



Nepal

Gender Relations in Nepal Overview

Overview

The country ranks 145th from 187 countries on the 2014 Human Development Index (HDI) with value 0.540 (2013 figures), placing it in the LDC¹ category. The 2014 Gender Inequality Index (GII) places Nepal 98th (with value 0.479) on the index.

Education: The female population with at least some secondary school education 17.9% (2005-2012 figures), women's mean years of schooling is 2.4 (2002-2012).²

Economic: 19.7% households reported ownership of land or house or both (fixed assets) in the name of female member of the household. Ownership of fixed assets in urban areas is 26.77% for women and in rural areas it is 18.02%

Of the total share of wage employment in the agriculture sector, women's share is 44.8%.. 74.8³ percent of the unpaid family labour force is female (CBS, 2009), a fact suggesting that a large number of economically active women have no access to economic resources. Women comprise approximately 15 percent of the workforce (MoF). Female labour force participation is 54.3%⁴ (2012 figures⁵). Women's participation in and contributions to the country's progress are constrained by a lack of formal employment or alternative livelihood opportunities, compounded by their limited access to economic resources, and most women are engaged in unpaid, home-based labour.

¹ A least developed country (LDC) is a country that, according to the United Nations, exhibits the lowest indicators of socioeconomic development, with the lowest Human Development Index ratings of all countries in the world.

² The above data are from the United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2014. Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience

³ Nepal MDG Progress Report 2013

⁴ Labor force participation rate is the proportion of the population ages 15 and older that is economically active

⁵ UN Nepal Gender Profile, 5th may 2015

Girls have responsibilities of helping their mothers with housework while men and boys are not expected to assist with domestic work. Nepalese women have much higher work-load than the global average⁶. 78 per cent of economically active women are engaged in agriculture⁷, a rising figure due to the extensive labour migration of men from rural areas. However, the share of women's wage employment in the non-agricultural sector has more than doubled, from just under 19.9% in 2009 to 44.8% in 2011.⁸ The limited opportunities and the constraints have also driven many women to seek employment opportunities elsewhere in Nepal or abroad, a trend accompanied by concerns about their vulnerability to sexual exploitation, forced labor and abuse, and their concentration in the informal sector.⁹ Endeavoring to contribute to their family income through remittances (which contribute to about a quarter of Nepal's GDP), women often leave through unofficial and unregulated channels, rendering it difficult to have realistic figures of the overall number of women choosing foreign labour migration. However, according to Government of Nepal data, women's share of total foreign labor force has increased thirtyfold from 0.19% in 2006/2007 to 5.96% in July 2012.¹⁰

Nepal's Gender Inequality Index Rank, 2013 was 98, while Pakistan was ranked 127 out of a total of 187 countries¹¹.

The Maternal Mortality Rate is still among the highest in the world, (170 per 100,000 births)ⁱ. According to an Amnesty International 2014 report *Unnecessary Burden*, it is estimated that more than 600,000 women suffer from conditions related to uterine prolapses due to early marriage, early pregnancy, overwork and neglect.

Sex ratio- There are 94.2 adult males for every 100 females, due largely to extensive labor migration

Female headed household: 25.73%

Caste/ethnicity=125 groups, Chhetri¹² largest- 16.6%

Literacy- male- 75.1% and female 57.4%

Political Participation: The constituent assembly, in office between 2008 and May 2012, comprised 32.8 percent women.

Social and Cultural Practices: Eliminating discriminatory social and cultural practices poses a considerable challenge to fostering gender equality in practice.

Education

Literacy: (2011) 57.38% of the female population in Nepal (above 5 years of age) is literate.

Gender roles in Nepal vary with context, caste, ethnic group, religion, and socio-economic class. Overwhelmingly, the traditional family structures are grounded in beliefs that men have pre-eminence over women and respect for elders. Women and girls in Nepal are disadvantaged by traditional practices like the dowry system, early marriage, son-preference, stigmatization of widows, seclusion of women (*purdah*), family violence, polygamy, and the segregation of women and girls during menstruation (*chhaupadi*).

⁶ Government of Nepal and United Nations Development Programme, Nepal Human Development Report 2004

⁷ NPC, GoN and WFP (2011), National Population and Housing Census

⁸ Nepal MDG Progress Report 2013

⁹ CEDAW Concluding Observations, 2011, paras 33-34; MDG Report 2013

¹⁰ Government of Nepal, Department of Foreign Employment, 2013, cited in Nepal MDG Progress Report 2013

¹¹ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-4-gender-inequality-index>

¹² Chhetri is one of the higher Hindu Nepalese castes

In Nepal a high-caste, educated woman may have fewer opportunities to work outside the home than a rural Dalit woman for whom working outside the home may be more accepted. Women face an onerous multiple burden. The economic contribution of women is substantial but largely unnoticed because their traditional role as caretaker is taken for granted. Nepalese women have a much higher work-load than the global averageⁱⁱ. Nepalese men are expected to earn an income and support their families although how they do that and the view of manhood will often be linked to caste. Due to increasing economic pressure, many Nepali men have lost their traditional occupations and have been forced to migrate to the cities or abroad in order to maintain their “breadwinner” role. As a result many of them face severely exploitative conditions that sometimes amount to forced labour. Boys are more likely to be educated as they are seen as the future family breadwinner while daughters leave home to live with their in-laws.

