

“FEDO report/input on Dalit women in relation to the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Critical Areas of Concern”

Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO)

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Acknowledgements

The Beijing +20 holds a lot of significance for women as it provides a platform for women to come out with ideas and share experiences from the different corners of the world and this, to pinpoint how we can ensure overall empowerment of women. We have written this report to present the situation of Dalit women who are at the bottom of Nepal's and South Asia's caste, class and gender hierarchies.

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Background

Beijing Platform for Action and FEDO:

The Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) established in 1994 works tirelessly with women empowerment particularly focused on the Dalit women of Nepal. FEDO participated in the historic UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China in 1995. This was the first time that Dalit women issues had been internationalized and been advocated and discussed in an international forum. Some remarkable signs of progress have been recorded in relation to the situation of Dalit women since FEDO's representation in Beijing. Nevertheless, this has still not been enough for Dalit women to achieve sufficient development and empowerment on the same level as other women, or to achieve proportionate representation in state mechanisms.

Who are Dalit Women?

Dalit women are the most marginalized among marginalized groups in Nepal. They suffer from multiple forms of discrimination – as Dalits, as members of an impoverished underclass and as women. The endemic gender-and-caste discrimination that Dalit women face is the outcome of severely imbalanced social, economic and political power equations.

Dalit women in Nepal constitute seven percent of the total population of the country. They are excluded in state mechanisms, governing structures and the political sphere. The literacy rate of Dalit women is 34.8% and their access to higher education is only 11.8% as compared to 54.5% of the total population of women in Nepal. They are victims of severe violence as about 49.1% of Dalit women encounter violence and only of 4.4% of the incidents are reported to the police (FEDO, 2013, Study on the situation of violence against Dalit women and children and advocate for their prevention and protection). 80% of them live below the poverty line (Nepal Living Standard Survey, 2011). The main problems of their poverty are landlessness, unemployment and working as agricultural labourers. Legal provisions are inadequate in addressing this severe exclusion and the weak implementation of existing policies and laws have made Dalit women excluded and underprivileged.

Since the political change in 2007, the situation of women has certainly improved, but not as much as it should have. The Constituent Assembly election is itself a triumph in Nepali history; its significant achievement lies in electing 197 women members, almost 33 percent of the total seats. Out of 197 women, there are 25 Dalit women in the CA. However, the second poll of the CA produced discouraging results, decreasing women's participation from 197 to 176 in the CA and Dalit women from 25 to 22. On the other hand, these gloomy changes in the political arena and the transitional vacuum requires charisma in the mindsets of national leading figures. All we need is unity, solidarity and a strong commitment to transforming the ideal of 'being equal' into reality.

Although official numbers are less, NGOs estimate that approximately 20% or 5.4 million Nepali people are Dalits, 50% of whom are Dalit women (13.2% of the total women's population of Nepal). Dalit women are thrice alienated on the basis of class, caste and gender. The Dalit community in general and women in particular have been treated as second-class citizens for centuries, and are still considered "untouchable" in a nation where untouchability has been officially abolished. Nepal has ratified 18 international human right instruments, yet Dalit women are still prevented from accessing basic social and economic resources and are not represented in political spheres.

The [UNDP Nepal Human Development Report 2014](#) found Dalits and Muslims in Nepal to be at the bottom of development tables on all fronts including education, poverty and health. The report emphasizes that,

"Social sector policies need to recognize the caste and ethnic dimensions of human development. Clear and ongoing caste and ethnic inequalities are revealed in different educational achievements and earnings. This strengthens the argument for deliberate strategies to increase inclusiveness by providing educational and economic opportunities for disadvantaged ethnic and caste groups such as the Dalits and Muslims." (The [UNDP Nepal Human Development Report 2014](#), www.np.undp.org/content/nepal/en/home/library/human_development/human-development-report-2014/)

Dalits also reign at the bottom of the scales in the [Nepal Multidimensional Social Inclusion Index 2014](#), by Tribhuvan University's Central Department of Sociology and Anthropology. The Index attempts to encompass all aspects of life and is a composite derived from six other indices: social, economic, political, cultural, gender, and social cohesion¹.

