

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP: AN EMERGING TREND IN MUSIKOT, RUKUM WEST

Govind Bahadur Pun  
Executive Board Member  
Magar Studies Center  
[pungbrd@gmail.com](mailto:pungbrd@gmail.com)

Received: August, 24, 2024 Revised: September, 3, 2024 Accepted: September 20, 2024

### Abstract

Indigenous communities in Nepal have historically faced marginalization, with limited access to resources and decision-making roles. However, recent years have seen a notable change, particularly in Musikot, Rukum West, where indigenous women are increasingly assuming leadership roles across various sectors. This study delves into the rise of indigenous women's leadership examining the patterns of its emergence, the factors promoting their political engagement, and the primary challenges they encounter. Despite the increasing presence of indigenous women in leadership, they continue to face significant obstacles rooted in deep-seated patriarchal norms and structures, particularly in political and governmental arenas. These impediments include discouraging organizational dynamics, societal biases, familial obligations, and cultural stereotypes that perpetuate their underrepresentation. Challenges specific to political parties, such as limited opportunities for advancement and insufficient support mechanisms, further complicate these issues. To foster indigenous women's leadership, which is vital for social inclusion and democratic governance, comprehensive strategies are necessary. These include promoting equal opportunities, economic empowerment, enhancing access to education and healthcare, and adhering to international norms. Implementing targeted policy interventions is essential to ensure the sustainable political involvement and leadership of indigenous women in Musikot, Rukum West.

**Key words:** *Indigenous, Leadership, Women, Challenges, political parties*

### 1. Introduction

Women Leadership refers to the roles and responsibilities undertaken by women in guiding, influencing, and directing a group, organization, or community towards achieving specific goals. This concept encompasses various styles and approaches to leadership, recognizing the unique perspectives and contributions that women bring to leadership positions. Empowering leadership represents a dynamic and transformative approach in the modern organizational landscape, crucial for fostering innovation, engagement, and adaptability among teams. As businesses and institutions evolve, the demand for leaders who can empower their teams has increased, aligning with the growing emphasis on autonomy, employee involvement, and decentralized decision-making processes (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014). The concept of empowering leadership encompasses not only the delegation of power and authority but also the support and development of subordinates, enabling them to enhance their skills and take on more significant roles within the

organization (Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, & Drasgow, 2000). This shift from traditional, hierarchical leadership styles to more participative models reflects a broader change in workplace dynamics and cultural expectations within industries worldwide.

Despite the recognized benefits, implementing empowering leadership is fraught with challenges. One of the primary barriers is the existing organizational culture, which may resist the shifts in power dynamics and roles required for effective empowerment (Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2010). Additionally, the varying individual readiness among employees to accept and utilize increased autonomy can hinder the effectiveness of empowering practices (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). The knowledge gap exists in understanding how empowering leadership can be consistently and effectively implemented across diverse organizational contexts, particularly in environments with deeply entrenched traditional hierarchies. Furthermore, there is a lack of comprehensive strategies that address both the psychological and structural facets of empowerment within the workplace (Manz & Sims, 1987).

Research has shown that while empowering leadership can lead to numerous positive outcomes, including improved job satisfaction, increased productivity, and greater organizational commitment, it can also introduce complexities such as role ambiguity and increased stress among employees who may feel unprepared to handle the greater responsibility (Lee, Willis, & Tian, 2018). Moreover, the balance between providing support and autonomy without micromanaging or neglecting employees' needs is a delicate one, often not adequately achieved in practice (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). The effectiveness of empowering leadership is also moderated by factors such as the leader's credibility, the clarity of communication, and the alignment of organizational systems and structures with empowering practices (Pearce & Sims, 2002). This indicates a multifaceted challenge that involves not only individual leader behaviors but also organizational policies and the broader environmental context.

