

An Evaluation of Inequality of Enterprising Women in Developing Countries: A Case Study of Nepal

Rita Lamsal

Section Officer of the Government of Nepal, Doctorate Candidate at the University of Bolton, United Kingdom

Dr. Denis Hyams-SSekasi

Senior Lecturer, University of Bolton, United Kingdom

Corresponding Author

Rita Lamsal

lamsalrita@gmail.com

Received: February 2, 2023; Revised & Accepted: March 6, 2023

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the existence of gender inequality in Nepalese society and the response of the government towards it through policy documents. It also explores the changing scenario of women representation in the political and public sector because of the government policies. This research provides a critical review of the government policies and social practices regarding affirmative action and gender equality in Nepal. This research further unravels the systematic review of policy documents and future insight into government policies to enhance the position of women in public sector employment.

This research is based on secondary data and a descriptive method has been adopted to show the status of women in Nepal. Secondary data were taken from the academic published articles and policy documents of the Government of Nepal. This research has found that the Government of Nepal has taken up aggressive steps to ensure gender equality in each sector by increasing representation of women. The latest constitution of Nepal, 2007 and the second amendment of Civil Service Act, 1993 are the key policy documents from which, women representation in public sector has been increasing marvelously. Hence, the country has been moving towards gender equality and has impacted positively on society. It could be an example for other developing countries as well.

Key words: Affirmative action, Gender equality, representation, discrimination, reservation system

Introduction

Position of women in society is crucial for civilization. In the past, women were limited to household chores to take care of children and men were responsible to earn money for their family hence were to achieve higher education and engaged in formal jobs (Acharya, 2020). The concept of gender is still debated and thus mainstreams have emerged aiming at bringing reforms towards education and awareness on gender issues (Dormekpor, 2015). This has added more questions about the role of women in terms of enterprising particular in developing countries.

Like any other developing countries, Nepal is considered as a country with patriarchal society. In the patriarchal society, women suffer with various traditional practices including the caste system. Nepalese women have been facing gender discrimination in practice even in the 21st century. More than half of the population are women in Nepal (CBS, 2021). According to the preliminary report of National Population Census 2021, total population has recorded 29,192,480 and more than half of the population is women which is approximately 51% (ibid). The country has initiated to ensure women representation through policy documents and integrate them in development to ensure equal opportunity. Due to latest change on national policies and mechanisms, social indicators such as literacy rate and life expectancy of women has been increased. This has called for an examination of the women status, gender inequality and the impact of government policies in relation to women in Nepal.

This paper seeks to present the practices of gender inequality in Nepal and the progress made throughout the time regarding equal opportunities. This study critically reviews the extant literature on women and affirmative action on employment. The results of social policy such as affirmative action in Nepalese context is explored. Furthermore, the current status of Nepalese women in legal documents which have taken initiation to maintain equality in the society and the effect of such initiation in practical scenarios are examined.

Methodology

This is systematic research on developing countries based on published literature between 2000-2022. Descriptive analysis method is used to develop this paper. Descriptive research aims to describe state affairs which exist at present and through this design, researchers can report what has happened or what is happening in the context (Kothari, 2004). It has analyzed the published documents and research papers as a secondary data analysis which can be an effective and efficient means for this research (Devine, 2003). Published academic journal articles and newspaper articles have been studied. For the contextual investigation, different national policies and published reports of Nepal have been examined such as constitution of Nepal, periodic plans, annual policy and programs, civil service act and regulation, publications from Ministry of women, children and senior citizens, national women commission, public

service commissions, development partners and central bureau of statistics are examined as a secondary source of data.

In addition to this, scholar articles were searched from well-reputed databases, for instance, the library database of the university of Bolton, UK, as the researchers are based at the university of Bolton and have good access to these databases. Furthermore, google scholar also used to find articles. Random sampling methods are used to find academic articles to provide an overview of the existing literature. Particular attention was given to articles that focused specifically on gender and inequality in developing countries.

Background of the Study

Nepal has started affirmative action in 2007 and there was a political and cultural history on the evolution of affirmative action. To reduce discrimination between caste, ethnicity and gender, a decade-long civil war i.e. 1996 to 2006, was happened in Nepal led by Communist party of Nepal (CPN) called Maoist, along with people's 19 days movement in 2006. The movement was successful and made comprehensive peace agreement between the Government of Nepal and Maoist. one of the conditions of the peace agreement was to resolve existing class-based, ethnic, regional and gender-based discrimination by restructuring of the state (National Legislative Bodies, 2006). After the peace agreement, a huge political shift was happened, and Nepal was shifted from constitutional monarchy to a republic state and from unitary system to federally structured system (Jha, 2014).

