

**Commission on the Status of Women**

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”**

**A Report of Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO)**

Kathmandu, Nepal



January 15, 2025

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## Background

Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) is a national-level non-government organization (NGO) established by a group of rural Dalit<sup>1</sup> women in Nepal. It aims to create a discrimination-free society where all Dalit women and girls can live dignified lives, enjoy their human rights, and participate in development and decision-making at local, provincial, and federal levels. Since its establishment in 1994, FEDO has been the voice of voiceless Dalit women and girls in promoting their human rights, gender equality, and social justice.

FEDO participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 when it adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), the global landmark policy framework. It has submitted periodic and thematic reports to international human rights instruments, mainly the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Commission of the Status of Women (CSW), and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

FEDO has been collaborating with the government, civil society, multilateral and bilateral organizations, and other stakeholders to implement the 12 critical areas of BPfA and the recommendations of the international human rights mechanisms as they complement each other.

## The report and process

This individual submission of FFDO is devoted to the **Thirtieth Anniversary** of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

This report, a follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled ‘**Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the Twenty-first century**’, documents Nepal’s achievements and challenges in ten of the 12 critical areas of concern of the BPfA. The report recommends the government of Nepal to amplify actions in achieving gender equality and empowerment of Dalit women and girls.

FEDO organized two comprehensive provincial Beijing+ Consultation Workshops. The first consultation took place in Pokhara on 20 June 2024, which was participated by Dalit Women Human Rights Defenders (DWHRDs), elected Dalit women, and Dalit women community leaders from all 11 districts of the Gandaki Province. The second consultation in the Koshi Province was

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<sup>1</sup> Dalits in Nepal fall lower the four-fold Hindu caste hierarchy

held on 22 to 23 September 2024 with the active participation of Dalit women from more than 110 Dalit and other Marginalized Women. The third consultation in the Lumbini Province was held on 27 September 2024 with the active participation of Dalit women from more than 50 Dalit and other Marginalized Women across all seven provinces.

Further, the preparation of this report included a special national consultation with young Dalit women lawyers and journalists on 5 July 2024 in Kathmandu. Likewise, FEDO conducted the national consultation with multi-stakeholders on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2024 in Kathmandu.

FEDO raised the issues of Dalit women and girls in several consultations organized by the government and CSOs to make their submissions inclusive of Dalit women and girls.

In addition, FEDO participated in the government and CSO's consultations and raised the issues of Dalit women and girls to include in their submissions as part of the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

### **The critical areas of concern, progress, challenges and recommendations**

This chapter reports the achievements of gender equality and the empowerment of Dalit women and girls under the ten critical areas of concern and the challenges affecting their implementation.



#### **Women and poverty**

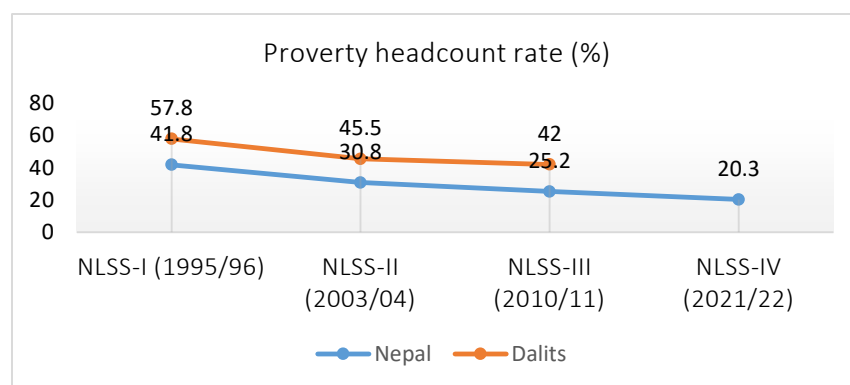
##### **Progress:**

According to the Human Development Index (HDI), Nepal has made significant economic progress. As of 2021, the country's HDI value stands at 0.602, which places it in the medium human development category. The country has advanced women's economic empowerment through skills training, income generation, entrepreneurship, and self-employment in small industries, alongside social security initiatives such as allowances for women and girls with disabilities, widows, single and elderly women.

Nepal has ranked higher than many other South Asian countries with significant progress in political empowerment and educational attainment<sup>2</sup>.

