts; Local level election; Women's representation.

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Introduction

There were significant contributions of women during the courses of political changes in Nepal including the aspiration of establishing women rights containing the equal political participation of women and other marginalized groups. All the political change movements of Nepal were for establishing democracy, advancement of democratization process and in latest time federalism and promoting inclusive democracy. Meanwhile, the women movement focuses several political agenda during the courses of the movement. The inclusion of political agenda by the Nepalese women movement was started in between 1946-1950 which was voting right to women. In 1950-1960 the main political agenda remained equal rights in political area and rights in political decision process. In 1960-1990 it focused to social, economic and political rights to women, legal reforms, and women's participation in development. Along with social, economic and political rights for women, it was focus to political reservation of women and reservation, gender equality and women empowerment in 1990-2006. 'After 2006 the main political agenda remained inclusive and proportionate representation of women in all organs of the state, equal legal rights and diversity in women movement'(M. Thapa & D. Khakurel, 2014).The latest achievement of the political movements is constitution of Nepal 2015 and the establishment of Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. It has clearly mentioned that 'Nepal as an inclusive, democratic, socialism-oriented, federal democratic republican State²'(Constitution, 2015). The women's involvement in political change movements and the decades-long Nepal's women movement has achieved many outcomes including constitutional and legal rights ensuring minimum representation of women in decision making structures. Democracy is all about power and justice. The participation of women in politics is also the matter of achieving power and justice. Globally, women have participated broadly during the crisis times of political movements but, they are relegated again once the crisis is end to the domestic arena'(Manandhar, 2021).

The constitution of Nepal 2015, in its preamble, premises 'eliminating all forms of discrimination and oppression including gender and caste based discrimination, resulted from the feudalistic, autocratic, centralized, unitary system of governance of the State.' It also commits 'protecting and promoting unity in diversity, social and cultural solidarity, by recognizing the

²*Constitution-of-Nepal.pdf*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 25, 2022, from <https://lawcommission.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Constitution-of-Nepal.pdf>

multi-ethnic, lingual, religious, cultural and geographically diverse characteristics; and resolving to build an egalitarian society based on the proportional inclusive and participatory principles in order to ensure economic equality, prosperity and social justice by eliminating discrimination based on class, caste, region, language, religion and gender and all forms of caste-based untouchability.’ The article 38 (4) and 40 (1) provisions women’s rights and rights to Dalit respectively to participate in state structures saying that ‘they shall have the right to participate in all bodies of the State on the basis of the principle of proportional inclusion.’ Likewise, in article 42 (1), the mentioned that ‘the economically, socially or educationally backward groups including women and Dalit shall have the right to participate in the bodies of the State on the basis of principle of proportional inclusion(Constitution, 2015). To implement the constitutional provisions, several legal reforms have been made by making new Acts or revising the existing laws. Similarly, various international treaties ICCPR, CEDAW, and BPFA ratified by Nepal outlined women’s equal rights with regards to political participation and representation in decision making. Moreover, CEDAW and BPFA outlined the special measures, positive action to address the low proportion of women among political and economic decision makers and aiming at accelerating the equality between men and women. SDGs 5 and target 5.5clearly mentioned‘to ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life’(UN, 2022).The federalism in Nepal determinesthree layers of governance structures as federal, provincial and local levels. Along with federal and seven provincial levels, there are 753 local levels in Nepal. The local levels are categorized as municipalities and rural municipalities. The municipalities are categorized into six metropolitan cities, 11 sub-metropolitan cities and 276 municipalities and likely there are 460 rural municipalities. Altogether 6,743 Wards exist under all 753 local levels.

The constitution of Nepal 2015, under the articles 222 and 223, provisions ‘village assemblies and municipal assemblies respectively in rural municipalities and municipalities as the local legislatures.’ According to the Local Election Act 2017, ‘A Village/Municipal Assembly composites of Chairperson/Mayor and Vice-Chairperson/Deputy Mayor of the Rural Municipal/Municipal Executive, Ward Chairpersons, and four members including women and Dalit women member, elected from first past the post electoral system(Commission, 2017)’ The legislative power of the Local Levels is vested in the village assemblies and municipal

assemblies.. Hence, in total, there are 293 seats of mayors and 460 of chairperson in the municipalities and rural municipalities and the same numbers for deputy mayors and vice-chairpersons. Similarly, there are 6,743 seats of ward chairpersons and 26972 seats of ward committee members. In total, there are 35,221 seats in the local level to be elected as people's representatives. The constitution, in article 223 has ensured that there must be at least two women members in each ward committee. To make inclusive Local Level Election Act 2017 provisions two of the ward members elected for each ward must be women, and one of those must be a Dalit woman. Likewise, the Local Level Election Act 2017 makes mandatory for each political party fielding candidate for both the key positions; mayor/deputy mayor and chair/vice chair to ensure that one of them is a woman.

After the promulgation of new federal structure in Nepal, two local elections have already been held in 2017 and 2022. Despite of several constitutional and legal provisions there are many deficits, challenges and issues during the practice with regards to women's representation in local levels. There have been seen some loopholes in the legal provisions. The patriarchal mind-sets in political leaders and voters, political dynamics and parties' alliance in the election, the level of self-confidence of women leaders themselves, patriarchal and gender stereotypes social attitude to under mind women's capacity, the electoral systems etc. are some of the factors lowering women's participation. On top of that there are several factors to limit women's representation in the decisive positions of local level in Nepal. This research paper aims to analyse the situation of women's representation in the local level and also to analyse the reasons reducing their representation in the decisive positions of local level in Nepal. This review based paper relies on the literature review, secondary data analysis and media content analysis. The finding would be useful to women movement in Nepal for the evidence based voicing, to law makers to address the legal loopholes and to the political parties to explore options for accountably increasing opportunities to women leaders to reach to key posts in the elected bodies including local levels.

