

# Women Leadership and WASH, Nepal

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Figure 1 – Training facilitation on safely managed sanitation to Municipalities officers of Bagmati. Source: ENPHO.

## Summary

According to the 2021 census, 51.04% of the population of Nepal is female<sup>1</sup>. The federal election of 2017 has been a new step towards gender and social inclusion in the government, ending age-old exclusionary processes. The participation and representation of women in different sectors is increasing. The share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector has improved from 18.9% in 1990 to 44.8% in 2013. The proportion of seats held by women in the National Parliament increased from 3.4% in 1990 to 32.8% in the last Constituent Assembly (AD 2017). The Local Governance Operation Act 2017 has provided for the representation of

<sup>1</sup> Preliminary Reports of National census 2021 Nepal, <https://nepaleconomicforum.org/key-highlights-from-the-census-report-2021/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Census>

women in self-governing local units either as mayors or deputy mayors. As a result, in local elections 700 out of 753 local units elected women as deputy mayor still women were not elected as the mayors. Out of 753 local bodies, only 18 (3%) are headed by women (chairperson/mayor and, while the percentage is 34.4% in provincial parliaments and 40.75% in local government bodies.

Around 6,567 Dalit female members were able to win in local level polls in the same election. The participation of women in the labour force is 26.3% as opposed to 53.8% of men (NPC, 2020)<sup>2</sup>. The female employment to population ratio (EPR) is 22.9%, which is 25.4 percentage points lower than the male EPR. Although women's participation in the cooperative sector is 51%, the percentage is only 13.2% of women in managerial positions.

With this backdrop, it can be seen that women's empowerment is increasing. However, these achievements thus far are not enough as the influence of women in decision-making still remains limited. The Constitution of Nepal guarantees the right to equality for all its citizens. Nepal, being a signatory to various international conventions, is also legally committed to gender equality and social inclusion (GESI). In line with these mandates, various initiatives have been taken by the Government of Nepal (GoN) in addressing gender equality and social inclusion in many sectors but these initiatives are not adequate to address the issues.

Considering the above facts, there is a gender gap in leadership positions in all the sectors including Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). Women make up a minority of the people involved in decisions relating to WASH policies and strategies, sanitation-related project management, tariff setting and technology choices, or even choosing sanitation facilities and services at the household level. In regard to the sanitation sector, women are absent in key areas of decision making. To narrow the gender gap in leadership at all levels of the WASH sector and to ensure WASH for all, there needs to be more equity, and women need to have greater involvement in the decision-making level. One individual case study on women leadership in solid waste management of municipalities is presented below.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://npc.gov.np/en/category/nepal\\_human\\_development\\_reports](https://npc.gov.np/en/category/nepal_human_development_reports) retrieved on 2/14/2023, Nepal Human Development Report, 2020

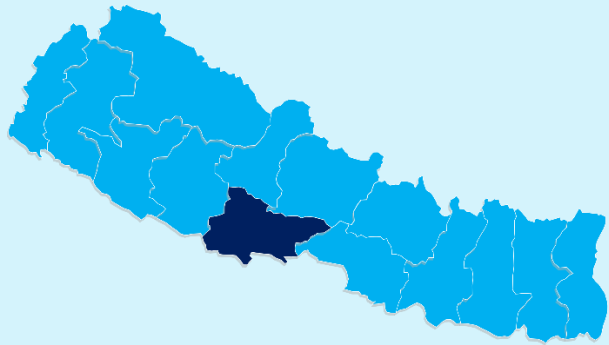
## Overview

### Geographical information

**Country:** Nepal

**Province:** Lumbini Province

**Province population:** 10,000,000



### Problem

- Women's participation is increasing in different sectors including WASH. But their involvement at higher levels remains low.

### Solution

- Increasing participation of women in the decision-making level is crucial.

## Problem

It's no secret that women have historically faced greater barriers than men when it comes to full participation in the economy or other sectors. Across geographies and income levels, disparities between men and women persist in the form of pay gaps, uneven opportunities for advancement and unbalanced representation in important decision making. Women's leadership in the sanitation sector matters since, as noted above, sanitation is "women's business" and critical to the performance of their productive and reproductive roles. Women are the primary promoters of home and community-based sanitation. They influence decisions in the home, manage household budgets to accommodate sanitation needs and educate the community on the value of proper sanitation, and yet they are inadequately represented in high-level planning and decision-making about sanitation.

