

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

**TOWARDS PLANET 50:50:
ENABLING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND
REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE**



20-21 April 2017
Kathmandu, Nepal

CONFERENCE REPORT

Organizers:

Election Commission Nepal (ECN)
United Nations Gender Theme Group-Nepal
Sajha Abhiyan (Women's Coalition)



निर्वाचन आयोग, नेपाल
ELECTION COMMISSION, NEPAL



UNITED NATIONS

स्थानीय तहको निर्वाचनमा
महिला सहभागिताका लागि
साझा अभियान

Election Commission of Nepal is the constitutional Election Management Body in Nepal. The Election Commission has the responsibility to conduct, supervise, direct and control the elections of the President, the Vice President, Members of Federal Parliament, Provincial Assemblies and Local Bodies.

The United Nations Gender Theme Group – Nepal consists of representatives from 18 UN agencies (FAO, IFAD, ILO, IOM, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UN Habitat, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODC, UNRCO, UNRCPD, UN Volunteer, UN Women, WFP and WHO). The Gender Theme Group is currently co-chaired by UNDP and UN Women.

SAJHA ABHIYAN is a campaign for Women's Participation in Local Election with an objective to ensure women's participation in local election. The members include: Women Security Pressure Group (WSPG), Working Group for Women's Political Empowerment (AWG), Shanti Malika, Sancharika Samuha, Men Engage Alliance (MEA), Sankalpa, Media, Women in Policy Advocacy Alliance (WIPPA), Beyond Beijing Committee (BBC), AATWIN, National Network Against Girl Trafficking (NNAGT), Women Awareness Center Nepal, Nepal Disabled Women Association, Alliance against Trafficking in Women & Children in Nepal (AATWIN).

Disclaimer: The views expressed in the report are those of the individual participants and do not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations.

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LIST *of* ACRONYMS

CA	Constituent Assembly
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CIN	Community Information Network
CoC	Code of Conduct
CPN (UML)	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist)
DCC	District Coordination Committee
ECN	Election Commission Nepal
EWG	Election Working Group
FNJ	Federation of Nepali Journalists
GoN	Government of Nepal
GTG	Gender Theme Group
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
IPWA	Inter-Party Women's Alliance
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
MP	Member of Parliament
NC	Nepali Congress
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NWC	National Women Commission
RPP	Rastriya Prajatantra Party
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
US	United States
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

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1

BACKGROUND

Women are significantly under-represented in political and electoral processes everywhere in the world – be it as voters, candidates, elected representatives, or electoral administrators.



Women shall have the right to participate in all bodies of the State on the basis of the principle of proportional inclusion.

- The Constitution of Nepal, 2015

Women are significantly under-represented in political and electoral processes everywhere in the world – be it as voters, candidates, elected representatives, or electoral administrators. Women’s political empowerment and equal access to leadership positions at all levels are fundamental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a more equal world. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Nepal in 1991, calls on state parties “to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life”. Similarly, the Constitution of Nepal (2015) in Article 38-4 stipulates that “women shall have the right to participate in all bodies of the State on the basis of the principle of proportional inclusion”. In sum, women’s political representation and leadership are prerequisites to ensuring the human rights of all. It has been almost two decades since the last local-level elections were held in Nepal. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 has stipulated that the Government of Nepal (GoN) hold local, provincial as well as federal elections by 21 January 2018. Accordingly, the GoN announced 14 May 2017 as the date for the election of local bodies and preparations are now underway. The GoN has established 744 local-level units, replacing the previous

Village Development Committees and Municipalities. The units for which elections will be held include 481 Rural Municipalities, 246 Municipalities, 13 Sub-Metropolitan Cities and 4 Metropolitan Cities.¹ The five election-related bills - Election Commission Bill, Electoral Rolls Bill, Election Offences and Punishments Bill, Local Level Election Bill and Political Party Bill - have been approved by the Legislative Parliament, and the Election Commission Nepal (ECN) has issued the Election Code of Conduct (CoC), a guideline to ensure that the election is conducted in a free, fair, impartial, transparent, and credible manner.

In post-conflict countries like Nepal, where there are additional barriers to women’s participation, special attention is required to ensure that their rights are respected. Recently approved election-related laws have incorporated some progressive provisions in terms of women’s representation in local bodies, including the Rural Municipality, Municipality and District Coordination Committee (DCC). Women in Nepal, however, still struggle to exercise their rights to political participation and leadership. This is due to social norms related to women’s participation that limit women’s voice and agency, women’s limited information about the relevant provisions of the constitution

¹The Directives to Govern and Operate Local Level Government of Nepal, Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development, 2073.

and election-related laws, low levels of motivation to be a candidate or a voter, resource constraints, and inadequate mentoring and support systems.

Women's representation in the first Constituent Assembly (CA) of Nepal (2008) was the highest ever, reaching 33 percent. This declined to 29.91 percent in the second CA (2013). The percentage of women in the legislature parliament following the promulgation of the new constitution in September 2015 has remained the same (29.91 percent). Constituent Assembly has two roles to play as Constituent Assembly and as Legislature Parliament. Hence, after the promulgation of the Constitution their role is limited to Legislature Parliament. The Constitution of Nepal guarantees 33 percent of seats to women in the Federal and Provincial Legislatures.

This election will result in at least 13,360 women being elected from 6680 wards. This is because the Election Commission Act (2017) directs the Election Commission Nepal (ECN) to adopt gender-friendly and inclusive principles while conducting local elections in a free and fair manner. The ECN has developed the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy and the strategies and action plan for making election gender friendly. Furthermore, the Local Level Election Act (2017) provisions state that in any five-membered Ward Committee, two women (40 percent), including one Dalit woman (20 percent) shall be elected. Similarly, there is a provision to elect at least four and five women as members of each Rural Municipality and Municipality Executive Committee respectively.

Additionally, the Act guarantees at least 33 percent representation of women and 11 percent representation of Dalit

or minority community representatives in all District Coordination Committees (DCC). The Act has further mandated political parties to ensure 50 percent representation of women among candidates for Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson; Mayor and Deputy Mayor; and Chief and Vice-Chief of the Rural Municipality, Municipality and DCC respectively.

The ECN, UN Country Team Gender Theme Group (GTG), Election Working Group (EWG), National Women Commission (NWC), Women's Coalition and women's groups, and the media have been advocating for legislative frameworks to ensure women's fair access to the political sphere - as voters, candidates, elected officials, and government officials. As part of these initiatives, and in order to align these efforts with the provisions of the constitution and the new election-related laws, the ECN, the UNGTG chaired by UN Women and UNDP, and Sajha Abhiyan (Women's Coalition) proposed to host a National Conference in Kathmandu on the theme 'Towards Planet 50:50: Enabling Women's Leadership and Representation in Local Governance' on 20-21 April 2017. The overall aim of the National Conference was to empower women to be effective leaders and constituents in local governance. Within the framework of the conference, participants united to draft a common charter of demands for gender-responsive local governance and advocated with political parties on the charter.



Towards Planet 50:50: Enabling Women's Leadership and Representation in Local Governance

2

OBJECTIVES

- To take forward gender equality-focused voter education;
- To increase understanding of the provisions of the Constitution of Nepal and the Local Level Election Act 2017 on women's leadership and representation;
- To identify critical action points to ensure that the local elections are gender-responsive; and
- To collectively advocate and vote for the common charter of demands for gender-responsive local governance.

3

NATIONAL CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The inaugural session, held the morning of 20 April 2017, began after registration of the over 500 participants, followed by the playing of the national anthem initiated by a women's group.



Low education, limited political engagement, limited health care access, and domestic violence, have contributed to the low representation of women in politics.

- Mr. Gopi Nath Mainali, Secretary, Election Commission Nepal (ECN)

3.1 INAUGURAL SESSION

The inaugural session, held the morning of 20 April 2017, began after registration of the over 500 participants, followed by the playing of the national anthem initiated by a women's group. The session was chaired by the Chief Election Commissioner, Dr. Ayodhee Prasad Yadav, while distinguished chief guest and guests seated in the dais included Speaker of the Parliament, Election Commissioners and the UN Resident Coordinator to Nepal. The master of

ceremony was Ms. Babita Basnet. Mr. Gopi Nath Mainali, Secretary, Election Commission Nepal, provided welcoming remarks and outlined the objectives of the conference. The conference was formally inaugurated by Ms. Onsari Gharti Magar, the Right Honourable Speaker of the Parliament, by the traditional 'lighting of the lamp'. This was followed by remarks on the objectives and program of the national conference by distinguished speakers.