Similarly, the government of Nepal has developed different policies and strategies in different policy documents such as five-year periodic plans and constitution of Nepal. In 2007, an interim constitution of Nepal, 2007 was developed which guaranteed equality and provisioned of reservation/representation to the women and marginalized people in politics and public sector employment which was a great initiation towards affirmative action. As per the interim constitution, Civil Service Act (1993) was amended in 2007 and provisioned the reservation (quota) which is mentioned here as an affirmative action, in recruitment and allocated seats based on gender, ethnicity, geographical region, caste and disability. In Nepalese civil service, 55% of the total seats are allocated for the open competition and 45% are allocated for reserved groups out of which 33% are for women (Civil Service Act, 1993). It was a significant change to increase women representation in public sector employment. Women also started to be recruited in Military services of Nepal which was only for men before (Acharya, 2017). In addition, structural mechanism i.e Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens, National Women Commission and gender section in each local level have also been established which has taken initiative to empower women. At present, Constitution of Nepal, 2015 is active which was successfully formulated by elected constitutional assembly in 2015 and continued inclusiveness and reservation policy.

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 provisioned that *"the State shall not discriminate citizens on grounds of origin, religion, race, caste, tribe, sex, economic condition, language, region, ideology or on similar other grounds"* (Constitution of Nepal, 2015:16). It has also ensured the

rights of women; equal right of remuneration and social security, end gender discrimination, ensured the equal right to the property, right to safe motherhood and reproductive health, right to enjoy fundamental human rights. In addition, as part of the positive discrimination, the constitution has provisioned the special opportunity for women in different sectors, they are education, health, employment and social security. The constitution has also included the right of women to participate in all bodies of the State following the principle of proportional inclusion where it has clearly mentioned that at least one third of the total number of members elected from each political party representing in the Federal Parliament must be women. Similarly, the national assembly (upper house of parliament) must also have women representation (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). Overall, the constitution has clearly provisioned for women participation similar as strong preferential treatment.

Furthermore, Nepal had started to develop a periodic plan (five-year plan) in 1956 to set targets/goals for the country and to achieve them strategically. Issues of women was started to incorporate from sixth periodic plan i.e. 1980-85 and then continued it to integrate in development (Bhadra and Shah, 2014). Through the Tenth periodic plan gender issue was embodied to analyze poverty where especially gender mainstreaming, gender equality and empowering women were the key indicators of analyzing poverty (Acharya, 2017). At present, the 15th plan (2019/20-2023/24) is in execution. Building Nepal as a gender-equal nation is the vision of the 15th periodic plan in terms of gender equality and women empowerment which has taken an aim to reduce all forms of discrimination and exploitation. Ultimately, it has set a goal to achieve substantial gender equality by ensuring equal and meaningful participation of women at the end of this periodic plan, that is in FY 2023/24 (NPC, 2020a). It has further developed different strategies to achieve the vision, for instance, achieve economic empowerment and social transformation by giving priority to socially excluded women and increase justice for women using protective measures. Before implementation of the 15th plan, women development indicators were quantified such as: literacy rate, women right to property etc. Based on that, the progress will be evaluated in coming years.

Table 1: Development Indicators of Women in 2019/20

S.N	Indicators	Women percentage	Men percentage
1	Literacy rate	57.70	75.60
2	Access to the property right	26%	
3	Maternal Mortality Rate	239 out of 100,000	
4	Participation in labour force	26.3%	53.8%
5	Unemployment rate	13.1%	10.3%

Source: NPC (2020a)

Based on the table 1, women have lower literacy rate, lower participation in labour force and higher unemployment rate compared with men in Nepal. Almost double number of men are in

labour force than women. Being a patriarchal tradition, most of the households are headed by men. Hence, only 26% of women have the access to the property right till 2019/20.

Similarly, gender equality and girl's empowerment has also been included in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Generally, lack of employment opportunities and loss of jobs creates gender inequality in society (Baniya et.al. 2021). In terms of SDGs, there is significant progress in women participation on politics and public service decision making however the gender equality is still difficult to find (NPC, 2020b). Hence, there are lots more to do further to enhance women situation in Nepal even there are already main policy documents which have been sufficiently ensured women rights. The main provisions and achievements have been highlighted in the following Table 2.