Leadership is not about women participating in token positions to fulfil the government requirement (33%) but about truly enabling them to influence decision-making for the benefit of everyone. From the Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLASS), half of the countries surveyed reported that women comprise less than 10% of total professional water and sanitation staff. Low percentages of female sanitation professionals are compounded by cultural attitudes, social norms and systemic gender discrimination. Sociocultural factors

include unconscious bias towards “male preference” for leadership, together with social norms and cultural beliefs that women make inflexible and inadequate leaders or managers. The limited sex-disaggregated data available shows how women compare with men in leadership at various levels and different sectors, even in the sanitation sector. It revealed that women are significantly underrepresented at every level and in every subsector. The participation and leadership of women require significant input from them in terms of time, labour, skills and resources. Women already have less free time than men. Without the full support of their households, women’s participation in leadership costs them valuable leisure time and significantly increases their workload.

## Solution

Women's participation is required not just to fulfil the vacant allocated positions. Their participation needs to be assured at the decision-making level across the sector. Women leaders are needed in communities, user groups, government agencies, international non-governmental organizations and the private sector, and even at the level of policy making so that gender-inclusive WASH policies can be translated to national levels. It is not enough to simply increase the number of women in any institution. It is the critical mass of women which is important. Both quantity and quality are essential components of leadership. Some of the recommendations for enhancing women’s leadership are:

- Review, revise and implement gender-inclusive policies and enact legislation to accelerate women’s advancement.
- Assess organizational gender capacity and build a pipeline for sanitation professionals in the middle-management levels to develop them as leaders.
- Enable more women to engage in national and international policy dialogues.
- Continue gender sensitization for all institutions working in the WASH sector.
- Consider doing a gender analysis in WASH proposal, developing programmes and planning.
- Collection of disaggregated data and analyse information about whether and to what extent gender gaps, differences and outcomes are contributing to sectorial outcomes.
- Capacity enhancement to build the technical and managerial skills of women as professionals and technicians in sanitation.
- Provide opportunities for women through different training, blended learning, coaching, mentoring and exchange programmes.
- Create an environment for women to pursue technical and management careers through scholarships and “women leaders” programmes

- Create a favourable environment for working women leaders to support their leadership and encourage them.

### **Individual case study: Women's leadership in solid waste management of municipalities of Nepal**

Mrs Krishna Maya Karki, 52 years of age and a resident of Butwal sub-metropolitan city, is a single mother of a daughter and a son. She started her career as a female community health volunteer (FCHV) and continued to work for different organizations. However, when the income from the services was not sufficient to pay for her children's education, she decided to quit the job and run her own business and work in waste management.

She registered the private company, named Batawaraniya Sundar Nepal Pvt, in partnership. The company aimed to work in waste management for the municipalities. Currently the company is providing waste management for six different municipalities, i.e. Bharatpur metropolitan city, Butwal and Pokhara sub-metropolitan city, Tiltotma, Sainamaina, Tansen and Tauliya municipalities.

The company has 300 staff: 50% of the staff are women and the majority of them are from the Dalit community (minority group). Women are positioned in senior positions in the company.

Krishna Maya says, "The community misbehaves and mistreats workers working in this sector. So the workers at times feel harassed and face mental torture. In a patriarchal society like in Nepal, it's hard to accept women in a leading position. At times, whenever I have to attend the meeting to different authority including municipality organiser didn't show the same level of respect as my other male counterpart gets. Most of the time I am not invited too for a meeting, training or workshops related to waste management organized by the municipalities."

After spending many years in this sector, she is dedicated to managing municipal waste sustainably. She is keen and ready to expand the business sustainably. But for this, she needs legal, financial and social security from the municipality to move ahead. Figures 2 and 3 show Ms Krishna Maya Karki supporting the community clean-up campaign in the slum communities with awareness messages and supporting the flood affected communities of Terai in the rainy season.





Figure 2 – Ms. Krishna Maya Karki supporting the community clean up campaign in the slum communities with awareness messages.