Mr. Gopi Nath Mainali, Secretary, Election Commission Nepal (ECN), shared his experiences from the ECN, which has been working at the local level in order to encourage women's representation and make the local election process more inclusive. During his speech, he mentioned that various factors, such as low education, limited political engagement, limited health care access, and domestic violence, have contributed to the low representation of women in politics, although they make up 51 percent of Nepal's total population. Mr. Mainali stressed that the government should not only focus on making policies more gender-responsive but also ensure that policies are fully applied in practice and that women are fully represented in all positions. He also discussed how the representation of women in property ownership and government bodies is low even though the political participation of women is shown to increase economic empowerment and reduce domestic violence. He stated that ensuring the proportional representation of women is not sufficient; policy-level interventions as well as guaranteed representation in the local bodies are also required. He emphasized that the ECN ensures the inclusive representation of all marginalized groups in its activities.

Ms. Durga Ghimire, Sajha Abhiyan, informed participants that the movement is working with different political parties and media groups to increase the participation of women in local governance structures. According to her, women's representation can bring important changes to Nepal's political assembly. Ms. Ghimire highlighted that whenever there has been a presence of women in the political arena, particularly in the South Asian context, we have noticed increased good governance, less corruption, less violence and women strengthening their identities outside of the household realm. She urged all local representatives to bring this message to their respective communities and encourage women in their communities to take part in the local election.

“ *Whenever there has been a presence of women in the political arena, particularly in the South Asian context, we have noticed increased good governance, less corruption, less violence and women strengthening their identities outside of the household realm.* ”

- Ms. Durga Ghimire, Sajha Abhiyan,



Ms. Pratibha Rana, Inter-Party Women's Alliance (IPWA), stated that the Alliance is active in all 75 districts of Nepal and that it is urging strong women's representation in local bodies. She also stated that the local elections will be the point of departure for increasing the representation of women as enshrined in the constitution and highlighted that this is a good opportunity for women and youth to participate both as candidates and voters as the Constitution of Nepal (2015) has made the election and voting more gender- and youth-inclusive. However, Ms. Rana stressed that to make the local election more practical at a local level, the foundation needs to be strong. To realize this goal, members of her alliance are continuously working with all political parties to ensure women's inclusion and participation at the local level.

Ms. Valerie Julliand, UN Resident Coordinator to Nepal, urged the participants to mentor women so that they can become full-fledged citizens as "we need champions of women in politics". She expressed that women leaders present at the conference were "not only leaders but also children of women in politics". Ms. Julliand mentioned that women constitute a

higher proportion of the population than men in Nepal but that women represent only 29.91 percent of parliamentarians. This could be because women are more likely to be illiterate and more likely to face violence than men. She also stated that women's caretaking responsibility, coupled with the increasing responsibility to economically provide for their family due to male migration, hinders them from getting fully involved in the political arena. She stressed that gender-insensitive policies, such as girls having to seek support from their fathers and married women with their husbands in order to secure citizenship, can also create challenges for women. She called this a "conspiracy of men to keep women at home". Ms. Julliand further noted that this is the perfect moment for women to enter politics and that there will be no sustainable development without women's empowerment.



“ *Women cannot be an afterthought. They will move the nation. Whether we want it or not. Today or tomorrow, they will do it.*

- Ms. Valerie Julliand, UN Resident Coordinator, Nepal



Ms. Onsari Gharti, Chief Guest and Right Honorable Speaker, mentioned women's low representation in decision-making bodies throughout the world and stated that women's representation in Nepal was not as high as expected, especially their meaningful presence in decision-making bodies. She also highlighted the gap between capacity and opportunity for women's participation as enshrined in the constitution, and other fundamental human rights treaties. She further noted the tendency of political parties to limit women's candidacy to reserved quota seats and how local elections represent an opportunity to challenge this tendency. She highlighted that it is crucial to push for more "leadership of women" in the pursuit of national development.

Mr. Ayodhee Prasad Yadav, Chief Election Commissioner, highlighted that among the 744 local bodies there are more than 6880 wards and that a movement is needed to ensure implementation of women's guaranteed representation in these. He cautioned that we cannot survive as a free society unless we exercise complete democratic rights. He reported that the ECN has finished all the preparations to hold the local elections in a free and fair manner through voter education and making provisions for women-friendly polling stations. He also highlighted on issue of violence, how women were passionate to fight the upcoming local election. Dr. Ayodhee Prasad Yadav also requested all political parties to exert for women's candidacy in all posts as far as possible. Dr. Yadav also requested all political parties to exert for women's candidacy in all posts as far as possible.

“

We should not only demand women's candidacy but also ensure their victories as well.

- Ms. Onsari Gharti,
Right Honorable Speaker,
Legislature Parliament

“

Democracy without women's empowerment is no democracy.

- Mr. Ayodhee Prasad Yadav,
Chief Election Commissioner

Day 1

Thursday,
20 April 2017

3.2 TECHNICAL SESSIONS

SESSION 1: **Know Your Rights:** Demystifying key elements in the Constitution of Nepal and Electoral Laws focusing on women's leadership and participation

Panelists:

- Ms. Ila Sharma, Commissioner, ECN
- Mr. Nawaraj Dhakal, Joint Secretary, ECN
- Mr. Nilkantha Uprety, former Chief Election Commissioner

Facilitator:

- Bijay Paudyal

The following panel presentations were made during the session:

Gender-responsive provisions related to women's leadership in the Constitution of Nepal, the Local Level Election Act (2017), the Election Commission Act (2017)

Ila Sharma, Commissioner, ECN, highlighted relevant legal provisions designed to enable women's representation in local and national politics. The constitution contains special provisions to ensure 33 to 50 percent representation of women, Dalit and marginalized groups in the local election. However, women's representation in political and government positions is currently low. Women's access to education, health,

as well as social and cultural resources is also limited. The constitutional provisions and election acts of Nepal, together with international conventions and the support of UN agencies, provide the foundation to enable women's representation in all fields, organizations, and levels (local to federal), including in decision making positions through the use of quotas. Such a foundation will gradually allow for the transformation of existing social norms and restrictions.

Presentation on the electoral management system (voting system, polling centres, human resource management, special provision for women voters)

Nawaraj Dhakal, Joint Secretary, ECN, provided an overview of the electoral management system in place for the forthcoming local elections. Preparations for the elections made by the Election Commission Nepal in collaboration with the Government of Nepal include appointment of election and polling officers; establishment of district and local election offices; conducting of local-level trainings, awareness-raising initiatives, and media education; display of posters as well as preparation of voters'

lists and voter identity cards; enforcement of the code of conduct; organization of conferences; and organization of various logistics. Political parties, Sajha Abhiyan members, women's organizations, the Inter-Party Women's Alliance, NGOs, and INGOs are integrating and networking with each other as well as with UN agencies and the ECN to encourage women's representation and leadership in local and federal elections through various educational, promotional, and monitoring activities and programs.

Electoral violence and women's safety and security

Nilkantha Uprety, former Chief Election Commissioner, discussed the issues and adverse effects of election violence on women as candidates and voters. The elections should be unbiased, secure, and free in order to safeguard the rights

of citizens and prevent any kind of undue influence and/or electoral violence by political parties or the government. Violence aimed at women, Dalits and marginalized people includes domestic violence, physical and psychological violence, electoral



violence, undesirable incidences, and corrupt practices such as intimidation and threats. The ECN has demanded the application of tight security measures, enforced by three circles of police, armed police, and the army. There are also arrangements in place for special cells from the government and watchdogs as well as national and international human rights observers, to check and respond to possible threats and violence. Women representatives need to play a proactive role in breaking the patriarchal mindset that often gives birth to gender-based violence.

During the discussion that followed, most of the questions focused on the existence of quotas for Dalit women while there are no quotas for youth or Madhesi women who are equally

under-represented. Other minority groups such as LGBTI individuals, disabled women, and ethnic groups with very small populations were also mentioned. Another issue that received attention was the high cost of contesting elections and how women are intimidated by male politicians as a result of the high costs. Participants also cited examples where women were denied nomination despite years of struggle and contributions towards their parties and who called themselves “party-oppressed”. There were some questions on the issue of women candidates only being offered deputy posts. The panelists noted that these questions were focused on the issue of representation and stated that the ECN is an election-managing body and thus bound by the existing legislation.

SESSION 2: **Exercise Your Rights:** Sharing, mentoring, uniting and demanding

Panelists:

- Her Excellency Ms. Alaina B. Teplitz, United States (US) Ambassador to Nepal
- Her Excellency Ms. Mashfee Binte Shams, Ambassador of Bangladesh to Nepal
- Her Excellency Ms. W. Swarnalatha Pereira, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Nepal
- His Excellency Mr. Kjell Tormod Pettersen, Norwegian Ambassador to Nepal

Facilitator:

- Santosh Shah

The panelists were asked to speak on: Sharing of experiences by Ambassadors based in Nepal—best practices from other countries.