Objectives

The study aims to find out women's representation at local election in comparison of held on 2017 and 2022 in Nepal and to find out the factors reducing women's representation in decisive positions³ of the local levels in Nepal. The other objective of the study is to find out the areas of improvements on women's representation in the decision making positions of local level in Nepal.

Methodology

The study is based on a descriptive research approach and relied on literature review, secondary information analysis and media content analysis. The secondary information collected from the institutional records and official publications including of Election Commission Nepal. The literature was reviewed collecting most relevant previous work done by different authors, scholars and organizations in their research papers/articles, books, general articles published on women in politics, women's political participation/representation, local elections and the situation of women's representation in Nepal in 2022 and 2017. The media content analysis was conducted by choosing the reputed daily papers and online portals including eKantipur, onlinekhabar.com, setopati.com and nagarik.com. Basically they were analysed around the time of election; pre, during and post-election. The secondary data applied for the analysis were collected from the reports of Nepal Elections Commission. This research paper was prepared and presented in the Annual Conference organized by Martin Chautari in 30 November to 2 December, 2022. It was given input to refine the study.

Literature review

Despite of facing several challenges by women in political participation and electoral processes, 'they are success in achieving higher participation in political positions, although that is not enough'(Bishnu R. Upreti et.al., 2020) . 'Nepal's patriarchal system gender and sexuality intersect with caste, indigenous, ethnic and religion status. The insufficient formal education

³ In this paper, the positions Mayor/Chairperson, Deputy Mayor/Vice-chair and Ward chairperson have been defined as decisive positions of local level being more authority with them.

problems women in understanding complex, legal issues and therefore experience great difficulty to engage meaningfully in political debate. The access of poor and marginalized women in the political positions is still challenge, and the social norms of patriarchy persist in political interaction'(Bishnu R. Upreti et.al., 2020)⁴Citing to the Asia Foundation research, they argue that women elected in local level facing problem of time management, financial problems, problems of caste and gender-based discrimination and problems of transportation.

Regarding political participation of women,(Paxton et al.,2007)present supply-side and demand-side explanations. 'As the demand side, they explain that political participation requires both personal characteristics like interest, ambition, and knowledge as well as resources such as time, networks, civic skills, education, and economic resources'(Pamela Paxton et.al., 2007). It is quite relevant to women's political participation in Nepalese context too. They argue, gender socialization partly influences women's interest, knowledge, and ambition regarding politics, and partly by large-scale social structures, that enhance or limit women's opportunities for education and politics. She further argues that 'the limited education and literacy capacity and lack of political knowledge and experience about the political system, further hinder many female politicians from participating in the political process effectively'(Manandhar, 2021). 'The demand-side explanations features of political systems shape the rules of the game and strongly influence whether women can attain and how they attain political power. The specific features of the political system also affect demand, including the electoral system and the presence and structure of gender quotas and they further explain, political parties and party leaders also pull women into or push women out of the political process(Pamela Paxton et.al., 2007).

Discussing about the women's political participation/representation, there is also a concern of meaningful participation. The numerical representation is not enough. 'There are five types of arguments to justify women's representation in legislature'(Manandhar, 2021).The first is justice arguments that advocate for the women's equal rights to participate in the public spheres like men. Secondly, it is the utility arguments which is about putting forward a number of benefits which women's participation can bring. The third one is the deliberative democracy arguments that explain, urging participation of women in public decision-making and enriching public

⁴ Upreti, Bishnu R.; Upreti, Drishti; and Ghale, Yamuna (2020). Nepali Women in Politics: Success and Challenges. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 21(2), 76-93. Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol21/iss2/8>

debate through the perspectives of women and their experiences. The fourth is symbolic arguments that identify the symbolic effects of women's participation for raising women's aspirations, increasing their connection to politics, legitimizing the political institutions and uplifting their status as a group. . The agency arguments is the fifth one which claim, women have different interests than men and the presence is needed to protect these interests'(Manandhar, 2021).

Nepalese society strongly characterizes by patriarchal culture, where women have been marginalized conventionally from engaging in public life. The social status of women and comparative equality with men varies among various ethnic groups, regions and castes of Nepal. Patriarchy based discriminatory cultural practices poses major hurdles to achieve gender equality in Nepal that remains as the big challenges'(Manandhar, 2021) (Further, she argues, 'the patriarchal mind-sets present in the political parties and the leading roles and decision making seats are occupied by male leader in political parties.' 'A handful of senior and high caste male leaders in political parties always made decisions. Within the political parties, women's opportunities are determined on the basis of their loyalty and kinship to particular leaders, rather than capabilities and performance of women leaders. Nepal being a male dominated society there's a tendency of leaders to think that women aren't as capable as men. So, women's effective participation in decision making is hindered by male domination inside political parties. The lack of media coverage of news related to women leaders is also an issue. The lacking of economic resources which require for funding incentives to party workers and voters is other crucial challenge for women because control over their property and assets is mostly captured by men and women cannot take economic decision, thus, they face struggle to run high-cost political campaigns, which becomes mandatory for key political positions'(Manandhar, 2021).