The Constitution of Nepal ensures equality and social justice. Article 38 of the Constitution, for example, guarantees women, including Dalit women, rights to parental property. Growing awareness of these economic rights has motivated them to pursue information and seize economic empowerment opportunities.

### **Trend of poverty incidence among Dalit and national average<sup>3</sup> (%)**



Dalits are ranked at the top of poverty among all caste and ethnic groups in Nepal.

The Government of Nepal does not have a specific and targeted program to eradicate the extreme poverty of

Dalits, which is above the national average of 20.3%.

### **Challenges:**

- Despite some achievements documented, 4.9 million Nepalese remain multi-dimensionally poor, and women in rural and marginalized communities are particularly vulnerable. Dalit communities experience higher poverty rates compared to others, and Dalit women are among the most disadvantaged. In some parts of the country, the poverty rate among Dalit women is as high as 40-50 percent, they lack basic services and are exposed to violence. Further, landlessness and access to credit and financial resources for Dalit women trapped them in a cycle of poverty<sup>4</sup>.
- The 2021 census informs that only 23.8 percent of women in Nepal have property ownership. Their families and the State neglect Dalit women's right to property. Those women who have ownership do not have control over the property.

<sup>2</sup> In the Global Gender Gap Index-2024 produced by the World Economic Forum

<sup>3</sup> Nepal Living Standard Surveys, 1995/96, 2003/2004, 2010/11 and 2021/22 (NSO)

<sup>4</sup> Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) report

- Dalit women face compounded challenges due to both gender and caste-based discrimination, which significantly contribute to deteriorating their socio-economic status and extreme poverty. Many Dalit women have no job security as they get blue-collar jobs such as domestic workers, cleaners, and daily laborers. The intersecting multiple layers of inequalities have pushed them to extreme poverty, especially in far-flung villages.
- Poverty has put Dalit women and girls at risk of violence, exclusion, and marginalization. It has deprived them of social, economic, and political opportunities and narrowed their access to justice and healthcare services leading to higher rates of maternal mortality and childbirth complications.
- The government lacks disaggregated data and a comprehensive plan to support the economically marginalized parents of Dalit girls who cannot afford the basic facilities for their daughters.
- The gender-responsive budget introduced by the Ministry of Home Affairs is not responsive to the needs of Dalit women and girls as the local government's budget intends to meet the demands of the political party cadres and their voters.

### **Recommendations:**

- Distribute land to landless Dalit women as provisioned in the Constitution. The government should ensure Dalit women benefit from housing programs with provisions that guarantee their legal ownership of the property.
- Launch nationwide skill-based programs targeting Dalit and marginalized women to improve their employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.
- Implement poverty alleviation programs specifically for Dalit women focusing on economic empowerment and access to resources in partnerships with multilateral and bilateral organizations in line with national and international laws and SDGs.



## **Education and training of women**

### **Progress:**

The literacy rate among women including Dalit women in Nepal has significantly improved due to targeted educational interventions. According to UNESCO and the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), women's literacy has increased from 42.5% in 2001 to over 60% in recent years. The scholarship programs aimed at promoting girls' education, particularly in marginalized communities, including Dalits, made this achievement possible. These programs have helped increase school enrollment and retention rates for girls.

The trend is confirmed by the latest data of the CBS National Population and Housing Census 2021, female literacy rate is 69.40%. Similarly, the Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) 2022/23 indicates a national average literacy rate of 77.4%, with male literacy at 85.8% and female literacy at 70.1%.

The Technical Education and Vocational Training Council (CTEVT) with international support, for example, has enhanced women's access to job-oriented training. These programs provide skills in the fields of health, agriculture, and entrepreneurship, enabling them to contribute economically to their communities and break cycles of poverty.

Non-profit sectors have also played pivotal roles in promoting education and training for women through projects that offer mentorship, leadership training, and life skills. FEDO and other advocacy groups also offered training opportunities for Dalit and marginalized women to combat inequalities and provide avenues for personal and professional growth.

### **Challenges:**

- While Nepal has made significant achievements in increasing the literacy rate, the lack of capacity and resources of the local governments significantly challenges the formulation of new policies and guidelines in line with inclusive education. While educational policies and programs such as SSRP (School Sector Reform Program) and SSDP (School Sector Development Plan) have increased girl's enrollment, the poor implementation of programs as

per the principle of inclusive education poses further challenges to widen disparities between Dalit and non-Dalit girls' education.