Her Excellency **Alaina B. Teplitz**, US Ambassador to Nepal, highlighted that the challenges of inequality were

not unique to Nepal and shared the story of Women’s History Month that is celebrated in the US every March,



which recognizes the lengthy struggle for women's rights such as suffrage. She noted the importance of family, other women, and communities in women's struggles. Ambassador Teplitz cited studies which show that women exert a different kind of leadership: they reach out more to the other side, are more compassionate, look for ways to unite, and are more productive. She noted that women's leadership has yielded important results in the economic sphere as well. She stressed the need to build the confidence of women to participate in politics by developing their political skills and affirmed that the US will work alongside women candidates and voters to this end.

His Excellency **Kjell Tormod Pettersen**, Norwegian Ambassador to Nepal, stressed that it is a critical and decisive moment in Nepal and that women's participation is important for economic development. He shared the Norwegian experience in ensuring women's representation in politics and other Nordic models of democracy, which has also translated into the highest participation of women in the workforce leading to a large economic base. Ambassador Pettersen noted the achievements of the Government of Nepal regarding its many women in prominent leadership positions.

Her Excellency **Mashfee Binte Shams**, Ambassador of Bangladesh to Nepal, highlighted the significant political empowerment of women in Bangladesh through various legal provisions such as the 33 percent reservation for women in all committees of political parties. In addition, equal rights are guaranteed by the constitution as well as gender-equality and anti-discrimination policies. She also noted that Bangladesh is practicing gender-responsive budgeting.

Her Excellency **W. Swarnalatha Pereira**, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Nepal, noted that women's participation in politics in Sri Lanka started in 1938 but their numbers are still low even though they have achieved high positions in government. She pointed out the major reasons for their low representation, such as an expensive election process, lack of support from social and privately-owned media for female candidates, reluctance of political parties to nominate women candidates, and women's hesitation to take on major roles. Ambassador Pereira also highlighted that women in Sri Lanka are the highest source of foreign-currency earnings through foreign labour migration and involvement in the textile sector. In the face of women's under-representation as voters and politicians, despite proven leadership capacities and basic rights, she recommended the need for well-educated females in high positions even though they might lack the support of civil society.

One major question that was raised during the discussion concerned the rights of migrant workers to vote in national elections as three of the four countries represented, excluding Norway, have large migrant populations, including many women. The panelists noted that such provisions are yet to be enacted though migrant workers form a large and economically significant population in all three countries.

SESSION 3: **Women in decision-making—** lessons from Nepal

Panelists:

- Ms. Bandana Rana, CEDAW Committee Member
- Ms. Sulochana Shrestha Shah, UN Global Compact

Facilitator:

- Babita Basnet

The panelists shared the following experiences:

Bandana Rana highlighted the challenges she experienced while attempting to become a member of the UN CEDAW Committee. Though not the only criterion, she felt that the support of family is very important for women's success, especially for married women with family. She highlighted the need for women candidates to have a feel for everything and the challenges of women keeping themselves informed of political developments. Ms. Rana underscored the need to be constantly in contest mode, to win over people, and to rely on

one's self. She also noted that there is no hierarchy in the election process (despite the quotas). However, she also expressed the need to share one's experiences and create opportunities for others. She noted that women's representation and rights have been ensured in the new constitution and the SDGs, particularly regarding women's reproductive and property rights.

Sulochana Shrestha Shah talked about the long struggles she faced in transitioning from being a female



scientist to a successful entrepreneur who has fought for labour welfare and child labour-free industries. She described the frustrations she experienced as an enthusiastic female mathematician in the government's leading science lab and how that led her to found her business in carpet weaving. Ms. Shah discussed her experience in carpet manufacturing and empowering women weavers through education and support, helping to rid the industry of child labour, and the eventual establishment of the Nepal Rugmark Foundation on quality assurance. She argued that women are still far behind men and stressed that they need financial support during elections and security during voting as well. She questioned whether there should be educational qualifications in order to stand as a candidate.

During the discussion, many women who claimed to be deputy mayoral candidates noted the discouragement they experience when confronting the high expense of contesting elections. On top of this, many prospective women candidates cautioned that women will be competing among themselves as well. There was still confusion regarding whether women were only eligible for the posts of deputies and some expressed regrets that this conference did not happen earlier. However, during the discussion it was also made clear that they can fight for the Mayor/Chair positions too. In the discussion, the participants also strongly raised how the private sector could help them to fight for the local election in terms of financial support.

SESSION 4: Reflections and lessons learnt from past elections by the women's movement—what worked and what did not work?

Panelists:

- Ms. Benu Maya Gurung, Sajha Abhiyan
- Ms. Kala Swarnakar, Sajha Abhiyan
- Ms. Shashi Shrestha, Inter-Party Women's Alliance

Facilitator:

- Tika Dahal

The panelists made the following presentations:

Benu Maya Gurung, Sajha Abhiyan, noted that contesting elections is not only about finances but also about

“muscles”. However, she highlighted that the state has made provisions for women to enjoy equal freedom and



implemented constitutional provisions of proportional representation and a quota ensuring minimum 33 percent representation of women. Also, in the draft bills on political parties and local elections, there is a provision requiring between 33 and 40 percent women's representation as well as a provision ensuring equal opportunity for leadership. Ms. Gurung further noted that political parties have made commitments and developed organizational policies to prevent violence against women; to ensure 33 percent representation of women in their parties and sister organizations; and to provide women-targeted empowerment trainings. However, she also listed the remaining obstacles to the equal participation of women. For example, although 33 percent of seats are guaranteed for women in all assemblies at different levels of government, there is no such reservation in place at the executive level. Further, for the positions of president and vice-president, she argued that there is an "attempt to confuse" as the language of the provision refers to either gender or

ethnic group instead of directly requiring that a female occupy either of the posts. In addition, she noted that there is no mechanism to ensure 33 percent representation of women at all levels within political parties.

Finally, Ms. Gurung mentioned that though the election process is also about skills, no state or other entity currently provides training and/or support to women on the election process, on building a campaign, and/or on competitive contestation. She recommended that, among other actors, the state should make provisions to guarantee equal representation of women in federal, state, and local executives and assemblies. In addition, the ECN and its local offices should monitor whether women represent 33 percent of members of political parties, including 33 percent of their working committees. Ms. Gurung also suggested that the political parties should recognize the past contributions of women in their parties and recruit more women members through trainings and capacity development. Finally,



she proposed gender-friendly election observation practices and additional voter education to prevent invalid votes, and coordination among observer NGOs to cover larger geographical areas.

Kala Swarnakar, Sajha Abhiyan, asserted that the provision requiring that women hold 50 percent of the seats reserved for indigenous and ethnic groups in the Constituent Assembly elections had greatly encouraged women's participation. She reiterated that 40 percent women's representation is guaranteed in the local elections, which includes one Dalit woman (20 percent) and another woman (20 percent) in each ward. Ms. Swarnakar pointed out that political parties are reluctant to nominate women candidates or nominate them for constituencies where they are likely to lose, and that many women not only lack financial support but also the support of the family as well. She also noted that women themselves do not feel secure and capable and are therefore not willing to contest elections. She suggested increasing the number of women candidates and voters through voter registration, education, preparations for candidates, and collective alliances such as the IPWA.

Shashi Shrestha, IPWA, stated that the constitution is the framework for state-making and that elections are a step to make the constitution successful. She discussed the issues of inclusion, including in the election system as well as in the manifestos and constitutions of political parties. She identified various obstacles to women's participation in previous elections, including: lack of a women-friendly election system and obligatory provision for women's representation, patriarchal/feudal mentality where only males can lead, unfair household obligations, and unfriendly media. Ms. Shrestha suggested the adoption of an obligatory provision regarding women's representation in political parties, the provision of election-related trainings to prospective candidates, and prevention of cross-voting where political parties nominate candidates in coordination in order to minimize women's participation. She suggested a strategy whereby candidates are informed of one's constituency and other contenders in advance. She emphasized that "we do not have to demand, we can take it" and asked the participants to claim their right to stand for mayor, and not just as deputy mayor.

During the discussion, there were suggestions that campaigns like the Sajha Abhiyan should not be limited to Kathmandu Valley, but be taken to the rural parts as well. Many participants expressed disappointment that women become active only during the election period and that some women candidates are acting on behalf of their husbands. A concern was raised regarding the lack of space for disabled women which discourages their participation.

In the last session of the day, **Chandra Siwakoti**, Under Secretary, ECN, explained the process of filing nominations

and features of the new ballot papers. He explained that a Nepali citizen fulfilling the criteria can file candidacy for the elections through political parties or as an independent candidate. Mr. Siwakoti informed participants that the political parties have to nominate 50 percent women for the posts of chairperson and vice-chairperson, mayor and deputy mayor, and chief and deputy chief of DCCs, in addition to at least one Dalit woman in the case of ward committees.