The women politicians are vulnerable in several ways. Their male colleagues usually portray as having no exceptional leadership qualities. The women politicians have to negotiate patriarchal norms upheld by society as private patriarchy transforms into public patriarchy. The relation of private and public patriarchy is complex and women politicians face varied forms of gender inequality at home, when entering public space as well as their workplace(Lotter, n.d.). From

Intersectionality perspective, as cited to Kandiyoti (1988)⁵, Lotter further presents that the high caste Hindu women and women who belong to ethnic minority groups face different challenges in finding their political voice in Nepal. Thapa & Khakurel (2014) points out that ‘patriarchal thoughts and practices, descent-ism, seniority, nepotism and favouritism, opportunism as the key reasons of affecting access to political power of women. They argue, masculinization of politics, violence against women in politics, economic dependency, stereotype gender norms and values, socio-economic and cultural barriers are the key challenges for barring women in politics’ (M. Thapa & D. Khakurel, 2014).

The Intersectionality is an important aspect while discussing about the women’s political representation. ‘There are two compelling reasons to consider Intersectionality theory for studying leadership’ (Richardson & Loubier, 2008).⁶ Firstly, Intersectionality aims to reveal the multiple identities and characters of social actors exposing the connections between those points. Secondly, it suggests that analysis of complex social situations should not reduce understanding to a singular category; rather, it should facilitate the understanding of substantively distinct experiences from the effects of inextricably connected roles and situations. Further they argue that Intersectionality eliminates the possibility of our falling traits and actions merely to one attribute such as gender which would have emphasized on gender and stereotype of leaders. Employing Intersectionality in leadership studies opens new possibilities for leadership theory and education’ (Richardson & Loubier, 2008). Henne (2018) argues that ‘unpacking mainstream anthropology’s uneasy relationship with the interconnections between raced and gendered dynamics requires considering the discipline’s relationships to its subjects of study’ (Henne, 2018). She references, “Intersectionality,” a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989)⁷, ‘is a common framework employed to unveil these distinct forms of marginalization.’ She highlights three dimensions of Intersectionality as Crenshaw’s elaborated as: ‘(1) structural Intersectionality, which involves the forms of subordination that render the experiences of women of colour qualitatively different from those of white women or men of colour; (2)

⁵https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Deniz-Kandiyoti?utm_content=businessCard&utm_source=publicationDetail&rgutm_meta1=AC%3A10715121.

Bargaining With Patriarchy-1988

⁶https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/ijls/new/vol3iss2/IJLS_V3Is2_Richardson_Loubier.pdf

⁷ Crenshaw, Kimberlé () "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. Available at: <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>

political Intersectionality, which entails practices that fail to acknowledge how the position of women of colour is distinct like including antiracist and feminist coalitions that evoke one axis of subordination; and (3) representational Intersectionality, which captures the expansive and symbolic practices that perpetuate the (in)visibility of women of colour' (Henne, 2018). It can be an indicative direction to Nepalese context. Siera Tamang (2018) writes about the lived experiences of elected women; Deputy Mayors, ward chairpersons and ward committee members on the local governance. At the formal level the "deputy" position is given to women because "deputy" positions have very little authority which is gendered challenges to authority. The combination of formal and informal power is centred on the men authority. The formal political power is cantered on chairpersons at ward level who are male and is personalized embodiment centre of institutional and gender power. From Intersectionality viewpoint the author gives example that a Dalit Deputy Mayor faced caste discrimination from Mayor. Another Deputy Mayor faced double jeopardies being a woman and Muslim. She argues, the burden of Dalit identity is reflected in the lack of economic resources and equitable access to education. Moreover, Dalit women face greater barriers to developing the capabilities and building the resources needed to sustain their political participation (Tamang, 2018). There is also argument that there is marginalization of within the women. Dalit women are being further marginalized whereas there is continuation of deprivation from political oppression, social discrimination and religious ignorance against them. 'Unless and until there is no inclusion, proportionate representation and participation of Dalit women, the Nepal's women's movement cannot be a complete movement to achieve greater gender equality (Sob, 2006)⁸' 'Dalits are neglected in the post of key post of the local levels and ward chairpersons. Reasons behind less number of Dalit representatives are as women and Dalits were not given tickets, they are not acceptable in party leadership and election systems costly, so Dalit could not become leaders from voters' (Pariyar, 2019). The deliberative democracy model talks about the inclusive democracy, special representation of social groups guaranteed representation of excluded groups thorough proportionate representation or reservation or quota system, political communication and political culture. To make democracy for all deliberately special provision for excluded group should be made (Yong. as cited by Tumin, 2003). It is very much relevant to the diversified society like Nepal.

⁸<https://fedonepal.org/publications/study-and-report/>

To review the literatures there are limited resources available around on this topic. Being legal and structural practice of federal structure of Nepal relatively new, very few research studies have been carried out which are more focus to what women are experiencing after the latest political changes and represented in the elected bodies. There are limited resources on the situation of reaching women to key posts of the local governments. For this article the research question is: what are the factors lowering women's representation in the decision making positions of local levels in Nepal.

Representation of women in local governance.