- The dropout of the students who enroll in grade one and reach grade 12 is a big issue for the whole country as out of 100% only 31.5% of students remain in grade 12. In the case of Dalits, only 25% of them remain in grade 12 whereas there is not much difference between Dalit boys and girls. Retention is a big issue, which remains inadequately addressed by the government's plans, policies, and programs.
- The government lacks disaggregated data and a comprehensive plan to support the economically vulnerable Dalit parents who cannot afford higher education for their daughters and involve their children in agricultural or other occupations instead.
- Dalit women do not get a dignified job after graduation due to deeply rooted discrimination and untouchability in society. FEDO has reported the cases of Dalit medical graduate physicians who struggled to find jobs in hospitals and health centers. And also Community Health Volunteers are not from the Dalit communities since the access to the information and resources is limited to Dalit women.
- The other challenges for the Dalit girl students are the curriculums, the lack of trained teachers on the issues and rights of Dalit girls, caste and gender-biased school education, and the non-implementation of the Continuous Assessment System (CAS).
- Poor families struggle with indirect costs of education, leading to higher dropout rates, especially for girls who contribute to household duties. The harmful practices of child marriage are additional challenges faced by Dalit women.
- Rural areas lack proper infrastructure in government schools, while private schools are often only available in urban centers.

### **Recommendations:**

- Introduce targeted income-generation and livelihood activities for the mothers of Dalit girls living below poverty. Enlarge programs and resources for the empowerment of Dalit women and girls through income and job-oriented training.
- Increase the capacity, resources and accountability of the local governments to improve the education legislation and their implementation from the perspectives of Dalit girls' rights and in line with the principle of inclusive education.



- Eliminate the social and traditional practices such as caste-based discrimination, dowry and child marriage harmful to the education and career of Dalit women and girls.



## **Women and health**

### **Progress:**

Nepal has achieved a significant decline in maternal mortality rates. According to the WHO and UNICEF, the maternal mortality ratio decreased from 539 per 100,000 live births in 1996 to 258 in 2016. Government and NGO-led initiatives have improved women and girls' access to healthcare and emergency obstetric care services and increased skilled birth attendants. As a result, women's life expectancy has increased to around 71 years, reflecting the positive impact of healthcare reforms. Further, through targeted programs focusing on education, awareness, and reproductive health services, the rate of adolescent pregnancies has decreased<sup>5</sup>.

Nepal has made some strides in addressing gender-based violence, with legal interventions such as the Domestic Violence (Crime and Punishment) Act (2009) and increased support for survivors. The government's Aama Program provides financial incentives for Dalit women (and other women) to deliver their babies in health institutions rather than at home. Importantly, six in every 10 women know about the free care and transport incentive that is available for delivering at a health facility. The Adolescent-Friendly Information Center established by the Ministry of Education aims to set up an Information Corner in schools to disseminate adolescent sexual and reproductive health education. These Corners benefit also the Dalit and other marginalized girls.

The Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of women and girls are protected through the formulation of laws and policies and infrastructural improvement of the health centers.

### **Challenges:**

- The caste and gender-based discrimination and harmful social and cultural practices hinder Dalit women from having access to healthy food, and discrimination-free health services in the government and private health facilities. Incidents and cases monitored by FEDO indicate that

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<sup>5</sup> World Bank and WHO

Dalit women experience discriminatory treatment within healthcare facilities and such discrimination has deterred them from pursuing necessary medical services.

- The practice of sex-selective abortion continues to increase in rural areas of all provinces. The sex-selective abortion is reported higher in marginalized communities such as Dalits. Sex-selective abortion has made Dalit women's physical and psychosocial health vulnerable.
- The female Dalit health personnel, including the Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHV), face caste-based discrimination at their workplaces, which challenges their right to dignified work.
- Dalit sexual and gender minorities, Dalit women and girls with disabilities, living below the national poverty line, Dalit single and elderly women face mental and psychosocial issues. Few Dalit women are psychosocial counselors at the local level to respond to the increased mental and psychosocial issues of Dalit women and girls.
- Dalit women often suffer from malnutrition due to limited access to nutritious food and unequal distribution of resources within the household. Cultural and economic barriers worsen food insecurity in rural Dalit communities leading to higher rates of malnutrition and associated health risks.
- Geographical isolation and caste-based discrimination prevent Dalit women from accessing essential healthcare, further limiting their ability to receive care for reproductive health and nutrition exacerbating health disparities, risks, and complications like anemia and malnutrition.