He also mentioned that only 50 percent of the required deposit has to be submitted by women candidates and by Dalit, minority, or economically weak candidates. He went on to explain the design of the new ballot papers that come in large sizes in line with legal provisions. A short animated film on the correct method to mark the ballot paper was shown, which also included examples of when the votes become invalid.

Day 2

Friday,
21 April 2017

SESSION 5: **Claim Your Rights:** Breaking social norms and challenging mindsets that hold women back

Panelists:

- Mr. Kapil Kafle, Coordinator, Secretariat of South Asia MenEngage Alliance
- Ms. Saloni Singh, Sajha Abhiyan
- Dr. Mahendra Bista, President, Federation of Nepalese Journalists
- Ms. Kanchan Magar, Youth leader

Facilitator:

- Chewan Rai

The following presentations were made during this session:

Men's role in promoting women's leadership

Kapil Kafle, Coordinator, Secretariat of South Asia MenEngage Alliance, explained the changing attitude of men in response to the evolution of society, such as the end to the Sati tradition in Nepal, and the effects of global initiatives, such as the White Ribbon Campaign. However, he highlighted how social norms still treat men and women differently and continue to ascribe fixed gender roles. He argued that women

will only be nominated for secondary positions in the forthcoming elections, and that this is mainly because women are considered 'vote banks'. Mr. Kafle suggested internalization of equal rights by both women and men and noted that opportunities for women are in fact also for the benefit of men. He suggested that the GESI concept is a basic element of a democratic culture. He urged everyone present to start campaigns to

gather votes for women through their social media accounts. He recommended the allocation of additional budgets to village executives run by women as an incentive, as the outcomes of their

leadership will be peace and less corruption while also encouraging and pressuring the political parties to bring in more women in leadership positions.

The role of the women's movement

Saloni Singh, Sajha Abhiyan, noted that there are “agitated women” in the room even as there are comments that the women’s movement in Nepal has not matured though it is 70 years old. She cited historical women figures who had asserted themselves and recent women political figures who had contributed as much as men. She stated that there had been a transformation in women’s status in Nepal in the 20 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, but that it was still not satisfactory. Ms. Singh also pointed out that during elections, women have

to fight for recognition and that even the 40 percent reserved seats were not secure. Thus, there is a need to move ahead strategically. To those present at the conference who intended to file nominations, she emphasized the need to empower and strengthen one’s self and to be ready for competition so that the best capable candidate may win. She expressed disappointment that the media is reporting that women are only standing for deputy/secondary positions. In the end, she stated that rights should be claimed and ensured for posterity while also benefiting men as well.





The role of media

Mahendra Bista, President, FNJ, stated that the Women's Charter was very relevant, that media understands the Nepali context and society, and that Nepal's pluralism is also its strength. He stressed that the media sees the elections as the biggest achievement of the agenda of change and will support and highlight the electoral process. Mr. Bista also reiterated the danger of women being nominated for deputy positions only during the local elections. He stressed the need for the candidates

to engage with the media and that the media will highlight both the positives and negatives of candidates. He also pointed need to enhance leadership skills, communication skills of women leaders and also on how to raise the most relevant issue of the communities. He said that women do not want to engage at all or are weak content-wise when there is a specific need to emphasize their message at home. He also committed that the media will give priority to voter-centered messages.

Voices of youth advocates

Kanchan Magar, youth leader, started her presentation with a poem about her aspirations for equality. She stated that youth, comprising 16- to 40-year old, make up about 40 percent of the population, of whom 82 percent are educated. She also stressed that they want to take on leadership roles, but that society sees them as immature. Further, Ms. Magar noted that youth commonly lack access to state resources, and stressed that the current generation of youth in Nepal has had no experience of and/or exposure to local-level elections and its processes. She highlighted that

the role of youth leaders is to encourage youth voting and to help elect a capable leadership, and further claimed that youth have a role to play in both development and elections. She also stated that women lag behind in society due to sociocultural factors like patriarchy and as a result of their own lack of confidence. A participant observed that her voice is not blocked by the veil that society makes her wear. Some participants expressed fear that although many women are candidates for deputy positions, in reality women may not win any seats due to inter-party and intra-women competition.

SESSION 6: **Enablers:** What can political parties do to make women viable candidates?

Panelists:

- Ms. Kiran Koirala, Nepali Congress
- Honorable MP Dr. Rajan Bhattarai, CPN (UML)
- Honorable MP Ms. Kunti Shahi, RPP
- Mr. Sarbendra Nath Shukla, Tarai Madhes Democratic Party

Facilitator:

- Bijay Paudyal

The session started with the submission of the Women's Charter of Demands: For Achieving Meaningful Equality in the Forthcoming Elections (Local Elections, 2017) to the representatives of the political parties present on the panel. The session was conducted in a Q&A format. First, the moderator asked the present leaders what their parties are doing to ensure women's representation in the local elections.

Kiran Koirala, NC, stated that the NC will ensure women's leadership in local bodies and different strategies are being prepared to achieve this; she noted that women are filing nominations for the positions of mayors and chairperson. Honorable MP Rajan Bhattarai, CPN (UML), also stated that women should file nominations for the position of chief beyond the legally mandated 50 percent quota; his party was asking for three nominees for each post with one woman among them. Sarbendra Nath Shukla, Tarai Madhes, stressed that women's nominations should be prioritized in constituencies where they are likely to win. Honorable Kunti Shah, RPP, also stated that RPP is for female mayors in

as many local bodies as possible but also expressed disappointment at the trend of nominating women who are close to party leaders, frustrating the dedicated party cadres.

Following the initial presentations, the moderator took questions from the floor and the panelists were asked to respond. Most of the questions focused on why there are rumors of women being nominated for posts of deputy mayor and vice-chairperson only, that their representation should not exceed the reserved 40 percent, and why women were being discouraged from standing as candidates on the grounds of the high expense of contesting elections. There were also questions raised as to why quotas were not reserved for disabled women, minorities such as LGBTI, and ethnic groups with small populations. Some participants were concerned that if there are no Dalit women in a ward, their quotas would go vacant. The panelists stated that the Dalits were provided high quotas to ensure participation in governance because they have been historically marginalized. The leaders agreed that while there are problems

of representation and participation of women in politics, men will continue to dominate unless the number of women party members is increased. As it currently stands, women candidates will have to be approved by male-dominated

committees. The panelists also agreed that first and foremost there is a need to implement the constitutional and legal provisions of women's representation and participation in politics and governance.



SESSION 7: **Enjoy Your Rights: Practical actions to enhance women's participation and leadership in local elections**

Group work on practical actions—'We commit'

Facilitator:

- Govinda Khadka, News Chief, CIN
- Laxmi Basnet, News Desk Chief, CIN

Before and during the lunch break, 'I commit' cards were collected from participants where they committed in words to ensure women's representation in the forthcoming local elections. These cards were categorized on the basis of the participants making the commitments and the themes of their

commitments. Participants representing various sectors were asked to make commitments on behalf of their respective sectors.

The collected 'I commit' cards were categorized into six groups: 1) civil society, with commitments to giving

their votes to women candidates and providing training to women, indigenous groups, and sexual minorities to help them access top posts; 2) media, with commitments to giving priority to women's issues, voter education on women's issues, and women-friendly impartial collaboration during the elections; 3) UN bodies, with commitments to ensuring inclusion at all levels of society; 4) development partners, with commitments to working towards equal participation; 5) political parties, with commitments to proportional participation and ensuring wins for women; and 6) others, who made similar commitments.

Out of these commitments, 13 themes were identified: 1) working for women's

leadership in local bodies; 2) ensuring seats for Dalit women and minorities; 3) working towards preventing election violence; 4) giving space in the media for women's campaigning; 5) providing needed facilitation and capacity development; 6) working for women's empowerment and quotas; 7) using social media to campaign for women; 8) promoting the slogan of 'one household, one vote' for women; 9) supporting pregnant, disabled, and elderly individuals at polling stations; 10), rising above party politics in this historic election; 11) working towards a common mechanism of coordination; 12) ensuring coordination continues post-election as well; and 13) other commitments.

Box 1: EXAMPLE OF COMMITMENTS

- Our vote is for women candidates.
- Our vote is for indigenous and ethnic tribal women.
- We will work for women's equality.
- We will help and support disabled women.
- Let us closely work with media to support women candidates.
- Let us applaud and support women's voice.
- Ensure women's rights.
- Support women-friendly candidates.
- Support women-friendly programs.