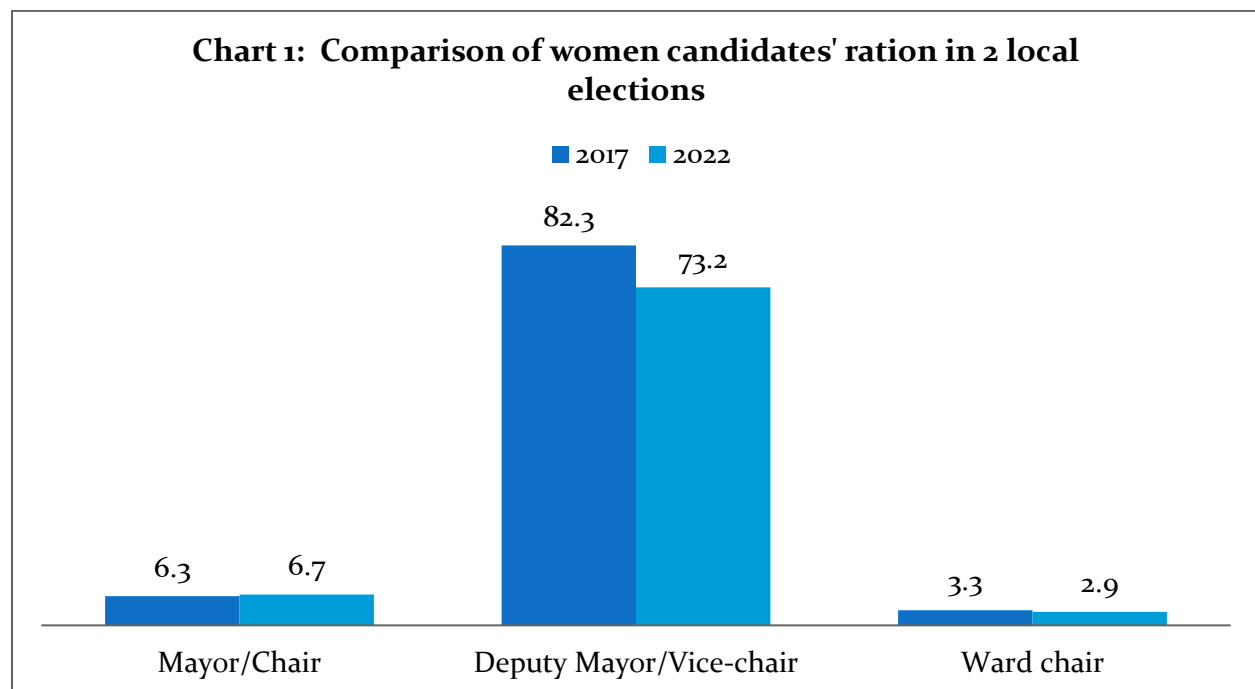
'The representation of women in local governments is 36% in the world. Regionally, it is 41%, 35%, 32%, 29%, 25%, 25% and 18% respectively in Central Asia & South Asia, Northern America & Europe, Oceania, Sub-Sahara Africa, Eastern Asia & South Eastern Asia, Latin America and Caribbean, Western Asia & Northern Africa'(I. Berevoescu & J. Ballington, 2021)⁹. The highest and lowest representation of women in local government are in Antigua & Barbuda and Saudi Arabia with 66.67 and 1.14 per cent respectively. According to the local election 2017 result, Nepal lies in 16th position in the world and 2nd position in South Asia with 40.96%(I. Berevoescu & J. Ballington, 2021) in this regards.

The representation of women in local governments is higher than in parliaments globally, however is still not equal to men. The similar situation is there in case of Nepal. The women's population is 51.04 % of the total population 29192480(CBS, 2021) in Nepal. But the women voters were less than men that is 49.29% of the total voters 17733723 during the local election 2022. 'There was recognition of "other" gender in the voter registration. The Election Commission records 183 voters of other gender that is only 0.001%'(EC, 2022) .To see the population ratio, the number of women voters had to be higher than men and mostly they live in the country. The voter registration is vital to use voting rights, which is initial level of political participation. Lesser the women's participation in political arena higher the male dominance to represent in governance. Insufficient awareness in women towards importance of voter registration and not being able to spare time to go for it due to gender biased workload and not

⁹<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Womens-representation-in-local-government-en.pdf> Note(in Citation ; Authors name is provided event though it is under UN Women's working paper)