### **Recommendations:**

- Provide targeted nutrition programs to improve food security for Dalit and marginalized women, ensuring access to balanced diets.
- Expand access to culturally sensitive reproductive health services, including maternal care and family planning, in underserved areas. Increase community-based health programs to raise awareness and provide healthcare in rural and marginalized areas.
- Increase female Dalit psychosocial counselors at the local level and address the intersecting psychosocial issues and needs of Dalit sexual and gender minorities, Dalit women and girls with disabilities, Dalit single and elderly women, and Dalit women and girls living below the national poverty line.



## Violence against women

### Progress:

There are strong laws enacted to protect women from violence and ensure equal rights. Article 38 (3) of the Constitution of Nepal -2015 guarantees protection against all forms of violence for women, providing for the punishment of such acts and the right to compensation. Similarly, the Domestic Violence (Offense and Punishment) Act, 2009 protects women including Dalit women from domestic violence as it criminalizes domestic violence and allows victims to seek legal recourse.

Further, the National Penal Code, 2017 criminalizes marital rape, stipulating penalties to combat domestic abuse. Nepal is also a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The CEDAW Committee takes measures to eliminate discrimination against women and ensure their equal rights in political, social, economic, and cultural fields.

The other international human rights instruments, including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) have made substantial recommendations to the government of Nepal to end all forms of violence against women.

The government has extended the reporting period for sexual violence cases from one to three years. If the violence is against children, it counts from the age of 18 years. The extended three years is also for violence against persons with disabilities and people above 70 years<sup>6</sup>.

### Challenges:

- The prevalence of child marriage and the dowry-associated violence to death in Dalit communities. Child marriage for example is punishable but pervasive. Therefore, the biggest challenges are people's perceptions and deeply ingrained mindsets about the issue and it has not been reflected in the government programming.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://hr.parliament.gov.np/uploads/attachments/ky1remr5lbnxneoih.pdf>

- The other challenges include inadequate implementation of the existing laws aimed at ending harmful practices, including untouchability, witchcraft, and child marriage, has discouraged Dalit women.
- Dalit women and girl's survivors of victims lack legal information and knowledge, including about the free legal aid service of the government and counseling and treatment services of the OCMC. The absence of a rapid response from the law enforcement authorities and justice mechanisms for the Dalit women and girl's survivors of violence remains a significant challenge, as it leaves survivors without timely or adequate support.
- The major group of women victims of violence are those in inter-caste marriages. According to a study conducted by FEDO in 2023, out of 120 couples surveyed across seven districts of Nepal, 39.2% of the women had faced violence in their inter-caste marriages.
- According to NDHS-2022, 9.7% of Dalit women aged 15 to 49 have faced sexual violence by any perpetrator, compared to the national average of 7.5%. Domestic violence is also prevalent among Dalit women, with 30.3% experiencing physical violence since age 15, significantly higher than the national average of 22.5%. Furthermore, 23.5% of Dalit women aged 15 to 49 who have ever had a husband or intimate partner experienced emotional, physical, or sexual violence by a husband or intimate partner in the past 12 months, compared to the national average of 17.2%. According to data of Nepal Police, domestic violence constitutes the largest share (78.8%) of gender-based violence.
- According to Trafficking in Person (TIP) reports of the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens revealed that the proportion of TIP survivors is also higher among Dalit women (See Table). For instance, the proportion of Dalits in total of TIP survivors was 17 percent in FY 2022/23, which is higher to 13.4% Dalit population in Nepal. Moreover, all survivors were Dalit women.

### Proportion on Dalits among TIP survivors<sup>7</sup>

Sex of survivors	FY 2015/16			FY 2018/19			FY 2022/23		
	Nepal	Dalit	Dalit%	Nepal	Dalit	Dalit%	Nepal	Dalit	Dalit%
<b>Women</b>	350	43	<b>12.3</b>	316	59	<b>18.7</b>	200	34	<b>17.0</b>
<b>Men</b>	2	0	<b>0.0</b>	71	7	<b>9.9</b>	11	0	<b>0.0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>17.1</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>16.1</b>

### Recommendations:

- Protect and promote the right of Dalit women and girls to information by enhancing their knowledge of the free legal aid service of the government, their access to justice mechanisms, and counseling and treatment services of the OCMC.
- End violence against Dalit women and girls and associated harmful practices, including untouchability, witchcraft, and child marriage through rigorous implementation of the laws and massive awareness and education by mobilizing Dalit community leaders, DWHRDs, Dalit CSOs, and Dalit media.
- Take affirmative actions to end human trafficking, increase sensitization on the issues, and amplify efforts to foster an enabling environment to create a competitive job market and security for the future.