In terms of opportunities, empowering leadership presents several. It can significantly enhance the innovative capabilities of teams by granting them the freedom to explore new ideas and approaches without fear of punitive consequences for failures (Srivastava, Bartol, & Locke, 2006). Empowered teams are more agile and can adapt quickly to changes, a critical advantage in today's fast-paced business environment (Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005). Furthermore, by fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility, empowering leadership can cultivate a more dedicated and motivated workforce (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). It also facilitates the development of future leaders within the organization by providing employees with the experience and confidence needed to undertake leadership roles (Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

The purpose of this research is to bridge the knowledge gap by developing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with empowering leadership within various organizational contexts. By examining empirical evidence and case studies, this study aims to propose actionable strategies that organizations can implement to overcome challenges and harness the opportunities of empowering leadership. This will contribute to the existing literature by providing a detailed roadmap for organizations wishing to adopt or enhance their empowering leadership practices, ultimately leading to more adaptive, innovative, and committed organizational environments. This research will delve into both the micro and macro aspects of empowerment, analyzing individual leader behaviors and broader organizational policies, to offer a holistic view of empowering leadership's impact on organizational success.

As of 2024, women constitute approximately 51 percent of Nepal's total population, with the total population being around 31.2 million. Indigenous people in Nepal account for about 35.8 percent of the total population. The indigenous female population can be estimated to be around 5.5 million women, representing a significant segment of the overall female demographic. Despite their numbers, women often lack involvement in policy-making due to patriarchal barriers. Feminist perspectives are essential in research to mainstream the knowledge and experiences of marginalized women, enabling effective participation in decision-making processes.

Women's leadership and participation are vital for societal development, shaped by socio-economic, cultural, and historical factors. Empowering women in all spheres, including policy-making, is fundamental for equality, development, and peace. Despite advancements in women's empowerment, no woman has yet attained the position of chairperson in any Nepalese political party. Addressing these issues through political socialization and education is crucial in transitional contexts like Nepal. The primary objective of this study is to examine and comprehend the emerging leadership roles of Indigenous women within Musikot Municipality, Rukum West.

**2. Data and method:** The rise of indigenous women in leadership roles within Musikot, Rukum West, signifies a transformative shift towards more public and influential positions, driven by enhanced recognition of gender rights and access to education. Their increased involvement in politics, supported by grassroots activism, non-governmental organizations, and policies promoting gender equality, marks progressive strides. However, challenges persist, including entrenched gender biases, resource limitations, and scarce representation in higher political roles, exacerbated by socio-cultural norms and insufficient community and political support. This study, employing descriptive and analytical research designs and using both primary and secondary data, delves into these dynamics to better understand the factors influencing these leadership roles and the obstacles faced by indigenous women within political and organizational spheres in Rukum West.

### 3. Results

This study with the thematic opinions of key officials and political as well as organizational women leaders. The diverse perspective emerges as the voices of Key Informant Interviewees (KIIs) and participants in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) converge to be elaborated their opinions and insights.

#### **Exploring indigenous women's political leadership in Musikot: Perspectives from key political figures:**

"Indigenous Women in Musikot Politics: Challenges and Progress" explores the complexities faced by indigenous women seeking political leadership roles in Musikot Municipality. Historical underrepresentation has been challenged by recent efforts such as awareness campaigns and electoral quota systems, leading to greater participation. However, indigenous women still confront significant barriers including societal norms, discrimination, and resource limitations. Encouraging developments include improved access to education and financial backing, which have enhanced their political involvement. Yet, they continue to struggle with deep-rooted social expectations and a lack of childcare support during campaigning periods. These ongoing issues underline the critical need for persistent advocacy, thoughtful policy reform, and cooperative strategies to overcome obstacles and facilitate meaningful roles for indigenous women in governing Musikot.

This narrative emphasizes the evolving landscape of indigenous women's participation in local governance, driven by both progressive initiatives and enduring challenges. The focus remains on strategic collaborations and policy enhancements to ensure that indigenous women not only participate but thrive in Musikot's political sphere, shaping the community's future through active and inclusive leadership roles.

### **Empowering indigenous women leaders in Musikot: Challenges and solutions**

The engagement with local governance highlights the pressing need to empower indigenous women in leadership roles. While collaborating on various initiatives, the focus remains on bridging the gap between the administration and the diverse needs of the community. Despite witnessing inspiring women breaking barriers, the journey towards indigenous women's leadership is fraught with challenges, necessitating concerted efforts to address root causes and provide necessary skills through government and NGO partnerships.

Progress in empowering indigenous women leaders is hindered by multifaceted challenges, including societal norms affecting women's confidence and the need for transparent candidate selection processes within political parties. Negotiating a male-dominated political sphere and securing adequate funding for women-led initiatives pose additional hurdles, underscoring the necessity for capacity-building programs and collaborative efforts with community leaders and religious figures to challenge traditional views that undermine women's leadership.