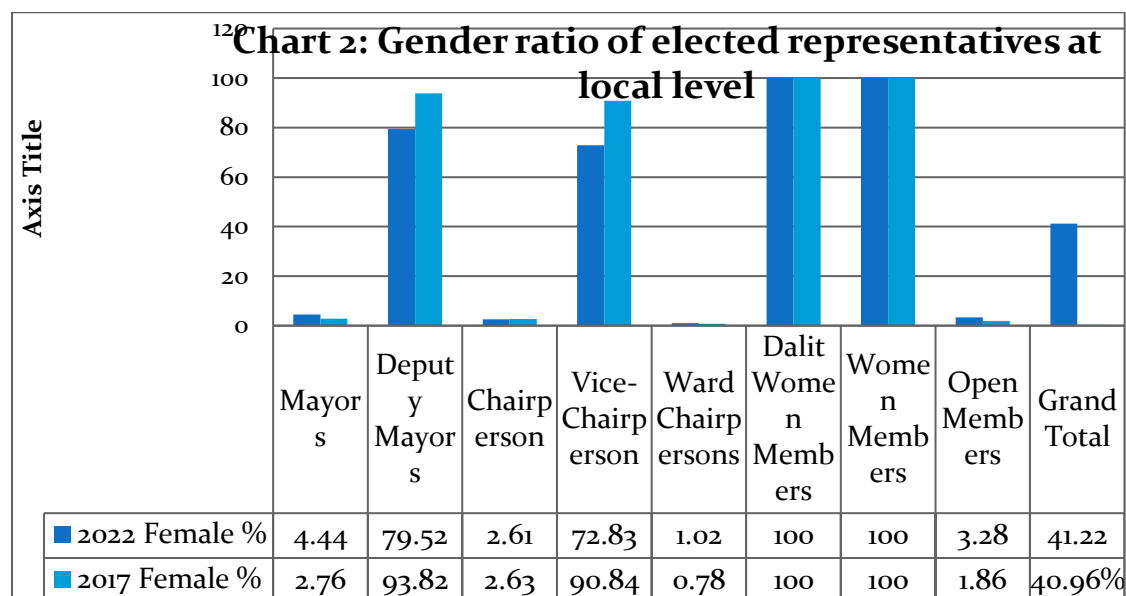
access to technical equipment and skills for online registration process are of the reasons behind it.

The other important step for political participation to reach to decision making level is field candidacy to contest in the election. There were altogether 145013 total candidates for the post of ward committee members, ward chairpersons, chairpersons and vice chairperson for rural municipality and mayors and deputy mayors for the municipalities in the local election 2022. Of them, 55699 were women which are only 38.41%(EC, 2022). The percentage of women candidates remained very less with only 6.7% for the vital positions like Mayor and Chairpersons which are decisive position at local level. The other vital can be considered to ward chairperson in which women's candidacy remained nominally 2.9% in the local election 2022 (Chart: 1). Hence, in candidacy, there is invisibly increment in chief positions by 0.4% but significant decrease in deputy positions by 9.1% and decreased by 0.3% in the Ward chairperson positions in 2022 compare to local election 2017.



Source: Election Commission Nepal, 2022

Overall, of the total 35097¹⁰ elected representatives for the all 753 local levels, women ration remains 41.22 per cent in 2022. This ratio was 40.96 per cent in 2017. In overall, it has been increased slightly in decimal (0.26%) than 2017 but significantly decreased in chiefs and deputy chiefs which are key decisive positions at local level. In the both the elections, predominantly male are elected as Ward Chairpersons, Rural Municipality Chairpersons and Municipality Mayors (Chart: 2). the same situation is in the position of open ward committee members. Majority of women were elected in the deputy positions i.e. Deputy Mayors and Vice-Chairpersons, and reserved minor posts ward committee women members and Dalit women members.

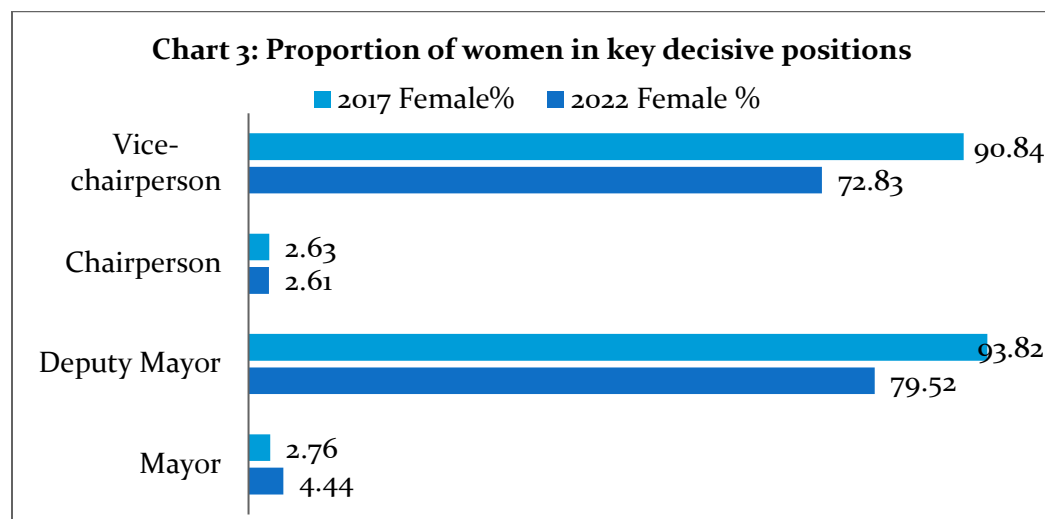


Source: Nepal Election Commission, 2017 & 2022

The key decisive positions at local levels are Mayors/Chairpersons (chiefs) and Deputy Mayors/Vice-chairpersons (deputy chiefs). The total number of chiefs and deputy chiefs is 1506. The gender ration in the key decisive seats is imbalanced. Of the total decisive posts women occupy only 39.38% in present local governments despite of legal provision of 50% candidacy from a political party to the either post of chief or deputy chief in the Local Election Act 2017.

¹⁰The total Seats is 35221 But 124 (123 Dalit women members and 1 woman member) seats remained vacant in 2022

To compare results of two elections, the women's representation has been reduced by 14.3 and 18.01 per cent respectively for the posts of Deputy Mayors and Vice-chairpersons in election of 2022 than the local election 2017 which is significant figure (Chart: 3).