### Women in power and decision-making

### Progress:

The constitutional provision ensures a minimum of 33% representation of women in local and federal government bodies. The 2022 elections achieved nearly 41 percent of the women in the local governments and 33 percent in the parliamentary elections. The constitutional reservation of

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<sup>7</sup> Trafficking in person reports, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens

at least one seat for Dalit women at the Ward Committee, the smallest Unit of the local government, is a historical achievement in Nepal.

Dalit women's political participation has increased in number due to reservation at ward levels, however, they face significant underrepresentation in leadership and decision-making roles, which is a crucial aspect of achieving SDG Goal-5. In total of 1.7% deputy mayors in municipalities and sub/metropolitan cities are Dalit women, 1.52% of vice chairpersons of rural municipalities belong to this demographic. In the House of Representatives, where women occupy 33.45% of the seats out of which 2.9% are Dalit women, with a meager 8.7% among elected women. This data highlights the presence of Dalit women in political representation.

### **Challenges:**

- Despite constitutional provisions, Dalit women are underrepresented in high-level decision-making roles. For example, except for a Dalit woman member in the National Dalit Commission, not a single Dalit woman represents the National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), mainly the National Women Commission, National Planning Commission, and National Human Rights Commission.
- The implementation of 33% representation of women has adopted a blanket approach without taking into account the intersectionality aspects within women.
- The representation of 6620 elected Dalit women in the local governments is less influential in the decision-making of the 753 male-dominant local governments with zero representation of Dalit women as Mayors and Chairpersons.
- Inadequate capacity and leadership of Dalit women has hindered them from participating in decision-making at all levels.
- Poverty and Dalit women's dependency on men challenge their candidacy in elections that require a big budget.

### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure the inclusion of Dalit women within the overall 33 percent women's representation at all levels of the government and the Constitutional bodies.

- Increase and ensure Dalit women's representation at all levels of government such as executive, legislative, judiciary, security forces, civil servants, bureaucracy, constitutional bodies, diplomats, universities, and other institutions.
- Design advanced courses and introduce targeted programmes to enhance the capacity, skills, and leadership of Dalit women to build confidence and capacity to enable them to compete in the elections and senior positions at local to federal levels.
- Double the technical and capacity development support to the elected Dalit women and potential Dalit women leaders to make their representation and participation in the decision-making and policy more impactful.



## **Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women**

### **Progress:**

The Constitution of Nepal has established key institutional mechanisms such as the National Women Commission, National Dalit Commission, and the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens for the advancement of women. These mechanisms have been advocating for gender equality and women empowerment and addressing discrimination and violence against women and their economic marginalization.

The constitution has made Dalit women's participation in government mandatory. The National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, the Local Level Election Act 2017, and other national laws and policies promote women's political participation. The Ministry of Finance has developed the 'Gender-Responsive for Budget Formulation Guidelines' and a 'Model Guideline of Gender-Responsive Budget' and formed the 'Gender-Responsive Budget Committee' to institutionalize the gender-responsive budget at the province and local levels.

The government has established a hospital-based One-stop Crisis Management Center (OCMC) in all districts<sup>8</sup> to prevent GBV and provide the survivors with properly managed services and treatment.

### **Challenges:**

- The National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), except for the Women Commission, are male-dominated. The shrunk mandate and limited budget of the Women Commission are unable to promote gender equality and empowerment of women and girls from highly marginalized backgrounds such as Dalit women and girls. The political appointment of commissioners in all NHRIs is discriminatory from the GESI point of view.
- The survivors of violence without filing a FIR cannot receive services from the OCMCs and the survivors undergo difficulties in filing a FIR.
- Nepal aims to graduate from least developed country status in 2022 and become a middle-income country by 2030. The lack of institutional mechanisms in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and unequal participation of Dalit women in the decision-making and development at all levels challenge the achievement of the SDGs, specifically goal 5, and Nepal's aim to reduce the gender inequality index (GII) from 0.38 to 0.05<sup>9</sup>, is unlikely to be met by 2030.