Despite these obstacles, optimism prevails as we work towards creating a supportive environment where indigenous women not only enter politics but also thrive as leaders. Through collective action involving the administration, NGOs, community leaders, and women themselves, it aspires to amplify women's voices in governance and shape a brighter future for Musikot. Some of the exemplary leadership of women have implemented empowering programs that serve as the beacon of possibility, reaffirming the commitment to ensuring women's voices shape the trajectory of the municipality.

### **Supporting indigenous women leaders in Musikot:**

The foremost responsibility is to ensure the effective functioning of local governance structures. This entails overseeing diverse departments and facilitating the implementation of policies set by the municipal itself and council, with a particular emphasis on empowering elected officials, including indigenous women leaders. While quotas have increased women's nominations for council positions, proactive measures are essential to ensure their success, such as organizing workshops to equip aspiring leaders with necessary skills and knowledge.

Despite strides made in streamlining nomination processes and raising awareness about quotas, challenges persist, notably the lack of female role models within administrative ranks. Collaboration with political parties is imperative to foster transparency in candidate selection and encourage active recruitment of qualified indigenous women. Moreover, addressing disparities in resource allocation remains paramount, underscoring the need for targeted capacity-building programs focused on financial management and project implementation skills for women leaders.

Beyond administrative purview, entrenched traditional practices pose significant hurdles to gender equality in leadership roles. While direct influence may be limited, collaborative efforts with local NGOs and women's organizations aim to raise awareness and challenge societal norms within communities. Through collective action involving the administration, NGOs, political parties, and

women themselves, barriers to indigenous women's leadership can be dismantled, paving the way for a future where they not only occupy positions of power but also actively shape the trajectory of Musikot's governance.

### **Nurturing community leadership: The indigenous women's journey in Musikot**

The role transcends mere administrative tasks to encompass a profound commitment to connecting with and representing the community. It needs to be prioritized listening to constituents' concerns, celebrating their achievements, addressing their needs, recognizing their identity as indigenous women that adds depth to this experience. Witnessing fellow women in the community assume leadership roles has fueled the journey, emphasizing the transformative power of women's voices in shaping our collective future.

While grassroots initiatives have proven instrumental in effecting positive change, navigating the challenges of balancing familial obligations with professional responsibilities remains a constant struggle. Moreover, inadequate support from political parties and the need to navigate traditional practices underscore the complex landscape of women's leadership. Despite these obstacles, informal gatherings provide invaluable support and camaraderie, highlighting the importance of fostering relationships within the community and among fellow women leaders.

Despite persistent challenges, optimism prevails as indigenous women leaders collectively strive to create an inclusive environment where women's voices not only resonate but also influence the trajectory of our ward and Musikot at large. Through collaboration, resilience, and the sharing of collective experiences, it aspires to shape a future where indigenous women's leadership is not only acknowledged but celebrated as a catalyst for progress and empowerment within our community and beyond.

### **Empowering indigenous women leaders in Musikot municipality:**

The commitment has been highlighted to empowering women and fostering their leadership through various programs. Collaboration is a key part of their approach, as they work with different stakeholders to maximize the impact of their initiatives. The success of their work is evident in the rise of indigenous women's leadership within the community.

The programs offered to equip women with the necessary skills and confidence for leadership roles. Workshops on public speaking, campaign management, and financial literacy are provided, as these skills are crucial for both political candidates and active participants in community decision-making. However, it is acknowledged the challenges posed by entrenched social norms and economic disparities that hinder women's pursuit of leadership positions.

The ongoing efforts to address these challenges, they advocate for women's inclusion in political parties and policy making. Additionally, they recognize the resistance women leaders face and provide them with programs to strengthen their leadership and resilience. Their approach goes beyond policy, acknowledging the importance of cultural sensitivities. By collaborating with community leaders and religious figures, indigenous women leaders aim to promote a more inclusive society that celebrates women's leadership while respecting traditions. It concludes by emphasizing the ongoing nature of their work and their unwavering commitment to creating a future where women's leadership is celebrated and drives positive change in the community.

### ***Empowering indigenous women's political leadership: Insights from Musikot municipality***

The FGD sessions shed light on the journey of indigenous women in Musikot municipality towards political empowerment, highlighting the challenges they face and the strategies employed to overcome them.