Source: Nepal

Election Commission, 2017 & 2022

The women's expected seats were at least 753 that is 50% according to the spirit of the Local Election Act 2073. However, there were 3.19% and 21.25% deficit in won seats by women in both the local elections of 2017 and 2022 respectively (Table: 1). The main reason remained effects of political parties' alliance in the election. Because of alliances, parties did not put up women candidates for the leadership posts, as the rule of fielding at least one woman for Chief/ Deputy Chief is not applicable if the party is contesting just one of those seats' (Shrestha, Giri & Neelam, 2022).

Table 1: Expected and actual won seats by women

Description	2022	2017
Women's expected seats in either chiefs or deputy chiefs	753	753
Actual secured seats won by women	593	729
Women's deficit seats*	160	24
Deficit %	21.25	3.19

Source: Nepal Election Commission, 2017 & 2022

In the condition of fielding candidacy by the political party's one male and one female candidate for the post of Mayor or deputy Mayor and chairperson or vice-chairperson women were pushed

to go for the deputy mayor and vice-chairperson. On the other hand, due to the alliance of political parties, women have missed the opportunity to be a candidate even though for the post of deputy mayor and vice-chairperson. As result 160 local levels have been occupied by male in the both chief and deputy chief. Whereas only in three local levels¹¹, women won the both post of chief and deputy chief.

Table 5: Decisive position including ward chairperson

Position	2022				2017
	Total	Male	Female	Female %	Female%
Mayor	293	280	13	4.44	2.76
Deputy Mayor	293	60	233	79.52	93.82
Chairperson	460	448	12	2.61	2.63
Vice-chairperson	460	125	335	72.83	90.84
Ward chairperson	6743	6674	69	1.02	0.78
Total	8249	7587	662		
%	100.00	91.97	8.03		

Source: Nepal Election Commission, 2017 & 2022

The position of ward chairperson is also considered as a decisive level. Of total 6743 seats of ward chairpersons, only 69 seats were won by women in the local election of 2022 that become only 1.02% though it has been slightly increased than local election 2017 (Table 5). To put together the chiefs, deputy chief and ward chairperson considering as decisive positions, it becomes 8249 in which women's representation is only 8.03%

Intersectionality with special focus to Dalit women

Nepal is characterized by socio-cultural diversities. The Intersectionality, being a methodological approach and framework to deal with diversity perspectives, is highly relevant and useful to analyze while discussing about the participation and representation of women in decision making levels in Nepal including local levels.

Table 6: Elected representatives from Dalit community in local election 2017 & 2022

Position	2017			2022
	Total	Male	Female	Total ¹²
Mayor	6	6	0	3

¹¹Gauriganj Rural Municipality, Jhapa, Bhairavi Rural Municipality, Dailekh and Lamki Chuha Municipality of Kailali.

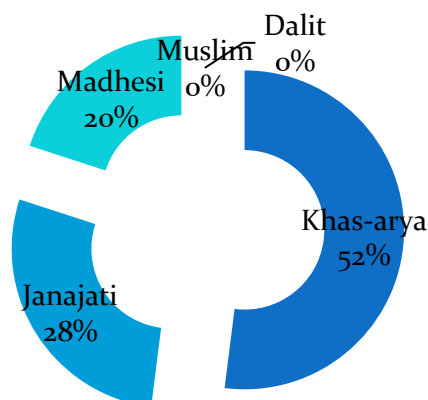
¹²Not found gender disaggregated data

Deputy Mayor	10	1	9	8
Chairperson	1	1	0	7
Vice-chairperson	13	1	12	7
Ward chairperson	169	169	0	158
Ward member open	1858	884	974	880
Grand Total	2057	1062	995	1063

Source: FEDO & Dignity Initiative 2020 and abstracted from B.K. 2022

There is highly under representation of Dalit male and female in the open positions including chiefs, deputy chiefs, ward chairpersons and open ward members. Only 3 Dalit men¹³ won the Mayor post in 2022. It has been decreased by 50% compare to election of 2017. The Dalit women's representation was zero in the post of chairperson and Mayor in 2017. The similar situation remained in 2022 too. The representation of Dalit has been decreased from 169 seats to 158 from local election 2017 to 2022 in the ward chairperson post which is also a vital post. Moreover, the representation of Dalit in ward member open has decreased largely from 1858 to 880 from local election 2017 to 2022 (Table: 6). Among the 25 women elected in principal posts; mayors and chairperson for municipalities and rural municipalities, there is a zero portion of Dalit women. Of them, ratio is 52%, 28% and 20% respectively of Khas-Arya, Janajati and Madhesi women (Table: 7). It clearly shows that there is no presence of Dalit women in key decisive position of local level in Nepal. The same situation is there of Muslim women. In a misappropriate way, the some seats reserved for Dalit women, has been taken as the implementation of proportionate representation by the hegemonic group in the influential

Intersectionality aspect among 25 women elected Mayors and Chairpersons



¹³Dev Kumar Nepali, Dhorpatan Baglung, Puspa Badi, Chaurjhari Rukum, Bechan Das Tatma, Bideha Municipality Dhanusha

positions in the political parties and the state mechanism.