¹ 9.5 Top and Bottom Ten Social Groups in Gender Dimensional Index among 97 Caste/Ethnic Groups: Levels of gender inclusion also vary widely across caste/ethnic groups. The majority of groups with the highest index values are Janajati (such as the Walung, Lepcha, Dura and Rai) or Dalit (such as the Badi). However, Madhesi Dalit and Madhesi other caste feature in the bottom 10. The highest index value (0.6955) is more than double the lowest index value (0.2822).

9.6 Social Cohesion/Solidarity Index: Social integration and positive social relationships are important indicators of inclusion. Social cohesion (or non-discrimination) is also important for development as it increases levels of social harmony and participation. Dignity and self-respect, therefore, are important elements of social inclusion. The Social Cohesion Index focuses on the areas of identity and social respect. Among the 97 caste/ethnic groups, the Hyolmo, Kayastha, Chepang, Hill Brahman, Hayu, Dhimal, Punjabi/Shikh, Baniya, Meche and Thakuri have the highest index values. These top ten groups include mainly Hill Janajatis and both Hill and Trarai Brahmans/Chhetri. There is some variation

In 1994, a group of concerned Dalit women founded the Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO). FEDO was the first national-level non-governmental organization to represent Dalit women, advocate for their concerns and address their immediate needs. FEDO works on both caste and gender discrimination. It aims to promote Dalit rights, eliminate caste and gender discrimination and endorse justice and equity in Nepali society. It has established 56 district chapters and mobilized over 53,850 Dalit women in 2154 Dalit women's groups. FEDO is determined to end all kinds of discrimination and empower Dalit women to participate as full members of Nepali society.

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) has identified 12 critical areas of concern for women. From these, some of the issues most pertinent to Dalit women are discussed below.

1. Dalit Women and Poverty

As a group, they have been deprived of the opportunity to own land, and they do not own houses. Poverty affects all members of Dalit households, but because of gender discrimination, poverty affects women and men differently: Because of traditional property ownership practices which favour sons and husbands over wives and daughters, or because of the preference for educating boys. The combined effect of caste and gender means that the impact of poverty falls disproportionately on Dalit women. Higher poverty levels among Dalit women result from their lower levels of resource endowment (including educational attainment) and consequent lack of access to more productive occupations compared to those groups who have been privileged historically.

There has been a feminization of poverty in Nepal. However, there has also been a Dalitization of poverty in Nepal. To illustrate, the average national poverty rate of Nepal is 25 percent, but is 42 percent for Dalits. The situation of Dalit women is worse than that of Dalit men as they face limited access to ownership of land, households and livestock. When the effects of caste and gender discrimination are combined, Dalit women end up at the bottom of the socio-economic scale.

among the top ten groups as well. The level of social cohesion among the Sarki, Dom, Musahar, Kami, Halkhor, Tatma, Gaine, Damai, Dusadh and Khatwe groups is very low. All of the groups that feature in the bottom ten are Dalit (Nepal Multidimensional Social Inclusion Index 2014: <http://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Nepal-Inclusion-Index-Tribuvan.pdf>)

- ❖ *Dalit women, like all Nepalese women perform three roles :(1) reproductive, (2) productive, (3) community. They spend most of their time in reproductive and domestic work, including giving birth, child care, cooking, washing clothes, fetching water, collecting firewood and raising animals. They also work as agricultural labourers, daily wagedworkers, perform traditional occupations and engage in household production. Despite doing all these types of work, they are still deprived of ownership of property.*

The Nepal Census of 2011 (Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal) showed that women comprise only 31% of all paid workers. This statistic provides evidence for women's lack of access to income. In research, commissioned by the National Planning Commission in 2004, it was found that micro-credit programs and saving and credit activities, especially since the 1980s, have enabled women to gain access to some income. However, these programs have not been adequate in lifting women out of their poverty trap.