SESSION 8: **Enjoy Your Rights: Practical actions to enhance women's participation and leadership in local elections**

Panelists:

- Lily Thapa, Sajha Abhiyan
- Sharu Joshi, UN Gender Theme Group

Facilitator:

- Babita Basnet

Lily Thapa, Sajha Abhiyan, asked the women to not only take up challenges but also develop the self-confidence to face them. She mentioned that Sajha Abhiyan is devising strategies to ensure women win in the local elections. She questioned the traditional notion of

contesting elections through 'men, money, and muscles' and argued that it no longer holds true as women have become aware and they will not sit idly watching men make the decisions. Ms. Thapa urged everyone to speak up for women candidates



and only vote for those who raise social issues. She asked women candidates to not be intimidated by the talk about the expense of election campaigns and instead asked them to turn to networks and groups such as Sajha Abhiyan for support. She reiterated that this is a golden opportunity to bring new female faces to ensure corruption-free, accountable and transparent governance that respects and protects women's rights.

Sharu Joshi, UN Gender Theme Group, thanked the ECN for hosting this programme. She argued that when women lack access to media, information, and resources, they cannot know their rights and the provisions made for them. She stressed that to ensure women's representation, the

elections should be made women-friendly. Ms. Joshi also expressed the need to translate constitutional and legal provisions into practice. She discussed the need to use available resources strategically and urged the participants not to doubt any woman's capacity, while at the same time providing support to other women, going beyond political strategies.

During the discussion that followed, a major issue raised was that the Women's Charter did not include transgender women. Another participant urged everyone to take what they have learned during these two days to their villages, while a youth leader was inspired by the presence of so many women leaders from around the country.

3.3 CLOSING SESSION

CLOSING SESSION: **Vote of Thanks**

Panelists:

- Mr. Gopi Nath Mainali, Secretary, ECN
- Mr. Nawaraj Dhakal, Joint Secretary, ECN

Facilitator:

- Babita Basnet

Nawaraj Dhakal, Joint Secretary, ECN, mentioned that similar questions have been raised elsewhere and in other fora on local elections. He reiterated that issues of representation have been decided by the government and that the

ECN operates within the acts and laws to ensure an enabling environment for voters. Mr. Dhakal also stressed that elections are a process and highlighted the importance of raising awareness about all aspects of this process. He

clarified the ballot paper design and the need for the large and complicated design, and also talked about the number of polling stations based on the total number of voters in each station. He thanked everyone for participating in the conference.

Gopi Nath Mainali, Secretary, ECN, emphasized the shortened timeframe for the local elections. He clarified that civil servants and members of security

forces are not eligible to vote as this is a direct election. He stressed that women's representation will translate into increased good governance as they are likely to take less risks and engage in less corruption. In the end, he clarified that besides the seats reserved for women they can also contest other free seats as well. With this, he thanked the participants of the conference and declared a formal end to the conference

The conference created a space for women leaders from different parts of the country to come together, share their experiences and advocate to the Election Commission Nepal and political parties to ensure women's representation in local decision making positions. This was made

possible through a two-day national conference, 'Towards Planet 50:50: Enabling Women's Leadership and Representation in Local Governance in Nepal'. It served as a platform to collectively advocate for a gender-responsive



local election and contribute to gender mainstreaming in local governance. A total of 541 representatives (313 female) from the government, Inter-Party Women's Alliance (IPWA), Sajha Abhiyan and Association of Community Radio Broadcasting participated in the inauguration session. In addition, there were 516 participants, including 334 women leaders, in technical sessions for the two-day event. During the conference, the participants discussed their voting right, electoral process, system and the provisions on women's participation and leadership in the Constitution and Local Level Election Act 2017. Women leaders also made commitment to contribute to ensure women's leadership and participation in governance processes. A total of 39 local women leaders expressed their commitment to file candidacy in the local elections. During the conference, various speakers highlighted that women's participation is more than increment in women's numbers and filling of women-specific quotas. It is the representation and recognition

of half of the total population. The country is demanding female representation and meaningful participation, which are expected to substantially transform decision making in the political sphere (<http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2017/05/call-for-womens-representation>; <https://www.facebook.com/unwomennepal/posts/285595201891547>; <https://twitter.com/unwomennepal/status/864808189451059200>).

The participants also identified critical action points to ensure that the local elections are gender responsive. Representatives of major political parties also committed to the effective implementation of the constitutional provisions to ensure at least 40 per cent representation of women at the local level election. Another outcome of the conference was a recommendation for gender monitoring of the local level election. Capacity building with elected women representatives on gender responsive local governance was also strongly requested.

4

KEY THEMES

The conference was effective in clearing confusion about the constitutional and legal provisions for the local elections and in addressing criticisms regarding (the lack of) women's leadership and participation in governance, political parties, the state, and societal structures.

The conference was effective in clearing confusion about the constitutional and legal provisions for the local elections and in addressing criticisms regarding (the lack of) women's leadership and participation in governance, political parties, the state, and societal structures. The conference, by bringing together leadership from the national level and local-level women leaders, was able to impress upon all the equal status of women in all aspects of society, which has also been safeguarded by constitutional and legal provisions. The ability and capacity of women to take on leadership roles and perform has never been questioned and, in fact, based on international experience, women's active participation has been shown to be more constructive for society in general. Therefore, women themselves need to seek and take an active part in public life by challenging the established patriarchal social values and attitudes, in which task the supportive role of family and society in general is vital.

4.1 DEMYSTIFYING WOMEN'S RIGHT TO LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION



Women make up more than half the population of Nepal, yet their participation in leadership positions and governance is disproportionately low. Even their limited participation is restricted by tokenism and does not add up to meaningful participation as their access to and influence in decision-making is greatly reduced. The male-dominated composition of these decision-making bodies further restricts women. Unfortunately, enduring patriarchal values and attitudes seem to have been internalized by women

themselves. This is further complicated by the false reports in the media that women can only stand for deputy or secondary positions in the forthcoming local elections.

While social and cultural factors may restrict the progress of women in Nepal, their capacity cannot and should not be underestimated. In Nepal, there historically have been women leaders who have either led themselves, or supported other leaders during crucial political changes and gone on to make

lasting impacts on Nepali politics. At present, there are many women in important leadership positions in politics, government, and society as a whole. Given the opportunity and support, women have proven themselves capable of providing leadership and direction to society. As citizens of Nepal, women have the same

rights to participation in governance as any other citizen; however, due to an ingrained patriarchal social structure, women are denied space and support in politics and civil society. Therefore, the issue of inclusion of women in governance, alongside that of other marginalized communities, must be given greater attention.

4.2 NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK RELATED TO GENDER-RESPONSIVE ELECTIONS IN NEPAL

Nepal is undergoing an exercise in state-making as it implements the new constitution of 2015. The new constitution envisions an inclusive society with equal rights for all citizens as well as their participation at all levels of society. To that end, the constitution has made provisions where women, marginalized groups, and minorities have been provided reserved quotas for elected government bodies. For example, in the forthcoming local elections, women have been provided reserved seats of 40 percent, including Dalit women (20 percent), in all local decision-making bodies. In addition, the ECN has focused on ensuring inclusive elections by trying to ensure a women-friendly election infrastructure, such as women-led polling stations and giving priority to women, elderly, and disabled voters. In addition, the ECN has made a provision whereby women candidates, minority candidates, and candidates from financially weak social strata have to pay only 50 percent of the deposit amount. Despite these proactive and positive provisions, however,



there still remain contradictions and inconsistencies between the constitutional and legal provisions related to women's representation and participation, such as the 40 percent reserved quota for women being limited to the local bodies.

4.3 EXERCISING WOMEN'S RIGHTS: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

That women can take leadership positions and perform effectively has been demonstrated both nationally and internationally. In fact, women's

leadership is seen to be more effective and efficient. However, one significant and under-reported element in this narrative of success is women's long



struggle for their participation and representation. There is a long history of women's movements for basic rights such as education, suffrage, and health, among other things. With education and suffrage for women, their participation in national and international politics has gradually increased. Women's participation, not only in the workforce but also in the

public sphere, has been helped by various constitutional and legal provisions such as mandatory quotas for women's representation. Therefore, even though women are capable on their own, legal provisions for positive discrimination are seen to be effective in increasing their numbers and participation in governance.

4.4 KEY LESSONS LEARNT FROM PAST ELECTIONS

Even with legal provisions for women's participation and representation in the local bodies through the local elections, there are various obstacles for women as candidates and voters. Nepal's election system and process has always been characterized by excessive campaign expenditure and violence, as evidenced by past elections. In this scenario, women candidates face three challenges. First, the intra-party committees for nominating candidates are male-dominated, which works against the nomination of women candidates. Even when they are nominated, they are nominated for constituencies where there is a low probability of victory. Second, traditionally, male candidates have relied on a classic 'men, muscle, and money' approach in their election campaigns, which is not only inherently unfair and against the code of conduct, but women candidates are often unable to avail themselves of these tactics. This

relates to the third and fundamental challenge for women candidates: the common lack of family and financial support. Any election campaign takes a toll not only on the candidates but also on the immediate family because candidates, as public figures, are exposed to public scrutiny.