Source: Election Commission Nepal, 2022

Actually, not only ward members but also needed to ensure representation in all levels including Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Chairpersons and Vice chairperson according to 14% population of Dalits. While doing so, there had to be representation of Dalits as 40 in Mayors and Deputy Mayors, 64 in Chairpersons and vice-chairpersons and 944 in ward chair persons' (Nepali, 2022) Nepali further argues that the ward committee members have been used as showcase, in real sense; they have been deprived from participating in the governance system of the state. Leaders of Dalit communities were provided tickets in the beginning but snatched during the registration of nomination. On the other hand the Dalit candidates who were in the election campaigns have faced the caste based discrimination. On the other hand, 123 Dalit women reserved seats remained vacant¹⁴ because none of political parties fielded candidature in the local election of 2022. The main reason is not having Dalit population in some wards. "Dalit rights activists, said —'from discriminatory mind-set among leaders to political parties' lack of willingness—which have become barriers to electing Dalit ward members in the legal mandated number"(Pradhan, 2022)¹⁵

Factors analysis on lowering women's decisionmaking position in local governance.

There are multiple factors lowering the women's representation in local levels' decision making levels. The key factors are analysed below categorically.

Legal factor: There are several legal loopholes. Local Level Election Act 2017 makes mandatory for each political party to ensure at least one woman while fielding candidate for mayor/deputy mayor and chair/vice chair. But it is not imperative if a party fields candidacy for only one either any post. There are loopholes in the election laws. If a party gives candidature only for one post, this provision is not imperative' (Pokhrel, 2022). Likewise, legal provisions are silent for Intersectionality for the key posts. There is no precise definition of "principle of proportional

¹⁴25 in Gandaki province, 37 in Bagmati, 6 in Madhesh, 10 in Sudurpaschim, and 6 in Province #1 and remaining in other places

¹⁵<https://tkpo.st/3vUHYFz>

inclusion” that constitution vaguely provides right to participate in the state organs to women, Dalits and other underrepresented groups based on the principle of proportional inclusion.

Political factor: The party alliance used this legal loophole while fielding candidacy in both the local elections of 2017 and 2022 that resulted to reducing women’s representation in the key posts of local level in Nepal, because they did not put up women candidates for the leadership posts. Men dominate political parties and always want to stake their claim when it comes to power position. Plus this year, due to the coalition, the representation has been even low. When the number of female candidates was low, the representation going down is normal. Within parties, women have lesser chances of being selected as candidates due to vague selection criteria descriptions from central authorities, male-dominant selection committees and other informalities of the selection process as a whole. ‘The Selection Committee- A Male Dominated Process: Political parties organized local committees that work to select candidates for the local elections. These committees were predominantly male and sought subjective traits, namely: loyalty to the party, sacrifice, dedication, trustworthiness, popularity, charisma, and contributions. The informality in the traits as mentioned above give space for implicit and/or outright gender biases as seen in this election as well as the one in 2017’ (Shrestha, Giri & Neelam, 2022). There is predominantly high number of men in political parties and they have monopoly in decision making in the parties. ‘In 2022 local election, they did not like to give more ticket to women for the election candidature in the name of alliance of political parties. In previous election there was alliance in very few local levels, so political parties mandatorily fielded candidature of women for either chief or deputy chiefs. But this time, there was political alliance of ruling parties. To field candidature one party field for one post another party fielded for another post’ (Gyawali, 2022) To provide ticket for contesting the election, political parties ignore capable ones rather provide tickets to those on the basis of nepotism, favouritism, casteism and those who have lots of money. ‘Male political leaders do not see win ability in women and do not give ticket for election candidate. The capable women are not getting



Figure 1: QR code for the report of UN women on the situation of women equal participation in governance.

ticket’(Shah, 2022)Shah further writes, ‘the objective of political presentation of women is to achieve gender equality through political empowerment. But the women empowerment agenda remained challenging and unsolved till the completion of terms of firstly elected body of local level. It shows the need of change in thoughts and behaviour of Madhesi men of the society specially those who are in frontlines with public positions’(Shah, 2022).

In the beginning, the Election Commission said that woman candidate must be mandatory while fielding candidacy only for one post from the alliance but later one it changed the position and said, only priority to be given to women candidate in such case. In such situation women’s representation has been reduced due to mind-set and will power of political parties rather than capacity of women leaders. There is need of ensuring women’s representation in ward chairpersons with certain ratio. In some case women leader have got chance to field candidacy only if there is difficult to find male candidate or there is lower chance to win(Gyawali, 2022). The political parties have given importance to male candidates where there is no legal compulsion.“Deputy” positions are feminized because “deputy” positions have very little authority& challenges (Tamang, 2018). Women are pushed to go for the reservation position.

Economic factor:‘A candidate needs money to contest elections in Nepal. It’s a sad reality that people who worked hard and fought to change this rarely get to contest election’ (Dumre, 2022)Lots of resources spent in the election campaigns, male leaders think, women leaders cannot spend money. ‘The electoral practices are becoming unfavourable for women, poor and disadvantaged groups. The electoral characteristic is going for the favour of the rich people. In many places the ward committee member candidates have spent up to one million, ward chairperson’s candidate spent up to five million and candidates of Rural/Municipality up to ten million rupees’(Kiranti, 2022).The election commission has been failed to instruct and make abide political parties to follow decision of the election commission about the women candidacy of either one chief post.