2. Education and Training

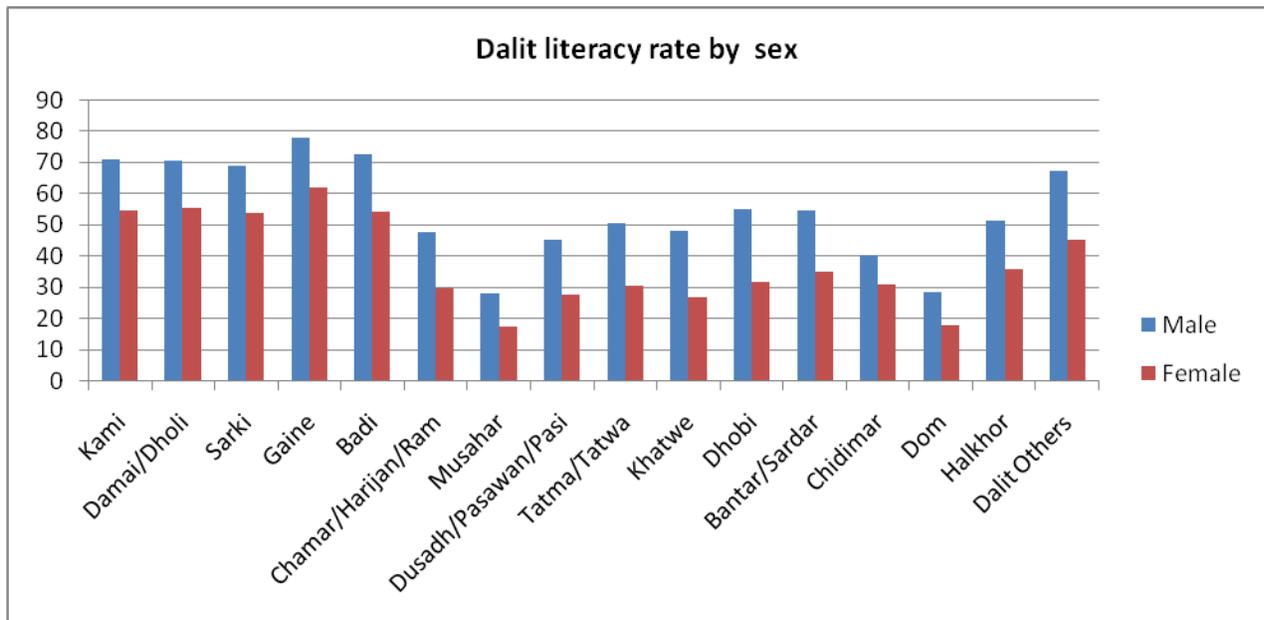
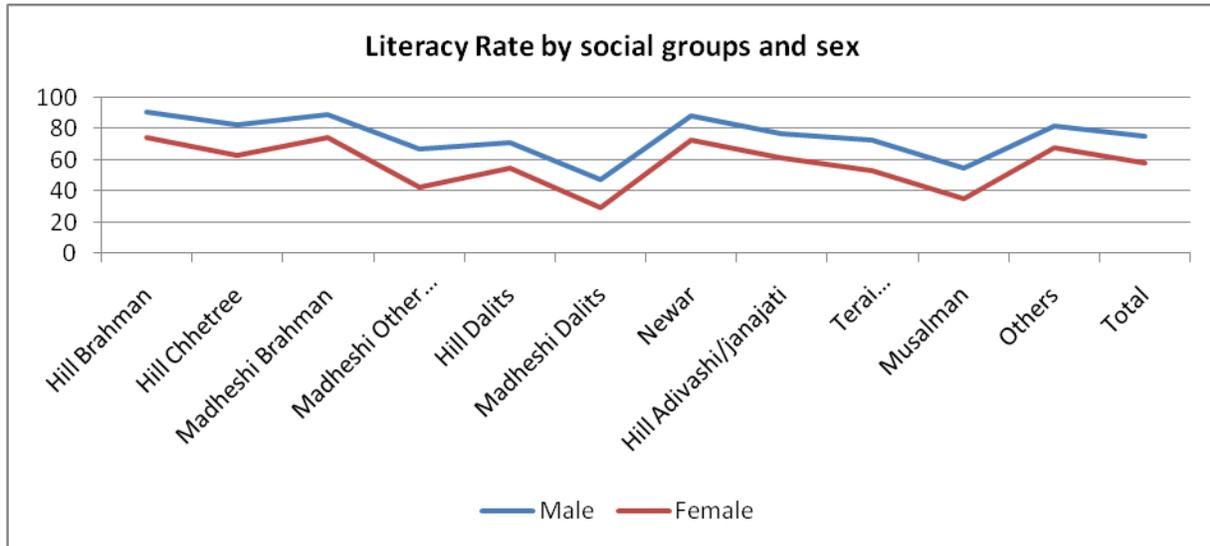
Education is the most essential element and a basic human right for the 21st century human being. Nepal's national agenda is to "educate all." This is inspired by a dream of modernizing the Nepali state, an idea of democracy, equality, human rights and ideals of abolishing caste. Many scholars believe that education is beneficial for all and that there is a positive relationship between education and socio-economic status. Education also has a liberating potential for Dalits. The role of education has been significant in contesting structures of caste inequality and untouchability. Generally, one finds that the importance of Dalits in education has heightened in Nepal. This is reflected in the phenomenon that even though the majority of Dalit parents are illiterate, they are keen to send their children to school.