Amidst all the challenges faced by women candidates, the overarching challenge is the need to increase the number of women candidates and voters. In a patriarchal society like Nepal, the distinct disadvantages women face extends to their exposure and skills as candidates in dealing with public scrutiny, communicating with one's constituency and the media, and managing their family, all at the same time. The need to overcome this lack of experience and fear of exposure is the biggest lesson learnt from past experiences.

Box 2: KEY LESSONS LEARNT FROM PAST ELECTIONS

- There should be an increase in women's participation in the election.
- Persons violating the election code of conduct should be punished.
- The polling booth should be women-friendly.
- There should be security management for women's safety.
- There are women who hesitate to go to the polls fearing men's touch. Therefore, election staff should also include women.
- Political parties nominating more women candidates should be rewarded.
- Women can do anything if they are self-confident. We should ensure a decisive role for our rights in the election.
- Give top positions to women candidates.
- Polling booths should be disabled-, senior citizen-, and sign language-friendly.
- The societal notion that considers women inferior to men has to be changed.

4.5 WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: BREAKING SOCIAL NORMS AND CHALLENGES

Historically, in times of emergency and pressure, the state has been driven towards men's engagement in transforming societies. With the pace of time, men in Nepal have come up with a more democratic, inclusive, and participatory mindset rather than a hegemonic and masculine one. It started more than 100 years ago when Prime Minister Junga Bahadur Rana forbade child marriage and Sati Pratha for females below 16 years. He had revolutionary thoughts even then, which could not be realized at that time. Later, Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher Rana succeeded in abolishing Sati Pratha, which was possible with men's involvement. These gendered transformations have been made possible by the demands and pressure of time. Similarly, there were also cases

where men rose in protest when women were manhandled and murdered. In a patriarchal society like Nepal, there is a strong need for men to break gender-based discriminatory social norms and to provide support for women's leadership. It is equally important that men work in partnership with women rather than only support their roles.

Although the women's movement in Nepal has not been that strong, whenever a group has been suppressed, there have been revolutions in the country. However, most of these events have mainly been documented as men's stories. Therefore, proper analysis of history is important in order to understand the Nepali women's movement. The Beijing Conference held 20 years ago has given rise to



women's movements that have brought progress with them. Women's voices have been increasingly heard, at the same as the economic status and political representation of women have improved. Issues of women's involvement in elections were already raised during the local elections held 20 years ago. At the national and local level, Sajha Abhiyan has been working for 22 years to improve women's political and social representation. Whenever elections have been conducted, Sajha Abhiyan has worked with both men and women to improve women's participation. In the past, women were not able to talk to political candidates, but today, they are working together with political parties to develop strategies for their empowerment.

Similarly, the role of the media in ensuring women's participation in local elections shows that there are pros and cons of working closely with media sources. They will highlight positive

aspects, but can also be critical. Usually, voters will look at how a candidate can contribute to their locality. Women need to focus on this aspect and work with media to promote their plans. Moreover, women candidates need to be involved in programs such as talk shows and TV programs that would help to boost their candidature in the election.

About 40 percent of Nepal's population is considered youth. Among them about 82 percent are educated. If youth came together and worked to raise women's awareness of their rights and capabilities, this group could promote the growth of Nepali society. Thus far, the state has ignored investment in youth, often considering them as immature. Some youth groups are also unaware of their roles in local elections. Raising youth awareness about elections and how they can contribute to youth- and gender-sensitive elections is equally important in breaking social norms and challenges.



4.6 POLITICAL COMMITMENTS

Nepal's political parties are committed to the effective implementation of the constitutional provisions that ought to contribute towards furthering the cause of gender equality and the empowerment of women in Nepal. There are also political commitments towards working closely with national and international organizations and community in realizing the vital goals as stated in the constitution through enhanced levels of partnership in the context of increasing women's leadership and representation.

Most of the political parties have a policy and strategy of nominating women and Dalits for candidacy in the local elections. In the upcoming local election, they will nominate at least 33 percent of women and Dalits as per provisions of the constitution and election acts for seats in the local elections. Women's nominations will be slightly higher under the inclusive quota (40 percent). In order to maintain 33 to 40 percent

representation of women, Dalits, and marginalized people in the local elections, political parties have come up with the following suggestions:

- The media, women's organizations like the Inter-Party Women's Alliance, Sajha Abhiyan, and NGOs/INGOs need to work closely with the ECN and political parties.
- Women should be elected either for the position of mayor or deputy mayor and chair or deputy chair in the municipalities and rural municipalities respectively.
- The current trend of party leaders nominating their close relatives needs to be addressed.

Political parties are committed towards eliminating various types of electoral and physical violence including vandalism, intimidation, and manhandling. They are also committed towards ensuring the safety of women candidates and voters by implementing a security and voter education plan.

Box 3: POLITICAL PARTIES' COMMITMENTS

Nepali Congress

- Party wants to make candidates strong and capable.
- Women are motivated to take leadership positions.
- Efforts are made to nominate women candidates in all positions.

Unified Marxist and Leninist (UML)

- More priority will be given to women candidates for mayor and deputy mayor positions and there will be one woman candidate out of three, including for the positions of mayor, deputy mayor, and ward chair.
- Quota system is strictly followed while nominating candidates.

- The party works within the criteria and adequate efforts will be paid in defining criteria considering gender concerns.

Rastriya Prajatantra Party

- Party will ensure women's rights and their claims to rights.
- Constitutional provision should be amended and women's rights should be exercised.
- Ensure that women are also nominated as candidates for chair and vice-chair positions.
- Eliminate all discrimination starting at the local level.

Tarai Madhes Democratic Party

- Effort will be made to prioritize Dalit, Muslim, and women candidates.
- Wherever there is chance of victory, only women will be nominated.
- Party wants to encourage women who have been left behind.
- Dalit, Muslim, and discriminated-against women will be given priority.
- Veil system will be eliminated.
- Party as a policy commits to making women self-reliant.



5

WAY FORWARD

The conference included informed presentations and wide-ranging discussions, based on which the following measures are deemed essential to achieve increased participation and representation of women in politics and governance.

The conference included informed presentations and wide-ranging discussions, based on which the following measures are deemed essential to achieve increased participation and representation of women in politics and governance.

- **State and legal:** The government should work to remedy the contradictory and inconsistent constitutional and legal provisions on the inclusion of women and minorities to reflect the vision of equality enshrined in the constitution. Quotas for women, marginalized groups, and minorities should be extended to all levels of the governance structure rather than limiting them to the local bodies. The government should formulate policies for proportional representation of women and

preferential representation of marginalized communities to ensure their participation in governance. In addition, there should be a monitoring mechanism to ensure women's representation in all state entities. To ensure women's participation in the election process, it should be made women-friendly. The government should also undertake extensive voter education in view of the changed constitutional provisions and government structure arising from federalism. Voter education is essential to ensure low vote invalidation as the present ballot paper is complex and large in size.

- **Political parties:** Political parties should be encouraged to increase the number of women members so that there is a substantial pool of women candidates during elections.





Political parties should include women in nomination committees so that they can make the case for women candidates. Political parties should work towards proportional representation of women in their organizational structures and sister wings. Political parties should develop an organizational policy on preventing and addressing violence against women.

- **Women candidates:** There is a need to increase the number of women candidates beyond the reserved quotas. Women should also be able to file their candidacy through open and free competition. Women candidates should be provided trainings to acquire and enhance their skills and capacities to contest and run effective election campaigns. Additional trainings should be offered to female as well as male winners post-election on their roles

and responsibilities and how to carry them out effectively. Women candidates should be provided with security so that they can put their energy into campaigning and raising women's issues.

- **Civils society, media, youth:** These actors can play a catalytic role in increasing women's participation and representation in politics and governance. They have knowledge and skill as well as access to resources that they can utilize in raising relevant issues. They should coordinate their activities to put pressure on the government and political parties to implement the constitutional and legal provisions on women's participation in politics. They should also undertake voter education programs to encourage voter turn-out and the casting of valid votes.