Table 2: Key Highlights of policies provision for women right.

<p>Women position ensured by Constitution of Nepal, 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Rights of Women” as Fundamental Rights • Citizenship with identity of descent and gender by the name of mother or father • 33% of Federal Parliament Seats reserved for women • Women’s Representation in State Body Ensured • President or Vice-President to be from different sex or community • Speakers or Deputy Speakers in House of Representative, • Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of National Assembly • Speaker and Deputy Speaker of State Assembly • Proportionate representation in all state bodies • National Women Commission as a Constitutional Body • Economic evaluation of contribution and work for the maintenance of children and family as the State Policy • Special Opportunity through affirmative action in education, health, employment and social security • Identity and special provisions for gender and sexual minorities • Equal pay for equal value of work
<p>Legal Reforms</p>	<p>Continuous amendments in several Nepal Acts to maintain gender equality, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Right Act, 2018 • Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention) Act, 2015 • Domestic Violence (Offense and Punishment) Act, 2009 • National Penal Code, 2017 • Local Level Election Act, 2017 (one candidate for mayor or deputy mayor from a political party must be a woman)
<p>Political Representation (Data based on 2017 election)</p>	<p>Women in Federal Parliament: 33%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women in State Assembly: 34% • Women in Local Level Assembly: 41% • Women Chairpersons in Federal parliament: 9 out of 16 • Women holds 90% of Deputy Mayor or Vice Chair of Local Governments, leading four major sectors: Judicial Committee; Revenue Consultation Committee; Budget and Program Committee and Monitoring and Evaluation Committee

Employment and professions	Women mayors in 18 Local Governments <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Women in Civil Service: 23.72% (2019)• Women health professionals 46.93% (2019)• Female doctors 34.1% (2014)• Female Journalists 18%• Ratio of women in the small and large enterprises 37.7%• Female labour force participation 26.3%
Sectorial Achievement	Gender Parity Index in Secondary Education: 1.0376 (2017) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Net Enrollment rate of girls at primary level: 97%• Coverage of Immunization to women and children: Almost 100%• Women mean age at marriage: 20.6 (2011) against legally marriage age 20 years

Source: MOWCSC, 2020

The table 2 shows that the government of Nepal has taken significant steps to ensure gender equality. Number of provisions are made in different policies in Nepal to increase women participation. As a result, participation of women in different sectors, especially in politics and civil service has rapidly increased.

Literature Review

The challenges that impact the daily endeavors differ from each country, people, cultures, traditions and beliefs in society. Despite, the cultural practices and roles, gender inequality still exists in society particularly in countries where men are considered superior, bread winners and entrepreneurial. Historically, there was low pay and low status of clerical work where most of the women were engaged, created gender inequality (Acker, 2006). According to Rietveld and Patel (2022), gender inequality is the social process where man and women treated differently and such differentiation spread through various sectors such as social, economic, legal and institutional. Such inequality affects the women participation on labor market, entrepreneurship and other opportunities (ibid). Ultimately, it can be argued that inequality hampers socio-economic development.

Feminist theory often focuses on analyzing gender inequality. It is an analysis of social behavior of human towards the issues regarding women (Lay and Daley, 2007). It helps to understand power relationships between men and women in the society (ibid). Based on the literatures, there are eight separate feminist theories, they are: black feminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism, lesbian feminism, liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, materialist feminism and socialist feminism (Andermahr, Lovell, & Wolkowitz, 1997; Evans, 1995 cited by Lay and Daley, 2007). Different theories advocate diverse aspects of feminism.

According to Mackay (2015), existence of patriarchy and male violence against women is talked on radical feminism which works against patriarchy thought and seeks to end such male dominated practice. Furthermore, racism is a central problem of socialist feminism, and it leads to examine race, class and gender (Bhavnani and Coulson, 2005). In liberal feminism, women

get freedom, independence and equal opportunity along with workplace equality and recognition at work (Lay and Daley, 2007). Not only the black women experience but also overall societal structure and cultural differences is studied on black feminism. Moreover, latest feminist theory extended on intersexuality and internationality which is affected by contextual basis (Nawyn, 2010). Such thoughts and overview about gender equality in society provide a platform for reducing historical practice of gender discrimination and inequality which is still prevalent.