The education provided by the current education system, specifically schools, colleges and vocational training institutions, does not incorporate the experiences and needs of Dalit women. The current system is patriarchal and inaccessible to all. Furthermore, it is impractical for many potential students, and discriminatory. People-oriented and practical education policies are needed to address the expansion of education services to all members of the population.

Nepal has endorsed the UN-inspired "Education for All" (Sabaiko lagi Shikshya) project in 2000. Education for All commits itself to provide commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults by the year 2015. The question remains whether Nepal will achieve the goal and make education a reality for all by 2015? Current educational figures on Dalit women are discouraging.

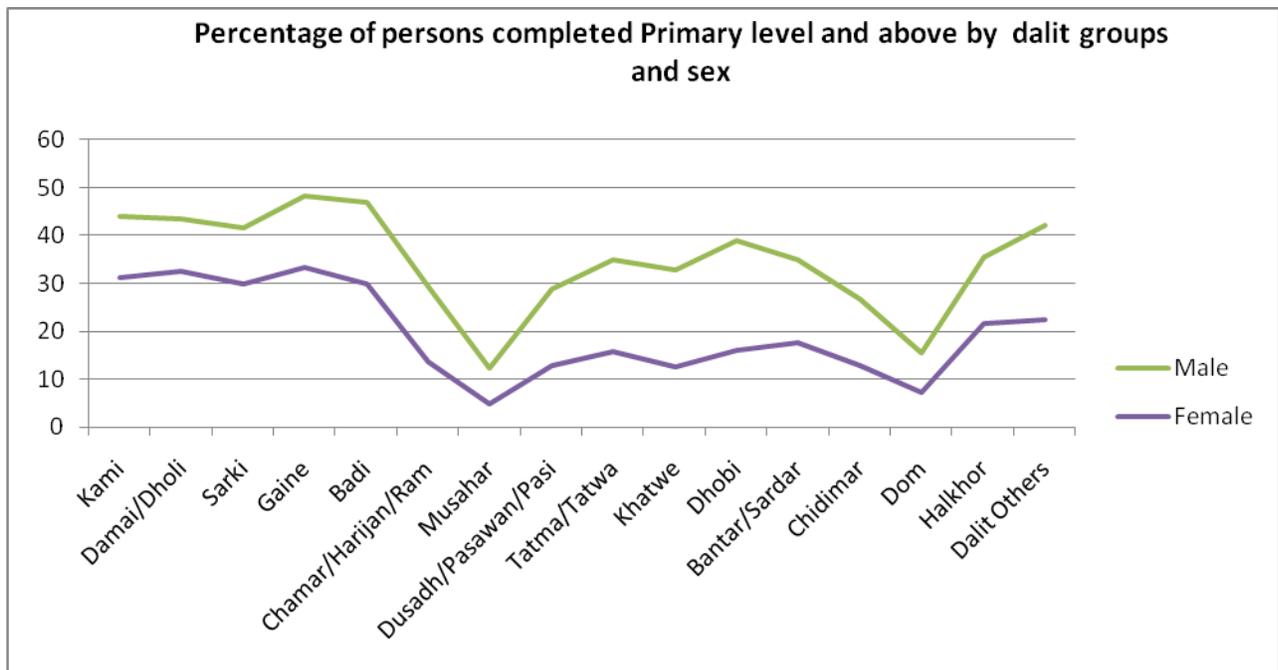
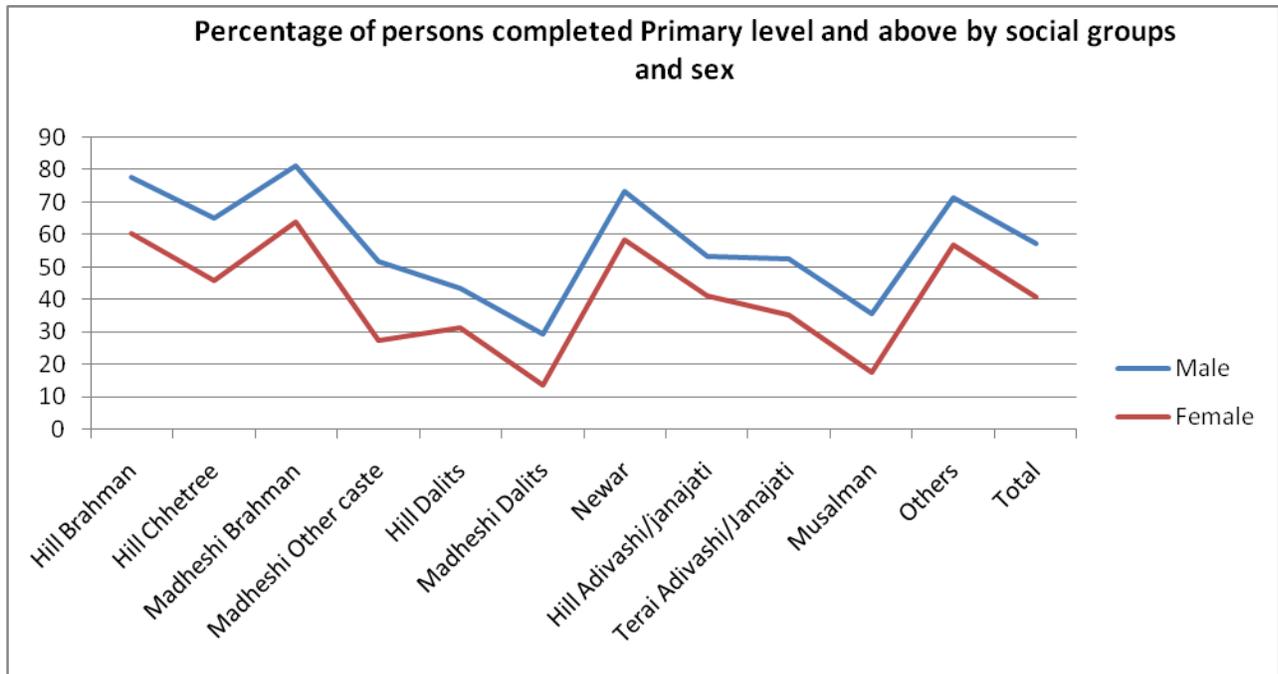
According to Census 2011, the average literacy rate in Nepal is 65.97%. For males, it is 75.21% and for females, it is 57.53%. Madhesi and Hill Brahman and the Newar community have the

highest literacy rate among social groups with 81.9%, 81.7 and 79.9% respectively. Literacy for all Dalit is 52.7% with Dalit women literacy rate of 45.4%. As the following figure shows, women from all Dalit groups have lower literacy rates when compared to the national average and their male counterparts. Women from Musahar and the Dom community are at the bottom with respective literacy rates of 17.4% and 17.9%