### **Recommendations:**

- Make the appointment of commissioners Dalit women inclusive in the NHRIs and collaborate with them to benefit Dalit women girls from their programmes.
- Establish a Dalit Desk in the NHRIs mandated to work for Dalit women and girls.
- Expedite the Nepal's aim to reduce the gender inequality index (GII) from 0.38 to 0.05<sup>10</sup>, is unlikely to be met especially in line with SDGs 5.

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<sup>8</sup> Seventh Periodic Report of Nepal

<sup>9</sup> National Planning Commission, 2017, SDGs

<sup>10</sup> National Planning Commission, 2017, SDGs





## Human rights of women

### Progress:

Nepal has made remarkable legal and programmatic progress on the human rights of women and girls. The present laws and policies allow to grant citizenship certificates in the mother's name and protect the rights of women and girls to own and inherit property. The other major laws and policies to protect women's rights and promote gender equality are the second National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 and 1820, the National Gender Equality Policy-2021, and the 15<sup>th</sup> periodic plan (2019/20-2023/24) that sets goals to create gender-responsive governance and reduce violence against women. Further, the local and provincial governments have endorsed gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) policies and strategies.

The Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offense and Punishment) Act, 2011 protects Dalit people, including Dalit women and girls by criminalizing caste-based discrimination and untouchability. Articles 24 and 40 of the Constitution guarantees fundamental rights to the Dalit Community.

The government has established 86 Dalit cells within the Police Office Unit across the country. Each of these cells is responsible for reporting, investigating, and coordinating with victims of caste-based discrimination and untouchability.

### Challenges:

- FEDO has documented numerous cases of killing, depression, suicide, and other psychosocial problems linked to the disapproval of inter-caste marriages because of poor enforcement of

### CASE OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION

In 2020, a 13-year-old Dalit girl tragically took her own life in a village in western Nepal. The day before, a 25-year-old man had raped her. Shockingly, instead of reporting the crime to the police, the locals forced the girls to marry the man. They finally sent the girl to his house to marry him where his mother subjected her to physical abuse. Feeling utterly desperate, she was found hanged in a tree.

The police took action only after the public expressed their outrage.

anti-discrimination laws and the government's failure to act against authorities refusing to register FIRs.

- Caste-based discrimination challenges the human rights of Dalit women and girls, including the right to equality and non-discrimination. Women accused of witchcraft are mostly Dalits. The majority of Dalit women facing discrimination did not report the crimes due to fear of retaliation, lack of trust in the legal system, and inadequate support mechanisms<sup>11</sup>.
- The implementation of the Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offense and Punishment) Act, 2011 is ineffective. Many cases of caste-based discrimination documented by FEDO have remained unreported to the Police due to the lack of resilient actions of the government to eliminate caste-based discrimination.

### **Recommendations:**

- Increase Dalit women's access to justice mechanisms and free the FIR process from caste and gender discrimination and other prejudice and political pressure.
- Implement rigorously the recommendations of the international human rights mechanisms, including CERD, CEDAW, CSW, and UPR related to the rights, dignity, and empowerment of Dalit women and girls.
- Develop the capacity of law enforcement authorities, elected representatives, OCMCs, Women Cell, Dalit Desk and local governments on the rights of Dalit women and girls and the national and international laws that protect their rights.
- Monitor and investigate the allegations of caste-based discrimination and untouchability against Dalit women and girls across all sectors, including social, economic, and political and dismiss the elected representatives and law enforcement authorities from their positions if proven to be guilty of such discrimination.

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<sup>11</sup> The Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2019, the United States Department of State



## Women and the media

### Progress:

The legal provisions of the Local Level Election Act 2017 to reserve two seats for women, including one for Dalit women, on each Rural Municipality and Municipality Ward Committee not only promote the inclusion of Dalit Women as a whole but also foster their access to the media fraternity. The board of Nepal Television includes women. The media organizations have put efforts into producing women journalists.

The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), an umbrella organization of Nepali journalists, for instance, has stated inclusivity and representation. It has 3,050 members from diverse backgrounds.