To ensure equality and antidiscrimination, initially the civil rights laws and affirmative action programs were developed in the 1960s in the USA. The executive order 10925 of President John F. Kennedy in 1961 was the initial formal document to start affirmative action for equal treatment of employees without regard to their race, color, religion and national origin (Aiken et. al., 2013). Later in 1965, the president Johnson supports the affirmative action by executive order 11246 which was amended in 1967 and added sex as an attribute of affirmative action (Farrell, 2019). President Johnson developed a plan to specify the certain procedures for employer to recruit, evaluate and promote qualified minorities and women employees at all levels of work (ibid).

In view of the prevailing issues, the affirmative action programs and policies were developed and eventually spread to other countries. According to Gomez and Premdas (2013:6), *affirmative action seeks to promote unity through wider inclusion, by compensating for past injustices and discrimination that created inequality and systemic deprivation for entire classes, castes, and groups*. Considering the challenges faced, Australia started affirmative action through the Equal Employment Opportunity for Women Act of 1986 and focused for women only (Kornrad and Hartmann, 2001). Based on the act, organizations with 100 or more employees were forced to develop and implement affirmative action programs only for women (ibid).

Norway has implemented gender centric affirmative action where at least 40% women should be in the board of directors of public limited companies and such targets must be met by 2008 (Seierstad and Opsahl, 2011). It was taken as an external shock however; the aim of such policy was to increase women representation in corporate sectors (ibid). Moreover, social context plays a major role in developing policies and programs to enhance people's lives. Due to the stereotypes of women roles and responsibilities along with the patriarchy practice, it is difficult for women to get into a decision making and leadership role in Bangladesh (Pandey, 2008). Most of the executive positions are occupied by men in South Asia (Kabir, 2013). Bangladesh has reserved certain number of positions in the civil service for women but most of them are in lower level of the civil service (ibid).

Most of such policies have been focused on hiring, promotion and pay as noted by Acker (2006). After starting affirmative action women and ethnic minorities were increased in public sector job (Bhul, 2021). Despite its widespread, still, there were debates regarding affirmative action as to whether it provided equal opportunity to all. The acceptance and rejection of affirmative action differ depending on person to person as well as country to country. Evidence

showed that the mostly the women supported to the affirmative action as it also applied gender-based policies which helps to improve disadvantaged women in labor market hence, women position was upgraded (Prokos et. Al. 2010).

Affirmative action is only not enough to develop women entrepreneurship and equality. Despite the affirmative action programs, gender and race inequalities continue to exist at work and organizations (Acker, 2006). Event though, such programs had been helping to increase women participation in labor market, but it could not ensure the entrepreneurship hence gender gap seen in the labor market.

As per the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017) record, there is different in labor force participation between male and female. The almost half of working-age women were participating the in global market whereas the ratio of men was almost two third (76%) in 2016. Similarly, women unemployment rate is also higher compared to men. Such gaps are different countrywide. Due to the societal structure and historical practice of gender discrimination and division of gender role in the society, women are less enterprising than men. Research found that the higher entrepreneurial activity in those countries where gender equality is higher (Rietveld and Patel, 2022). Nonetheless, female entrepreneurs can be empowered by economic and political gender equality (ibid).

Hence, to lower the gender gap in the labor market, new jobs need to be created for which education and vocational training system could help to connect with rapid technological changes. As per the Woetzel et.al. (2018), three things are necessary to execute, they are: increase the rate of women labor force participation, increase paid work hours for women it may be part time or full time and then raise women's productivity through higher number of women participations on productivity sector. Ultimately, it can help to increase gender equality along with economic empowerment.

Discussions and Findings

Traditional societal practices, cultural values and religious belief play a vital role in gender equality (Dormekpor, 2015). In the past, women have limited access to economic resources, education and were nominal control on reproductive rights and compelled to engage on unpaid domestic work (ibid). To ensure equal opportunity, different government policies and programs have been designed and implemented. One of them is the affirmative action policy which provides preferential treatment to the women and marginalized people in the society. The primary goal of affirmative action policy is to increase female and ethnic representation (Kurtulus, 2016). The primary beneficiaries of affirmative action are different based on country context. Black and native American women and men were the primary beneficiaries in the America while this policy was introduced at first. Women only are the affirmative action beneficiaries in Norway, Australia and Bangladesh. The first step of affirmative action is to increase representation of women and minorities by providing preferential treatment.