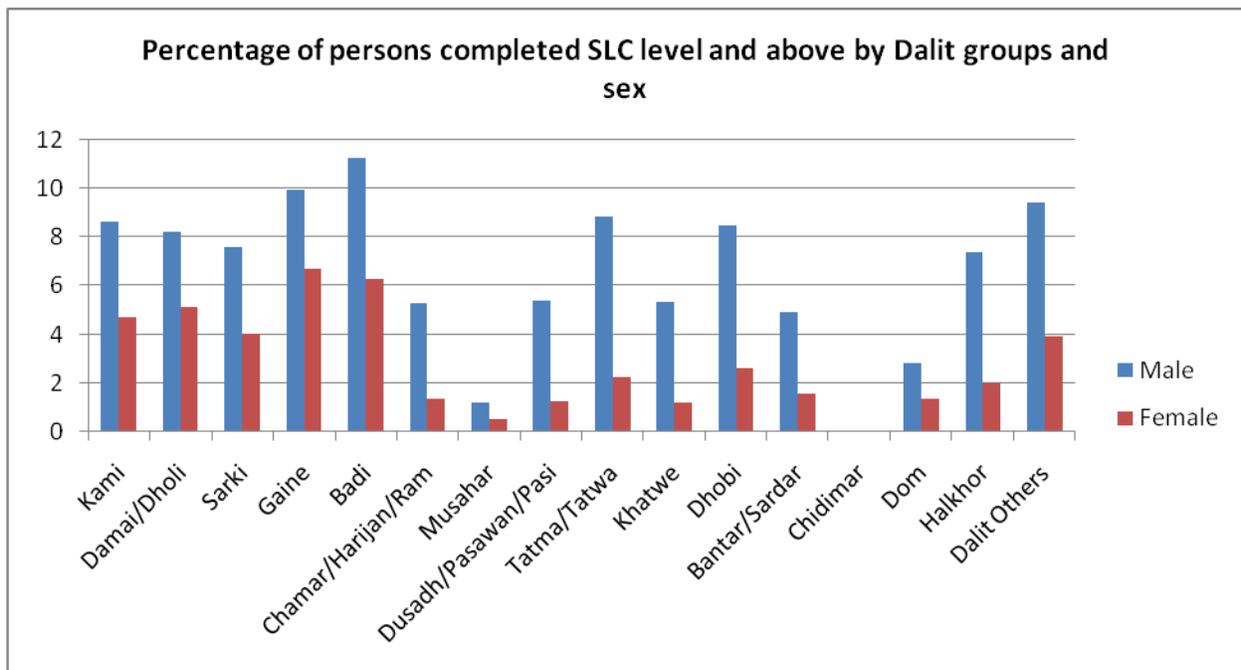
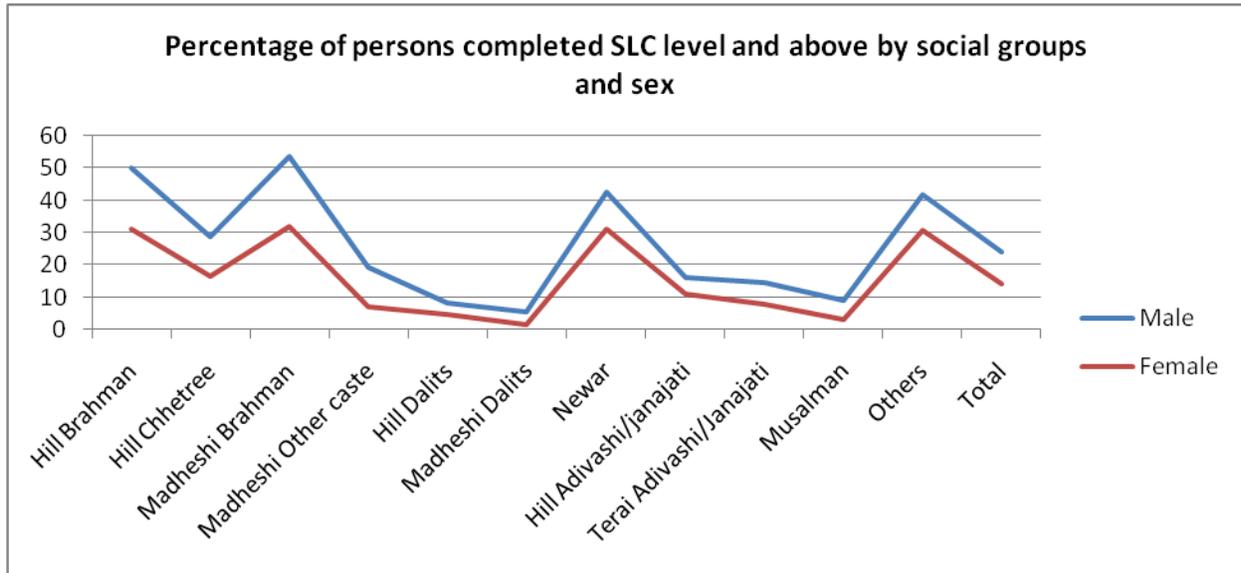