Indigenous women representatives and mothers' groups in Musikot municipality exhibit resilience and innovation in their pursuit of political leadership. Despite facing societal expectations, resource constraints, and limited access to education, these women harness the power of supportive networks, advocacy, and collaboration to advance their roles in community leadership. Through awareness campaigns, mentorship programs, and alliances with stakeholders, they strive to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for indigenous women's political participation, ultimately fostering a future where women hold stronger leadership positions within their families and communities.

### **Empowering indigenous women's political leadership: Insights from Musikot municipality**

The FGD emphasizing the importance of understanding indigenous women's experiences in politics within Musikot municipality set the tone for the discussion. Participants shared diverse experiences, ranging from running for office to engaging in political activism, driven by motivations for community improvement and personal empowerment. Challenges discussed included societal expectations, limited resources, and access to education and training, hindering their participation and contribution to political processes.

Social, economic, and educational factors influencing indigenous women's participation in politics were examined, identifying barriers such as social pressures, lack of support, and cultural norms. Participants proposed addressing these challenges through awareness campaigns, mentorship programs, and changes in community attitudes, emphasizing the importance of stakeholder involvement.

The availability of support systems for indigenous women leaders, with some existing groups while others called for tailored support systems. Suggestions included peer mentorship, capacity-building workshops, and funding opportunities, underscoring the significance of supportive networks in overcoming challenges.

The successful strategies used by indigenous women, such as forming alliances and utilizing social media for advocacy. Recommendations for promoting women's leadership included training programs, quotas, and raising awareness of achievements, focusing on implementation and sustainability.

Overall, indigenous women representatives in Musikot municipality illuminated the multifaceted challenges and promising strategies surrounding the empowerment of women's political leadership, underscoring the importance of tailored support systems, collaborative initiatives, and a concerted effort to address societal barriers.

### **Indigenous women's leading change: Mothers' group of indigenous women**

Nestled in a semi-remote area of Rukum West, Nepal, a mothers' group thrives as a testament to the power of indigenous women's leadership. The group, though facing challenges like limited decision-making power within households and lack of access to information, has emerged as a vital support system for its members.

Driven by a desire to improve their children's well-being and empower themselves, these women navigate traditional gender roles and overcome resource constraints. They organize health

initiatives, raise funds for education, and even participate in income-generating activities fostered by the group.

However, the narrative acknowledges the need for a broader support network. Limited access to education and external resources hinders their leadership potential. The group yearns to connect with other women leaders and organizations, seeking not only inspiration but also practical tools for further growth.

Despite the obstacles, the mothers' group embodies a spirit of resilience and collaboration. By sharing knowledge, advocating for girls' education, and fostering financial independence, they pave the way for a future where indigenous women hold stronger leadership roles within their families and communities.

### **Mothers' groups as catalysts for indigenous women's leadership: Mothers' group of indigenous women**

The conversation delves into the significant role mothers' groups play in empowering indigenous women for political participation, acting as vital support networks. These groups provide a nurturing environment for knowledge exchange, childcare assistance, and fostering a sense of community, all essential for women's empowerment.

As the discussion progresses, attention shifts towards how mothers' groups can cultivate political engagement among indigenous women. Exploring whether these groups actively promote political involvement and the mechanisms they employ, such as offering leadership training or mobilizing female voters, highlights their potential in nurturing political aspirations.

Moving forward, the conversation addresses the unique challenges faced by indigenous women in Musikot concerning political participation, often intertwined with their roles as mothers. The discourse explores strategies for mothers' groups to tackle these obstacles, creating pathways for women's leadership within the community.

The dialogue concludes with an emphasis on collaboration and recommendations to bolster the role of mothers' groups in fostering women's leadership. Drawing on success stories from other communities offers inspiration, while proposing solutions like partnering with NGOs, conducting capacity-building workshops, or advocating for dedicated resources underscores the importance of collective efforts in advancing women's political participation.