Gender quotas are specified to increase women representation in public sector which is considered as a strong preferential treatment (Faniko et. al., 2017). African countries have also applied affirmative action for women to increase representation in politics. For instance, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda have the world's highest rates of representation in parliament because of the affirmative action policies however it is only descriptive representation which needs to be changed on substantive representation for betterment of women lives and status (Okedele, 2021).

Nepali society belongs to patriarchal society where males are on top, and women are at the bottom in the societal hierarchy (Acharya, 2017). Women have limited freedom and are marginalized in the society whereas men are in the center of all social, political and institutional life (ibid). To improve women's position in society and in the labor market, gender-based policies such as affirmative action has been implemented (Prokos et. al., 2010) but does it always improve the women situation? How much such policies are successful to enhance the women life? It is necessary to investigate.

The constitution of Nepal has provisioned for an inclusive approach for all sectors and still needs to continue this until achieving equality. Acharya (2017) states that still there are higher number of top-level civil servants who are male and are basically from upper caste, rich, educated and privileged. There are fewer women in such positions and even they are educated but taken for granted tags as cultural production of the society (ibid). Hence, policy of Nepal and Nepal's civil service reflect socially constructed views, jeopardizing women's empowerment.

Based on the data, women representation including disadvantaged people has been gradually increasing in the public sector including in the civil service due to the reservation (quota) system (Bhul, 2021). He further argued that the proportional representation of communities in the state organs is crucial for inclusion. Before the reservation (quota) system in the recruitment of civil service, there were approximately 11% women in 2007 which has increased to 26.59% in the Nepalese civil service till July 2021 (Personal Record Office, 2021).

Table 3: Women in Civil Service

Fiscal Year	Number of women	Percentage
2016/17	19,260	21.15%
2017/18	21,169	23.60%
2018/19	21,963	24.87%
2019/20	22,999	26.00%
2020/21	23,532	26.59%

Source: Personnel Record Office (civil)

Table 3 showed that the number of women in civil service has been simultaneously increasing which has helped to mainstream women in decision making level however, the number of women in senior post is not sufficiently increased which could be because of structural hindrance of Nepalese society (Wagle, 2019). Also, Gupta et. al. (2020) identified the invisible gender stereotypes in Nepalese civil service which could be one of the reasons for being few women in senior level. Moreover, participation of women should be equal to men in the executive, judiciary and legislative body of the government. However, for future it seems necessary to develop women's capacity for meaningful participation and sustainability rather than numerical participation. It could help to break the glass ceiling effect in society (Gupta et. al., 2020).

Based on the analysis, there are enough policy and programs to enhance women position in the society in Nepal. Effective implementation of those policies can lead the country towards gender equality. Women have been facing difficulties and challenges to be equal with men in profession due to the cultural practices and traditional belief. Despite the quota system, number of women in higher level of civil service are not increasing satisfactorily. Hence, to provide meaningful equal opportunity, not only the quantitative but also qualitative participation is necessary in all levels of the civil service for which it is necessary to enhance women capacity to be equally competent as male so that women could grab the opportunity of decision making and policy making level. Besides that, caste hierarchy is still existed in Nepal however it was officially abolished in the 1960's where Dalits, also called 'untouchables' are at the lower level (Guinee, 2014). There is poorer situation of women of lower caste which needs to be researched further in future.

Conclusion

To conclude, women participation has been increasing in different sectors in Nepal especially in civil service due to legal provisions; that is affirmative action or reservation system however, it is also necessary to continue such provision (quota system) until equal participation is achieved. Along with the participation, capacity enhancement programs also need to be carried out so that women could be equally competent with male which could help to provide equality in future. Due to the different policies intervention and awareness, Nepalese women's status is being improved and it could be a good example for other similar countries. Research on capacity enhancement and qualitative participation of women can be done in future. Similarly, the impact of reservation policy on women's social life can also be the topic for future research.

Limitation of the study

This study is based on secondary data and has tried to explore the women status in present context using descriptive analysis. Literature published after 2000 has been incorporated in this literature. It has only showed the basic status of women however based on the article; future research can be carried out on suggested topics.

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Nepal Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (NJMR)

Vol. 6, No. 1, March 2023. Pages: 40-53

ISSN: 2645-8470 (Print), ISSN: 2705-4691 (Online)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/njmr.v6i1.54285>

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Vol. 6, No. 1, March 2023. Pages: 40-53

ISSN: 2645-8470 (Print), ISSN: 2705-4691 (Online)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/njmr.v6i1.54285>

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