There are gender differences in different communities and regions of Nepal. In more traditional Hindu communities in the Terai, women’s roles tend to be more limited to domestic duties and subsistence farming while in Tibeto-Burman communities’ women are to be more economically active. In matriarchal Tharu communities, gender roles and relations may be reversed with women as the leaders and men in a submissive even abused role.

Almost half of the population gets married between the age of 14 to 19 years and dowry is a major driver of child marriage as well as a cause of violence against girls and women. More specifically, the younger the girl being married, the less dowry is expected from her parents. The amount of dowry expected increases as a girl’s age increases, therefore parents want to marry off their daughters as soon as possible to pay the least dowry possible. Marriage plays a decisive role in all women’s life choices and social-economic positionⁱⁱⁱ. As women get older, their gender roles may change especially if they become the mother-in-law who is more able to make decisions and likely to have more freedoms than her daughter-in-law. There is discrimination against single women in Nepal, especially those who have been widowed there are 7.4% of the female population who are widowed/divorced/separated compared to the national average of 5% of the female population.

In some communities perceptions around impurity such as, chaupadi will also render women and girls at higher risk. Chaupadi is the practice of isolating menstruating and/or post-partum women away from their family and friends. In the most western section of Nepal, the practice of Chaupadi is still in place. Chaupadi is derived from a Hindu tradition that relates to secretions associated with menstruation, and childbirth. These functions are considered, by those who practice Chaupadi, to be impure. There are reports of rape, physical violence, snakebites and other incidences of GBV which occur during their stay in chaupadi’s. There are also issues of reduced mobility and access to services, resources and opportunities associated with chaupadi, which will have a great impact on distributions from all sectors. Although there has been progress made by the Government and civil society to eliminate this practice, there is a stark difference between policy and practice. However, there may be some families affected by the quake in both Kathmandu and in the more rural districts who still practice this. There have also been recent moves by the government to provide cash incentives to men to marry widows, which may perpetuate further discrimination and sexual violence.

Socio-cultural violence remains prevalent in various forms, including bonded labour, violence against women accused of witchcraft and *chhaupadi*^{iv} in some parts of the region. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), 12,000 women and children are trafficked to the Middle East and India every year, mainly for exploitation in brothels or as forced labor. The National Demographic Health Survey (2011) showed that, among women age 15-49, 22 percent have experienced physical violence and 12 percent had experienced sexual violence at least once since age 15. Among married women, one-third had experienced emotional, physical or sexual violence from their spouse, and 17 percent had experienced it within the 12 months immediately prior to the survey. The most commonly reported perpetrator of physical violence among married women is their

husband (84%). Factors such as a woman's age, caste/ethnicity, wealth status, ecological zone, region and number of living children can all impact the degree to which she may experience spousal violence, with Muslim women generally experiencing the highest level (55%).^v Rural women are more likely to have experienced physical violence (22%) than urban women (19%).

Nepal is a signatory to 23 treaties and International Human Rights instruments with the legal framework in Nepal largely supporting women's rights and equality. The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 states *"no physical, mental or any other form of violence shall be inflicted to any women, and such an act shall be punishable by Law."* Specific women's rights are also enshrined in the Interim Constitution including the right against discrimination, the right to reproductive health, the right against physical, mental and other forms of violence, and equal right to property.^{vi} The Interim Constitution (2007) and the Election Act (2007) provide a quota for women (33%) to be represented in the Constituent Assembly. Marital rape is included within the definition of rape and can be punished. However, despite progressive laws and a vibrant civil society, Nepal still has many challenges when it comes to translating these laws into action.

ⁱ Nepal Demographics Profile 2014-Mundi

ⁱⁱ Nepal Human Development Report 2004, UNDP

ⁱⁱⁱCARE Nepal Women Empowerment Program Framework 2010

^{iv} A traditional practice of forced isolation where women and girls are confined to a kind of a cow-shed outside the house during their menstruation period, mostly practices in Fast Western Nepal

^v Tuladhar, S., et. Al. 2013. 1Women's Empowerment and Spousal Violence in Relation to Health Outcomes in Nepal. Further Analysis of the 2011 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey.

^{vi}Article 20 of the Interim Constitution 2007.