6

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME AGENDA

National Conference Towards Planet 50:50: Enabling Women's Leadership and Representation in Local Governance

Hotel Annapurna, 20-21 April, 2017

20 APRIL, 2017 INAUGURAL SESSION

08:30 - 09:00	Registration
Master of Ceremony: Ms. Babita Basnet	
09:00 – 09:05	Invite guests to the Dias Chair: Chief Election Commissioner, Dr. Ayodhee Prasad Yadav
09:05 – 09:10	National Anthem by women's group (Mangaldhun)
09:10 – 09:15	Welcome Remarks by Mr. Gopi Nath Mainali, Secretary, Election Commission Nepal
09:15 – 09:20	Inauguration of the National Conference: ■ Lighting the lamp by Chief Guest, Right Honourable Speaker, Onsari Gharti
09:20 – 10:30	Remarks by the Sajha Abhiyan (Women's Group Coalition), Ms. Durga Ghimire Remarks by the President of the Inter Party Women's Alliance, Ms. Pratibha Rana Remarks by UN Resident Coordinator, Ms. Valerie Julliland Remarks by Chief Guest, Right Honourable Speaker, Onsari Gharti Closing remarks by the Chief Election Commissioner, Dr. Ayodhee Prasad Yadav
10:30 – 11:00	High Tea

Technical Sessions Programme

Kumari Hall, Hotel Annapurna, Nepal

FIRST DAY (20 APRIL, 2017)

Know Your Rights:

Demystifying key elements in the Constitution of Nepal and Electoral Laws focusing on women's leadership and participation

11:00 – 13:00

Panel presentation on:

- Gender responsive provisions related to women's leadership in the Constitution of Nepal, the Local Level Election Act (2017), the Election Commission Act (2017)
- Presentation on the electoral management system (voting system, polling centers, human resource management, special provision for women voters)

FIRST DAY (20 APRIL, 2017)**Know Your Rights:**

Demystifying key elements in the Constitution of Nepal and Electoral Laws focusing on women's leadership and participation

- Electoral violence and women's safety and security

Speakers: Ms. Ila Sharma, Commissioner, ECN, Mr. Nawaraj Dhakal, Joint Secretary, ECN, and Mr. Nilkanta Uprety, Former Chief Election Commissioner

Followed by discussion

Facilitated by Mr. Bijay Paudyal

13.00 – 14.00

Lunch Break

Exercise Your Rights:

Sharing, mentoring, uniting and demanding

14:00 – 15:00

Panel presentation on:

Sharing of experiences by Ambassadors based in Nepal – best practices from other countries

- Her Excellency, Ms. Alaina B. Teplitz, Embassy of the United States to Nepal,
- Her Excellency, Ms. Mashfee Binte Shams, Embassy of Bangladesh to Nepal,
- Her Excellency, Ms. W. Swarnalatha Pereira, Embassy of Sri Lanka to Nepal, and
- His Excellency, Mr. Kjell Tormod Pettersen, Royal Norwegian Embassy to Nepal

Followed by discussion

Facilitated by Santosh Shah

15:00 – 15:15

Tea Break

15:15- 16:30

Women in decision making – lessons from Nepal

- Ms. Bandana Rana, CEDAW Committee Member
- Ms. Sulochan Shrestha Shah, UN Global Compact

Followed by discussion

Facilitated by Ms. Babita Basnet

16:30 – 17:15

Reflections and lessons learnt from past elections by the women's movement – what worked and what did not work?

- Ms. Benu Maya Gurung, Sajha Abhiyan
- Ms. Kala Swarnakar, Sajha Abhiyan
- Ms. Shashi Shrestha, Inter Party Women's Alliance

Followed by discussion

Facilitated by Ms. Tika Dahal

17.15-17.30

Mock polling exercise

Facilitated by Election Commission Nepal

Closing

SECOND DAY (21 APRIL, 2017)**Claim Your Rights:**

Breaking social norms and challenging mindsets that hold women back

8:30-10:15	<p>Panel discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Men's role in promoting women's leadership – Mr. Kapil Kafle, Coordinator, Secretariat of South Asia Men Engage Alliance ■ The role of the women's movement – Ms. Saloni Singh (Pradhan), Sajha Abhiyan ■ The role of media – Dr. Mahendra Bista, President, Federation of Nepalese Journalists ■ Voices of youth advocates- Ms. Kanchan Magar, Youth Leader <p>Followed by discussion</p> <p>Facilitated by Mr. Chewan Rai</p>
10:15-10:30	Tea break

The Enablers:

What can political parties do to make women viable candidates

10:30-12:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nepali Congress: Ms. Kiran Koirala ■ United Marxist and Leninist (UML): Honorable MP Dr. Rajan Bhattarai, ■ Maoist-Centre (MC): Ms. Pampha Bhusal, ■ Rastriya Prajantral Pary (RPP): Honorable MP Ms. Kunti Shahi, ■ Terai Madhes Democratic Party: Mr. Sarbendra Nath Shukla <p>Followed by discussion</p> <p>Facilitated by Mr. Bijay Paudyal</p>
12:30-12:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Collection of commitments <p>Participants to proceed to 'I COMMIT' photo standee for commitment pictures with their 'I COMMIT' card and to put their cards on the 'I COMMIT' board.</p> <p>Facilitated by Mr. Bijay Paudyal</p>
12:45-13:45	Lunch Break

Enjoy Your Rights:

Practical actions to enhance women's participation and leadership in local elections

15:00-16:00	<p>Interaction with Mr. Gopi Nath Mainali, Secretary, Election Commission Nepal, and Mr. Nawaraj Dhakal, Joint Secretary, Election Commission Nepal</p> <p>Open discussion</p> <p>Facilitated by Ms. Babita Basnet</p>
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Closing Session:

Master of Ceremony Mr. Bijay Paudyal

16:00- 16:30	<p>Vote of Thanks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Chief Commissioner, Election Commission Nepal ■ Ms. Lily Thapa, Sajha Abhiyan ■ Ms. Wenny Kusuma, Chair, United Nations Country Team, Gender Theme Group
16:30	Press release shared with media

ANNEX 2: WOMEN'S CHARTER

महिला बडापत्र

आसन्न निर्वाचनमा सारभूत समानता प्राप्तिका लागि (स्थानीय तहको निर्वाचन, २०७४)

नेपालको संविधानले प्रतिस्पर्धात्मक बहुदलीय लोकतान्त्रिक शासन प्रणाली, नागरिक स्वतन्त्रता, मौलिक मानव अधिकार, बालिग मताधिकार, आवधिक निर्वाचन, पूर्ण प्रेस स्वतन्त्रता तथा स्वतन्त्र, निष्पक्ष र सक्षम न्यायपालिका तथा कानुनी राज्यको अवधारणाका आधारमा समृद्ध राष्ट्र निर्माण गर्ने जस्ता लोकतन्त्रका आधारभूत मूल्य र मान्यताहरूमा प्रतिबद्धता जाहेर गरेको छ। सारभूत समानता प्राप्तिको महत्वपूर्ण रणनीतिका रूपमा महिला सामाजिक वा सांस्कृतिक दृष्टिले पिछडिएका, लैंगिक तथा यौनिक अल्पसंख्यक एवं गर्भावस्थाका महिला लगायतको सशक्तिकरण वा विकासका लागि कानून बमोजिम विशेष व्यवस्था गर्न सकिने उल्लेख गरिएको छ। संविधानमा महिलालाई शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य, रोजगारी र सामाजिक सुरक्षामा सकारात्मक विभेदका आधारमा विशेष अवसर प्राप्त गर्ने अधिकार र विभेद विरुद्धको अधिकार पनि सुनिश्चित गरिएको छ। संविधानको प्रस्तावनाले नै लैंगिक विभेद र सामाजिक न्याय सुनिश्चित गर्न समानुपातिक समावेशी र सहभागितामूलक सिद्धान्तका आधारमा समतामूलक समाजको निर्माण गर्ने संकल्प गरेको छ। उक्त संकल्पलाई मूर्तरूप दिन महिलालाई राज्यका सबै निकायमा समानुपातिक समावेशी सिद्धान्तको आधारमा सहभागी हुने हक मौलिक हकका रूपमा सुनिश्चित गरेको छ। यसका अतिरिक्त, नेपालले मानव अधिकार र महिला अधिकारको सुनिश्चितताका लागि विभिन्न राष्ट्रिय र अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय प्रतिबद्धता समेत जाहेर गरेको छ।