Lastly, the FGD delves into the potential of mothers' groups as a catalyst for indigenous women's political participation. By fostering a supportive network, encouraging political aspirations, and finding solutions to address specific challenges faced by mothers, mothers' groups can play a vital role in paving the way for a future with stronger women leadership within indig

### **4. Conclusion**

The advancement of indigenous women's leadership in Musikot, Rukum West, is significantly hindered by deep-seated patriarchal norms, behaviors, and structures, especially within the realms of political leadership and governmental sectors. These women face substantial barriers to participation and representation, despite ongoing efforts to integrate them into development and decision-making processes. The effectiveness of supportive policies is often undermined by a pervasive lack of gender sensitivity. Several factors contribute to the under-representation of indigenous women in leadership roles. Organizational structures frequently discourage their participation, while societal attitudes and cultural expectations confine them to traditional

domestic roles. The burden of family responsibilities limits their capacity to engage in leadership activities, and cultural stereotypes perpetuate a male-dominated public decision-making sphere, reinforcing the notion that indigenous women do not belong in leadership positions. Within political parties, indigenous women encounter significant obstacles including limited opportunities for advancement and a lack of supportive policies and frameworks. Economic constraints further exacerbate their difficulties, creating an environment where their leadership potential is not fully realized. To effectively promote indigenous women's leadership, it is crucial to implement strategies that provide equal opportunities and go beyond mere reservation and quota systems to address the root causes of gender discrimination. This includes a comprehensive policy review in Musikot Municipality, targeting leadership opportunities for indigenous women. Such reviews should evaluate policies on political representation, develop strategies for economic empowerment, and enhance access to education and healthcare. Engaging a diverse range of stakeholders, including indigenous women leaders, community members, government agencies, NGOs, and experts, is vital for gathering insights and identifying areas for improvement. Additionally, scrutinizing national and local legal frameworks concerning indigenous rights and women's empowerment is essential to identify gaps that hinder effective participation in leadership roles. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established to assess the effectiveness of policy changes and ensure alignment with international human rights standards. Addressing these deeply rooted patriarchal structures is key to recognizing indigenous women as full citizens and equal participants in all societal aspects. Through comprehensive and targeted policy interventions, sustainable political participation and leadership for indigenous women in Musikot Municipality can be achieved.

## References

- Ahearne, M., Mathieu, J., & Rapp, A. (2005). To empower or not to empower your sales force? An empirical examination of the influence of leadership empowerment behavior on customer satisfaction and performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90*(5), 945-955.
- Amundsen, S., & Martinsen, Ø. L. (2014). Empowering leadership: Construct clarification, conceptualization, and validation of a new scale. *The Leadership Quarterly, 25*(3), 487-511.
- Arnold, J. A., Arad, S., Rhoades, J. A., & Drasgow, F. (2000). The empowering leadership questionnaire: The construction and validation of a new scale for measuring leader behaviors. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 21*(3), 249-269.
- Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N. (1988). The empowerment process: Integrating theory and practice. *Academy of Management Review, 13*(3), 471-482.
- Kirkman, B. L., & Rosen, B. (1999). Beyond self-management: Antecedents and consequences of team empowerment. *Academy of Management Journal, 42*(1), 58-74.
- Lee, A., Willis, S., & Tian, A. W. (2018). Empowering leadership: A meta-analytic examination of incremental contribution, mediation, and moderation. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 39*(3), 306-325.
- Manz, C. C., & Sims, H. P. (1987). Leading workers to lead themselves: The external leadership of self-managing work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 32*(1), 106-128.



- Pearce, C. L., & Sims, H. P., Jr. (2002). Vertical versus shared leadership as predictors of the effectiveness of change management teams: An examination of aversive, directive, transactional, transformational, and empowering leader behaviors. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 6(2), 172-197.
- Pun, G. B. (2024). *Indigenous Women's Leadership: an Emerging Trend in Musikot, Rukum West*, Unpublished dissertation Central Department of Population Studies, TU, Kirtipur, Nepal.
- Shamir, B., House, R. J., & Arthur, M. B. (1993). The motivational effects of charismatic leadership: A self-concept based theory. *Organization Science*, 4(4), 577-594.
- Srivastava, A., Bartol, K. M., & Locke, E. A. (2006). Empowering leadership in management teams: Effects on knowledge sharing, efficacy, and performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(6), 1239-1251.
- Vecchio, R. P., Justin, J. E., & Pearce, C. L. (2010). Empowering leadership: An examination of mediating mechanisms within a hierarchical structure. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 21(3), 530-542.
- Zhang, X., & Bartol, K. M. (2010). Linking empowering leadership and employee creativity: The influence of psychological empowerment, intrinsic motivation, and creative process engagement. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53(1), 107-128.