

# Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Urban Water Governance

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## Introduction

- ❖ The impacts of the water crisis are prominent in urban areas due to the changing climate and rapid population growth.
- ❖ The Constitution of Nepal, 2015 recognized access to water as a fundamental right and have prioritized inclusion of different social groups.
- ❖ Commitment to achieving SDGs-6 demands inclusive and climate-adaptive local water governance.
- ❖ National drinking water policies are relatively progressive regarding gender and social inclusion (Shrestha and Clement, 2019).
- ❖ WASH Sector Development Plan (2016-2030) highlights the need to embrace a more GESI-oriented approach (Government of Nepal, 2016).
- ❖ Water Supply and Sanitation Act 2022: mandates women in key positions (at least 1 woman serves either as chair or member of Tariff Fixation Commission); (Coordination committee has at least 4 female members).

## Objectives

### General Objective

- ❖ To explore gender equality and social inclusion in urban water governance in Nepal.

### Specific Objective

- ❖ To understand gender and social inclusion status at the decision-making level in local water governing bodies.
- ❖ To explore the challenges for making local water governance gender and socially inclusive.

## Material and Methods

- ❖ Long-term research engagement in urban water issues in three municipalities of Nepal namely Dhulikhel Municipality, Diktel Rupakot Majhuwagadhi Municipality, and Dharan Sub-Metropolitan City.
- ❖ Qualitative approach - Key informants' interview, focus group discussion, Pani Chautari ( *water forums*), observations, and policy review

### Qualitative Approach



Fig 1: Pani Chautari in Dhulikhel



Fig 2: women and children stand in queue to fill their water jars in Nunthala, Khotang

## Results and Discussion

- ❖ Despite managing urban water needs at the household level, women are underrepresented in local water governance.
- ❖ Gender and social inclusion have increased at the decision-making forums. Yet women's influence in local water management decisions is weak as techno-scientific engineering and masculine decision-making continue to predominate.
- ❖ As seen in our research sites, male members head technical and higher-level decision-making roles such as fund allocation, and women members were offered roles, such as organizing cleanliness campaigns in Dhulikhel and choosing the color of paint of the committee building in Diktel.
- ❖ While policies prioritize the representation of women in different managerial roles, their implementation poses challenges. For instance, the Water Supply and Sanitation Act 2022, has set certain criteria for selecting the chair of the Water Fixation Commission that are more likely to favor men.
- ❖ Gender and caste-class intersection makes water access for marginalized groups and their meaningful inclusion in local water governance even more challenging.

## Conclusions

- ❖ Devolution of authorities and resources has created more conducive policy environment for gender and socially inclusive local water management.
- ❖ Creation of formal opportunities, however, does not necessarily ensure meaningful participation.
- ❖ Capacitating women with technocratic knowledge in water management is crucial.
- ❖ Recognition of women's contribution to water management and their capacity is necessary.
- ❖ The inclusion provisions should be more clearly spelled out in policy instruments.
- ❖ The intersectionality approach is crucial for meaningful inclusion of marginalized groups.

## References

1. Shrestha, G., & Clement, F. (2019). Unravelling gendered practices in the public water sector in Nepal. *Water Policy*, 21(5), 1017-1033.
2. Government of Nepal (2016). *Nepal Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector Development Plan (2016–2030)*. Ministry of Water Supply and Sanitation, Sector Efficiency Improvement Unit (SEIU), Kathmandu, Nepal.

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