There are 23% of female media persons in print, TV, and radio in Nepal (GMMP 2015). Out of 13,050 members in the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), only 18.03% (2,354) are women. While women's representation in decision-making bodies is only 14.6% in FNJ leadership, 14.8% in Association of Community Radio Broadcasters. Likewise, only 7% of the 740 FM stations are owned by women (2016/17 data). Gender breakdown of media employees: 40% female, 60% male.

### Challenges:

- Dalit women journalists face multiple forms of discrimination at their workplaces based on their gender and caste, which has severely affected their performance, promotion, and other areas of career development.
- All three tiers of government lack gender-sensitive media policies and a roadmap to increase Dalit women journalists and create a non-discriminatory working environment for them.
- The National Dalit Commission lacks targeted effort to address the intersectional discrimination, including unequal pay or unpaid work, faced by Dalit Women journalists.
- While the non-profit sector advocates for the rights of women journalists, the unique needs of Dalit women journalists in terms of training, representation, and mentorship are not their priority.

- According to Dalit rights scholars and activists, media ownership and newsroom control are far from the reach of Dalit people, including Dalit women journalists. The powerful press and media ecosystem are heavily dominated and manipulated by media tycoons and organizations who promote self-interest and pay less attention to the canon of journalists.
- Dalit women's entry into the media and career progression is often hindered by both caste and gender biases which have resulted in fewer Dalit women in senior roles, such as editors, producers, or reporters in major outlets. Economic instability and limited access to higher education, on top of social stigma, make it more difficult for Dalit women to pursue careers in journalism.
- A study conducted by UN Women<sup>12</sup> highlighted that 35% of women in Nepal reported experiencing some form of cyber violence, including sexual harassment, cyberstalking, or cyberbullying mostly them being from marginalized communities, including Dalits, face disproportionately high rates of digital violence.

### **Recommendations:**

- Introduce Dalit women-targeted media fellowship, scholarship, and sponsors at the local, provincial, federal and international levels.
- Mainstream the issues of Dalit women and girls in all media and sensitize the media persons on the rights and issues of Dalit women and girls.
- Provide technical support to Dalit women journalists to establish their own media to amplify the voices and agenda of Dalit women and girls. Promote diversity and inclusion in media recruitment to ensure equal opportunities to Dalit women in media.

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<sup>12</sup> UN Women Study (2020)



## **Women and the environment**

### **Progress:**

Article 30 (1) of Constitution of Nepal ensure Right to Clean Environment- Every citizen shall have the right to live in a clean and healthy environment. Further, Nepal's community forestry initiative is globally considered a conservation solution. Dalit women have developed leadership capacity at the community level in managing community forests. In many rural areas, they have led the efforts.

In some villages, they are also key players in water resource conservation and management. Importantly they are a part of the climate change campaigns at the local level and most NGOs consider them as their collaborators in conservation efforts.

Nepal has developed landmark policies in environment and climate action that are gender-responsive. The key policies include the GRID framework, the National Adaptation Plan, and the Climate Change Policy.

### **Challenges:**

- Nepal's vulnerable topography and tectonic activities make it a disaster hotspot, with Dalit women particularly at high risk from climate-related disasters like floods, landslides, and droughts that threaten their agriculture-based livelihoods.
- While development is necessary, the Constitution emphasizes a balance with environmental protection. Women, particularly in rural areas, often share the impact of both environmental degradation and unsustainable development practices. Dalit women, in particular, are excluded from decision-making processes around development projects that affect their land, livelihoods, and environment.
- While living through the climate crisis condition, Dalit women due to poverty, discrimination, and lack of education are denied access to resources such as training, technology, monetary resources and other multiple intersecting crises such as health hazards, and overall well-being.
- Social stigma and exclusion hinder their participation in broader environmental initiatives and restrict their access to decision-making spaces. While Dalit women are involved in community-

based environmental conservation, their voices are often underrepresented in national environmental policy discussions.

- Rural Dalit women's livelihood depends on natural resources where they collect water, firewood, green leaves, etc. They are vulnerable to climate change impacts such as rising temperatures, erratic weather patterns, flash floods, droughts, and landslides.
- Nepal was affected by disasters, most recently the devastating nationwide flash floods in 2024. Those most affected by disasters are Dalits and other marginalized women and children with limited access to humanitarian actors and aid.

