GIZ-Gender Competition 2024

Proposal from and submitted by: CDSG team, Nepal
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Implementation period: 04/2022-03/2024
Geographical focus: Lumbini, Karnali, Sudurpaschim Provinces (3 out of 7 provinces)
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A crucial time for women´s leadership and gender equality in Nepal

Nepal has made the fastest progress among South Asian countries when it comes to combating gender-based gaps in recent years. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 has been a significant milestone for "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)" and enshrines equal rights for women, the poor, the vulnerable and people from different social groups. Through representation quota Nepal has significantly increased the number of women and other marginalized groups in parliament and among local elected representatives. Furthermore the Government of Nepal (GoN) has adopted various policies and measures such as GESI Strategy and Gender Responsive Budgeting. Sectoral ministries are implementing GESI policies and guidelines, with many having established GESI units with GESI focal persons to monitor progress.

The mandated reservation for women in the local elections expressed as a percentage was 40.4 percent. In ward committees of each LGs, at least two of the four ward members are women, one of whom must be from the Dalit caste. Political parties should field at least one-woman candidate between the mayor and deputy mayor as per election law. Also, a minimum of three women are represented in the nine-member District Coordination Committees. The electoral quota of Nepal ensures 33% women's representation in federal and provincial parliaments and 40% in local government.

Challenges and opportunities

Social exclusion and gender inequality in Nepal have structural, historic and social root causes. While the government has made strong efforts in legal reform and institutional changes, achieving gender equality and transforming Nepal into a more inclusive democracy also requires changes in public and personal attitudes and mind-sets. Discrimination is highly intersectional, with women from certain ethnic groups and communities (Dalit, Adivasi Janajati) among the most marginalized. Gender, caste and ethnicity-based inequality and violence are still largely prevalent. Existing biases and discrimination against women, and other excluded and vulnerable groups of Nepal limits the growth and equitable distribution of benefits of development interventions. The deeply rooted gendered social norms and stereotypes have negatively influenced meaningful participation of women and excluded groups in governance and decision-making processes.

Since the first local elections after the new constitution in 2017 many women have assumed new leadership roles and have gained significant experience. Most of them struggled with a patriarchal environment and gender-based stereotypes in assuming their new duties. Some were discouraged by the push-back and partly hostile environment they faced, others fought their way through and achieved recognition by the community and their male peers. Though representation of women partially appears as a tokenism in Nepali politics and society, the new visibility of women in official roles and offices also slowly transforms perceptions and changes social settings. A new cohort of women leaders is growing who can also serve as role models for the younger generation. Hence it is crucial that these pioneering leaders receive all the support that is available. This includes formal knowledge and training but also access to social resources, like networks and psycho-social and mentoring support.

Foto: *Citizens of Bheriganga municipality in dialogue with deputy mayor, GIZ Nepal*

The project´s approach

CDSG´s mandate and mission is to build capacities of subnational governments in the new federal set-up. Gender and social inclusion are considered crosscutting issues in the project design and a gender sensitive approach is embedded throughout the workstreams. Beyond that, the project has piloted several dedicated interventions directed at women leaders and the implementation of GESI on a local level. These will be highlighted in the following sections. The project team is aware that influencing mindsets and societal stereotypes is one of the most complex and long-term change efforts. With our interventions we try to amplify voice and agency of female leaders and create spaces that foster connection and provide inspiration and input for reflection. We believe that feminist approaches and impactful gender actions need to be carried out by local change agents. We can and should nurture spaces for that.

A) Confidence through connection - Communities of Practices (CoP) for female elected representatives

Together with the Provincial Centers for Good Governance (PCGG) the project has piloted and launched Communities of Practice for female elected representatives in 3 partner provinces. The representatives recognize the value of belonging to a network of

professionals who share similar challenges and the need to create a safe space for open sharing and learning. Since most of the elected deputy mayors are first time in office and induction into roles and responsibilities are lacking, the COP has become a valuable platform for learning. Inputs from other participants and resource persons (e.g. former deputy mayors) during a CoP meeting are brought in, e.g. how to set up and chair the judicial committee. In addition, there is room for representatives to resolve issues among themselves and address problems and challenges connected with their role. One major challenge most of them expressed is the working relationship within the team of officials, especially the mayor (who in almost all cases is a man, currently there are 8 female mayors in 753 local governments). Hearing from others how they have resolved this and claimed their role in decision-making processes is perceived as encouraging. Thereby the CoP serves as a platform for them to develop strategies to overcome the challenges they face, to promote equal treatment and advocate for the recognition of their roles and responsibilities. A significant by-product is the creation of a network and community that can be activated and reached out to independently from CoP meetings.

Foto: *Taken from video on CoP, GIZ Nepal*

B) Spaces and prompts for reflection and dialogue

Together with the Municipal Associations MuAN and NARMIN peer-to peer learning and dialogue spaces reflecting on good practices and challenges while implementing GESI measures on the municipal level have been carried out. The Municipal Associations are an important actor and offer an ample platform for disseminating practices and learning and collecting voices from the local level. Together with them the project has developed an e-learning course with four modules on "Strengthening Women´s Participation in Local Governance". The course provides inputs to reflect on privilege, gender-roles and the benefits of inclusive governance. It also shares the stories and achievements of several Nepali women leaders. In addition it assembles tools, good practices and inspirations how to implement GESI on a municipal level. The course has been launched end of November 2023 in the presence of 35 municipal representatives.

Foto: *Launching of E-learning course on GESI, GIZ Nepal*

C) Promoting and disseminating tools and practices for more inclusive local governments

Mobile teams, another "learning beyond training" modality the project has piloted together with the Provincial Centers for Good Governance have supported municipal teams and elected representatives on inclusive planning and gender responsive budgeting. The mobile team is building on a mentoring approach which tries to identify implementation problems and viable solutions matching the specific situation of the municipality. A major general problem is that many of the plans and strategies that are developed in or for the local governments are never really implemented. The mobile team approach tries to get into that implementation barrier. The experts have shared the bottlenecks they faced in the participating pilot municipalities with other multiplicators. It is too early to talk about impact, but it is clear, that checklists or making plans on inclusive development alone will not yield the expected results. A more practical, hands-on support and trained facilitators and mentors are needed. The mobile team approach is promising in that sense, especially when it goes hand in hand with other sensitization or awareness raising measures. A change in awareness and attitude towards inclusive development can´t be addressed by tools alone.

Results, partnerships and sustainability

Limited in scope due to a short project phase of only 2 years and the project´s exit in 2024, the project´s interventions in addressing gender inequalities are far from a system´s approach. Impact is difficult to measure at this point. What we see and can report are promising effects and potentials, especially of the Community of Practice approach which can be combined with other interventions like mobile experts for inclusive practices, dialogues among the municipal teams and e-Learning. Participants repeatedly confirmed the value these spaces have for them. An externally administered survey and evaluation has been carried out. Building connections and networks among female leaders and giving them opportunities for developing their leadership skills and knowledge can be a powerful resource for their further journey and influence in society.

All activities were developed and carried out in close partnership with local organizations like the Provincial Centers for Good Governance (CoP, Mobile Teams) and Municipal Associations (E-Learning, Peer to peer learning and dialogues). Facilitators have been trained and a toolkit for CoPs developed. PCGG have allocated budget to carry on the CoP approach and Mobile Teams after the project´s end. The CoP approach is very cost-effective, in one case a group of deputy mayors has initiated a self-organized CoP in another region after witnessing a CoP session. In one province other development partners have taken up the CoP approach. We hope to spread the word and sustain the approach further in the remaining time of the project.