Figure 3 – Ms Krishna Maya Karki's Company supporting the flood affected communities of Terai in the rainy season.

## Lessons learned

- Though women are coming forward to contribute and lead the environment around the society, policy is yet to be favourable.
- Acceptance of the female leadership position is less.
- A considerable low scale business also can provide employment opportunities to many people.
- It is noticed that many workers are devoid of nationality cards yet the rights of sanitation workers need to be preserved and promoted regardless of their nationality status.

## Useful links

<https://cbs.gov.np/national-population-and-housing-census-2011national-report>

## Further reading and references

- <https://mowcsc.gov.np/rules/vThoYZI21iUYksJHQIYKeD6X32ttPSRKvIW1cTMy-1625469348.pdf>
- [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26541VNR\\_2020\\_Nepal\\_Report.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26541VNR_2020_Nepal_Report.pdf)
- <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/150953/women-water-and-leadership.pdf>
- [http://www.susana.org/files/Jessica-Susana.-BMGFGender-and-Sanitation\\_Our-Learning-Journey.pdf](http://www.susana.org/files/Jessica-Susana.-BMGFGender-and-Sanitation_Our-Learning-Journey.pdf).

## About the author

**Srijana Karki** is a practitioner with significant national experience of more than 10 years in the development sector in various leadership roles. She is passionate about making change happen to address inequalities and skilled in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), gender, advocacy, behaviour change and sustainability, programme monitoring and evaluation, and capacity building in both humanitarian & development contexts. Her skills in leading project and programme strategies, together with a deep commitment to enable and build leadership at all levels of the organization, have led to the award of “ENPHO Employee of the Year 2020”, in recognition of hard work, dedication and contribution to organizational development. She was recently rewarded by the Government of Nepal with the “Jana Sewa Ratna Shree” medal, presented on Nepal Constitution Day (AD 2022 / 2079 BS) by the President of Nepal, for contributions to social work for sustainable development. Srijana Karki is working as a Senior WASH and Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Officer in the Environment and Public Health Organization as well as National Project Coordinator of Freshwater Action Network South Asia (FANSA) with responsibilities to handle different projects. Ms Karki has a double master’s degree in Rural Development (RD) and Gender Studies and a bachelor's degree in Sociology from Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

## About the institution / organisation

Established on 4 November 1990, the **Environment and Public Health Organization (ENPHO)** envisages a role in creating eco-societies by providing quality services on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), environment and public health. Research, innovations and promotion of the WASH technologies and approaches have been the core priorities of ENPHO.

ENPHO, a service-oriented, scientific, national non-governmental organization, is constantly striving towards sustainable community development, demonstration and dissemination of eco-friendly technologies including drinking water treatment options and sustainable sanitation systems. ENPHO promotes integrated community-based approaches for safe water, sustainable sanitation, hygienic behaviour, improving indoor air, and environmental and air quality monitoring for creating healthy and environment-friendly societies. <https://enpho.org/about-us/>





### **About the IWA Inclusive Urban Sanitation Initiative**

IWA's Inclusive Urban Sanitation initiative responds to a huge and growing public need - safe sanitation in combination with access to safe drinking water and hygiene underpins good health. The aim of this initiative is reshaping the global urban sanitation agenda by focusing on inclusive sanitation service goals--and the service systems required to achieve them - rather than the traditional singular focus on expanding sewer networks and treatment works. This forms part of IWA's larger agenda to promote inclusive, resilient, water-wise, and sanitation-secure cities.

### **About the Inclusive Urban Sanitation Stories**

The Inclusive Urban Sanitation stories are documenting some of the policies, practices, and approaches that demonstrate how stakeholders especially those in urban areas (e.g., public sector, operators, academics, regulators, and other key actors) are taking part or contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 6 which require water and sanitation concepts and norms to look beyond technology and the usual focus on building infrastructure. Increased focus is on safety, inclusion, environment, public health, and multiple technology solutions tailored to different geographies and socio-economic contexts for building climate-resilient cities. The stories aim to inspire urban stakeholders to discuss ways for advancing inclusive urban sanitation, especially in low- and middle-income countries.