कानूनको शासन, संवैधानिक सर्वोच्चता एवं नेपालले राष्ट्रिय र अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय क्षेत्रमा जनाएको प्रतिबद्धतालाई व्यवहारिक रूपमा लागू गर्नु गराउनु राज्यका सबै निकाय तथा अङ्गहरूको महत्वपूर्ण दायित्व हो। यस परिप्रेक्ष्यमा नेपाल सरकारले संविधान कार्यान्वयनको एक महत्वपूर्ण कार्यको रूपमा २०७४ साल वैशाख ३१ गते स्थानीय तहको निर्वाचन गर्ने घोषणा गरेको छ। संवैधानिक व्यवस्था अनुसार संघीय विधायिका र प्रदेश सभाको निर्वाचन समेत मिति २०७४ साल माघ ७ गते भित्र सम्पन्न भईसक्नु पर्दछ। यस अवसरमा स्थानीय तहको आसन्न निर्वाचनमा महिलाहरूको सारभूत समानता प्राप्तिको अधिकार सुनिश्चित गर्न स्थानिय तहको निर्वाचनमा महिला सहभागिताका लागि साभ्ना अभियान तथा नागरिक समाज सल्लाहकार समूह लगायत विभिन्न नागरिक सञ्जालहरूको सल्लाह र सुझाव संकलन गरी महिलाका साभ्ना सवालहरूलाई एकिकृत गर्दै आसन्न निर्वाचनका लागि यो महिला बडापत्र (Women Charter) तयार गरी जारी गरेका छौं।

हाग्रा अपिलहरू:

नेपाल सरकार तथा निर्वाचन आयोग

- राज्यले गर्भवति, सुत्केरी, वृद्ध, फरक क्षमता भएका महिला लगायत सबै व्यक्तिहरूको निर्वाचन सम्बन्धका विशेष आवश्यकताहरूलाई ध्यानमा राखि उम्मेदवार हुन पाउने तथा स्वतन्त्रतापूर्वक आफ्नो मताधिकार प्रयोग गर्न सक्ने वातावरण सुनिश्चित गर्न आवश्यक प्रबन्ध गर्ने।
- स्थानीय निर्वाचनमा सहभागी हुने निर्वाचन अधिकृत, निर्वाचन पर्यवेक्षक, सुरक्षाकर्मी लगायत सम्पूर्ण निर्वाचन कार्यमा खटिने कर्मचारीहरूको व्यवस्था गर्दा महिलाको समानुपातिक सहभागिता सुनिश्चित गरिनु पर्ने।

- मतदाता शिक्षा कार्यक्रमलाई समावेशी बनाउनका लागि जनजाति, मधेसी, दलित लगायत ग्रामिण महिलाहरूको मतदाता शिक्षामा पहुँच सुनिश्चित गर्ने व्यवस्था गरिनु पर्ने । मतदाता शिक्षा सामाग्रीहरू तयार गर्दा नेपालमा विद्यमान भाषिक तथा सांस्कृतिक विविधता समेतलाई ध्यानमा राखी ग्रामिण महिलाहरूले समेत बुझ्ने भाषा र शैली प्रयोग गर्ने, गराउने व्यवस्था गरिनु पर्ने ।
- निर्वाचन आयोग, सुचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय, नेपाल सरकारले विभिन्न सञ्चार माध्यमहरू मार्फत स्थानीय तथा राष्ट्रिय तहमा निर्वाचन सम्बन्धि सुचना सामाग्री तयार गर्दा, प्रचार प्रसार गर्दा फरक क्षमता भएका मतदाता लयागत सबै मतदाताहरूले बुझ्ने भाषा, चित्र, रेखा चिन्हहरू प्रयोग गर्ने व्यवस्था सुनिश्चित गर्नु पर्ने ।
- स्थानीय तहको निर्वाचनलाई मध्यनजर राखी निर्वाचन आयोगले प्रेस काउन्सिलद्वारा तयार गरेको सञ्चार माध्यममा महिला उत्तरदायी पत्रकार आचारसंहिता, २०७३ पालना गर्न गराउन आवश्यक समन्वय गर्ने ।
- समाचार सम्प्रेषण गर्दा स्वस्थ, जिम्मेवार समाजको निर्माणमा मद्दत पुराने विषयलाई प्राथमिकता दिनु पर्दछ । निर्वाचन पर्यवेक्षण सम्बन्धी आचार संहिता तयार गर्दा सञ्चार माध्यम, राष्ट्रिय निर्वाचन पर्यवेक्षक र अनुगमनकर्ताहरू, मानव अधिकार सम्बन्धी निकायहरू र नागरिक समाजले निर्वाचनका दौरानमा महिला विरुद्ध भएका हिंसाको पनि पर्यवेक्षण गर्नुपर्ने व्यवस्था सुनिश्चित गर्ने, गराउने ।
- विशेषगरी सञ्चार माध्यमहरूले महिला उम्मेदवारहरूको हित विपरित हुने गरी लैंगिक भेदभावलाई प्रोत्साहन गर्ने, पुनःस्थापित गर्ने समाचारहरूको प्रचार प्रसार गर्ने कार्यलाई प्रतिबन्ध लगाउने र सञ्चार माध्यमले निर्वाचनका लैङ्गिक सवालहरूलाई फरक लैङ्गिक दृष्टिकोण, आवश्यकता र चासोका साथ स्थान र प्राथमिकता दिनुपर्दछ ।
- निर्वाचनको प्रचारप्रसार, जुलुस, यालि, चुनावी अभियान, जनभेला तथा अन्य कार्यको दौरानमा महिला उम्मेदवारको चरित्रमा आँच आउने गरि प्रचार प्रसार गर्न वा कुनै पनि प्रकारको अभिव्यक्ति दिन नपाउने व्यवस्था सुनिश्चित गरिनुपर्ने ।
- निर्वाचनमा कुनै पनि प्रकारको महिला हिंसा हुन नदिन सुरक्षाको आवश्यक प्रबन्ध गरिनु पर्ने ।
- महिला उम्मेदवार तथा महिला मतदाताहरूको सुरक्षाका लागि सुरक्षा निकाय र न्यायिक निकायहरूलाई शीघ्र परिचालन गर्न उपयुक्त वातावरण र उचित प्रबन्ध गर्न हेल्पलाईन सेवाको व्यवस्था गरिनु पर्ने ।

राजनीतिक दलहरू

- स्थानीय तह (गाउँपालिका/नगरपालिका) मा महिलाको जनसंख्याको आधारमा समानुपातिक सहभागिता हुने व्यवस्था सुनिश्चित गरिनुपर्ने ।
- उम्मेदवार घोषणा गर्दा नेपालको संविधानको मर्म तथा दिगो विकास लक्ष्यले परिलक्षित गरेको सन् २०३० सम्ममा हरेक क्षेत्र र तहमा समावेशी रूपले आधा आधा हिस्सामा (50:50 inclusively) महिला र पुरुष दुवैलाई पुऱ्याउने सर्वांगीर उद्देश्य प्राप्तिका लागि स्थानीय तहका प्रमुख र उपप्रमुख पदमा महिलाहरूको न्यूनतम पचास प्रतिशत जित सुनिश्चित गर्न महिलाहरूको विचमा मात्र प्रतिस्पर्धा हुने संवैधानिक व्यवस्था गरिनु पर्ने ।
- पार्टीको नीतिगत व्यवस्था सार्वजनिक गरि आफ्नो दलको स्थानीय नेतृत्व र कार्यकर्तालाई लैङ्गिक तथा समावेशी सवालमा प्रशिक्षण दिने व्यवस्था गरिनुपर्ने ।
- महिला वा महिला उम्मेदवारमाथि हुने शारीरिक, यौनजन्य वा मनोवैज्ञानिक धाक तथा धम्किहरू आउन नदिन सुरक्षाको अधिकार सुनिश्चित गर्न राजनीतिक दलको आन्तरिक संरचना, निर्वाचन पर्यवेक्षणको कार्यसूचि लगायत न्यायिक तथा अर्धन्यायिक निकायमा आवश्यक उजुरी संयन्त्रको व्यवस्था गर्ने र गराउने व्यवस्था गरिनु पर्ने ।
- आगामी निर्वाचनमा महिला प्रतिनिधित्व सुनिश्चित गर्न राजनीतिक दलहरूले उम्मेदवारलाई प्रदान गर्ने आर्थिक सहयोग महिला उम्मेदवारको हकमा दोब्बर हुने व्यवस्था गरिनु पर्ने ।
- उम्मेदवारहरू मनोनयन गर्दा निर्वाचन ऐनको पूर्ण पालना गर्ने व्यवस्था गरिनु पर्ने ।
स्थानीय तहमा महिलाले भोगिरहेका समस्याहरूको तर्कसम्मत तथा व्यवहारिक ढङ्गले विश्लेषण गरि महिलाका अधिकारहरू सुनिश्चित गर्ने नीति तथा कार्यक्रम, रणनीति र श्रोत साधनको उचित व्यवस्था गर्नुपर्ने ।

ANNEX 3: SNAPSHOTS OF THE EVENT





Towards Planet 50:50 – Enabling Women’s Leadership and Representation in Local Governance









स्थानीय तहको निर्वाचनमा
महिला सहभागिताका लागि
साझा अभियान