Social factor:There is masculinization of politics, gender stereotype conception- women for private men for public sphere, violence against women in politics, economic dependency, stereotype gender norms and values, socio-economic and cultural barriers are barring women reaching to decisive positions (Thapa & Khakurel, 2014), (Shah, 2022) & (Aryal, 2019). ‘Due to patriarchal thoughts and practices, descentism, seniority, nepotism and favouritism, opportunism,

the capable women are not getting ticket access to powerful positions’(M. Thapa & D. Khakurel, 2014)’. ‘Women leaders cannot frequently meet and lobby to male leaders for the ticket because, are busy for household & community works, restriction of travelling alone and also becomes a matter of character. The rigid and stereotype thoughts of men keep women inside the home (family barrier), not given priority to participate in politics.’Male leaders underestimate the capacity of women leaders and do not give ticket. Dalits are neglected in the key posts, their leadership are not acceptable in party leadership and election due to caste prejudice, so Dalit could not become leaders from voters’(Pariyar, 2019). ‘Dalit women are being further marginalized due to continuation of deprivation through political oppression & social discrimination’(Sob, 2006). The leaders who are in the decision making level of the parties are male leaders. Because of narrow minds of them they under estimate the capacity of women leaders. As a result women leaders do not get ticket for the election candidacy. On the other hand, there is economic deal to get ticket. Normally, women do not have economic decision power in family, they cannot easily involve in such deal (Adhikari, 2022). Even though the women rights achieved from the contributions and sacrifices are being time to time attacked by the patriarchal mind-sets. The thoughts of men are very rigid and stereotype. In the name of tradition and culture women are tried to keep inside the home. So they are not given priority to participate in politics (Chaudhary 2022)

Empowerment factor:There is insufficient pool of women leaders for the candidacy contesting for the election. There is found insufficient self-confident in women leaders to claim candidacy for key posts. Women leaders hesitate to challenge men political leaders who hold power in parties

Discussion and the outcome of the study.

The representation of women in local levels’ decisions making positions is in decreasing trend in 2022 compare to local election 2017. In local election of 2022, there were 122 post were vacant those were mandatory position for proportional representation of Dalit community in governance. There is invisibly increment in chief positions by 0.4% but significant decrease in deputy positions by 9.1% and decreased by 0.3% in the Ward chairperson positions in 2022 compare to local election 2017. Women’s representation decreased by 18% in decisive positions

in 2022 than 2017 in Nepal. The study found out that the legal, political, economic, and social and empowerment factors are responsible behind this trend. This article will contribute to demand side actors as a part of evidence to advocate for increasing women's representation in the key posts of the local levels particularly in Nepal. In the report of SDG-5 of 2022 mentioned that "As of 1 January 2022, the global share of women in lower and single houses of national parliaments reached 26.2 per cent, up from 22.4 per cent in 2015. Women's share is slightly over one third in local governments. At this pace, it would take another 40 years for women and men to be represented equally in national parliaments"(Report, 2022).Nepal also lagging behind to meet the goals of equal representation of women in decision making position in governance.

Conclusion

The female population is more than of male in Nepal. 'But their ratio is lower than male in terms of participation and representation in public sphere including politics and decision making levels. In terms of political participation, the number of women voters, women contesting in the election and number of women winners in the election are lower than men. The reservation provision increases the number women in the electoral politics'(AK. Shrestha & SP.Phuyel, 2019). Even though it is not enough to prepare them equal representation in decision making level.

There are several constitutional, legal, policy and program to increase women's participation and representation of women in decision making level including local level in Nepal. Despite of that their participation and representation in political decision making level is not equal to men. The women's representation has been decreased in decisive positions in 2022 than 2017.

Political, social, economic, legal, and electoral and empowerment factors behind the lower representation of women including in the decisive position of Local Levels. The legal loopholes, predominantly majority of men in decision making level of political parties, patriarchal and gender stereotype mind-sets of political leaders, political dynamics and having political parties' alliance in the elections, undermining the capacity of women leaders by the society and political institutions, costly electoral characteristics and lacking of access to economic decision, political parties and their leaders' tendency of keeping women in subordination position, lacking of self-confidence in women leaders and tying subordinate role like deputy mayor or vice-chairperson at

local level are some of the key reasons behind the lower representation of women including decisive position of local levels.

There is need of legal reforms to remove legal loopholes and having straight forward election system gender sensitization to male leadership, building self-confidence of women leaders, gender awareness to whole society and deconstruction of imbalance power relation among men, women and other gender etc. can be the addressing ways to ensure equal political participation and representation of women to men. Further, there is need of paying strong attention to Intersectionality aspect to promote inclusive and justiciable gender equality in the political participation, representation of all categories of women considering the diversified characteristics of Nepalese society.

Recommendation

- There is need of legal reforms to remove ambiguity provisions in the laws including overlooked to parties alliance and not enforceable if a party field candidacy for only one key post of the Rural/Municipality, to ensure meaningful women's representation in the decisive positions.
- The political parties and leaders should be accountable to ensure and promote women's leadership and increase their participation and representation in decision making levels including local level.
- The Election Commission should undertake strong position to promote gender equality in decision making level.
- The women leaders, women activists and women organizations should continuously create pressure to state mechanism and political parties to promote and ensure participation and representation of women in decision making level including people's representing bodies including local levels.
- The political parties should take responsibility to ensure representation of women, Dalit and other marginalized group by embracing the principles of inclusion and the framework of Intersectionality.
- There is a need of systematic and comprehensive research including focusing Intersectionality perspective.

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