### **Recommendations:**

- Increase participation of Dalit women in national environmental policy discussions, and climate change discourses, climate education and training at all levels, and ease their access to technology, humanitarian actors, and aid.
- Involve Dalit women in the development and implementation of disaster risks and management policies, strategies, plans and programmes, and its monitoring and evaluation.
- Generate disaggregated data by at-risk Dalit women and girls of climate change and relocate Dalit women and their families residing in the riverbank and other disaster-prone locations.
- Ensure access of Dalit women to the reparation as provisioned by the Constitution to its people if they are harmed by climate change. Formulate and amend laws and policies and design programs that help specifically the most vulnerable such as Dalit women and girls.



**The girl child**

### **Progress:**

Article 39 (1) of the Constitution has enshrined the right of every child to a birth certificate, as has Clause 4 (1) of the Act Relating to Children. Under Nepal's international obligations, several conventions, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Universal Declaration of

Human Rights, and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, have also ensured the right to registration and recognition before the law.

Nepal is a party to the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC). It has made significant progress in improving educational access for girls including Dalit girls, through initiatives such as scholarships, free textbooks, midday meals, separate toilets, counseling rooms, and gender-sensitive school programs.

The enactment of the Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offence and Punishment) Act provides a framework for protecting the rights of Dalit girls and ensuring that they have equal opportunities in society. The National Strategy to End Child Marriage (2016), including public awareness campaigns, with a focus on marginalized groups like the Dalit community helps them to grow. NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) are actively working to reduce child marriage among Dalit girls.

### **Challenges:**

- Dalit girls on the ground of caste and ethnicity, face discrimination in schools, including segregation and unequal treatment. Economic hardships force many Dalit families to prioritize household income, leading to higher dropout rates.
- Social stigmas Dalit girls face undermine their self-esteem, while poverty, discriminatory social norms, and harmful social and traditional practices make them vulnerable to early marriage, disrupting formal education. Safety concerns and GBV also deter school attendance and retention. Further, inadequate resources in the families and schools affect their school attendance and retention.
- Many rights of Dalit girls are affected by the marginalization of their mothers who are not financially independent and many of them marry before completing secondary education due to poverty on top of gender and caste-based discrimination.
- Although the Supreme Court of Nepal banned *Chhaupadi* in 2005, and in 2010 the National Plan of Action against Gender-Based Violence in Nepal recognized it as a form of violence against women but the practice continues by ignorance and religious-belief.
- Nepal's current citizenship law highlights challenges faced by Nepalese single women and their children due to the absence of citizenship which has significant impact on various aspects such

as access to essential services, including education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and social welfare programs.

- Despite legal provisions, there is a concerning lack of birth registration among Dalit children from the Madhesh Province. Shockingly, almost 50 percent of these children are not registered<sup>13</sup>. The lack of citizenship certificates has excluded Dalit women and girls from government programs, facilities, and services and made them vulnerable to human trafficking, forced labor, and other forms of GBV.

### **Recommendations:**

- Free Dalit girls from all forms of discrimination and violence and eliminate the social and harmful practices that affect the enjoyment of their human rights and dignity.
- Empower Dalit girls and their mothers by increasing their social and political participation and developing their capacity and leadership.
- Work together with the local governments to collect data on Dalit girls, make a profile of them in all Wards, and monitor their education and health situation and the possibility of GBV and discrimination against them.
- Revise Nepal's citizenship legislation in accordance with constitutional provisions, international human rights obligations, and Supreme Court decisions on citizenship.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.recordnepal.com/marginalized-since-birth>



## **Conclusion**

Despite the predominance of various laws, policies, and programs, Dalit women continue to face multiple forms of discrimination and violence. Their intersecting identities put them at further risk of discrimination, abuse, and atrocities, push them to extreme poverty, and exclude them from decision-making at all levels.

Implementation of the existing policies, strategies, plans and programmes of the governments should include caste and gender perspectives and a human rights-based approach. Further, the gender-responsive budget of the local and provincial governments should accommodate Dalit women and girls in line with the principles of gender equality and social inclusion.

The governments at all levels require strategic action, comprehensive plans, Dalit women and girls-targeted programmes, and increased gender budget to protect the rights of Dalit women and girls, and free them from gender-based violence and discrimination. The capacity development of the provincial and local governments and elected Dalit women representatives and Dalit CSOs on human rights, gender equality, SDGs, and related legislation is fundamental for the empowerment, and leadership of Dalit women, and their participation and representation at the local, and national and international levels.