The percentage of persons who have completed primary level education in Nepal is 48.5%. The Madheshi Dalit group has the lowest percentage among the social groups while the Musahar is

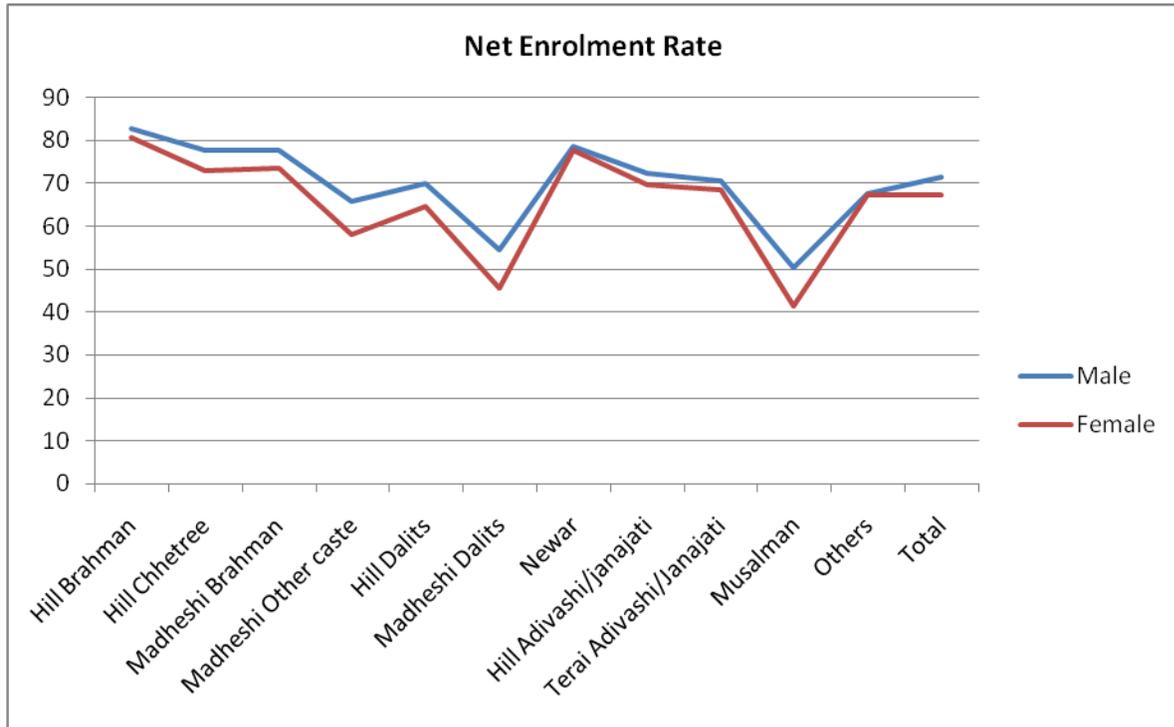
at the bottom with only 8.6%. The percentage of women from the Musahar who have completed primary level education is 4.9%, followed by the Dom and Chamar groups with 7.4% and 13.7% respectively.



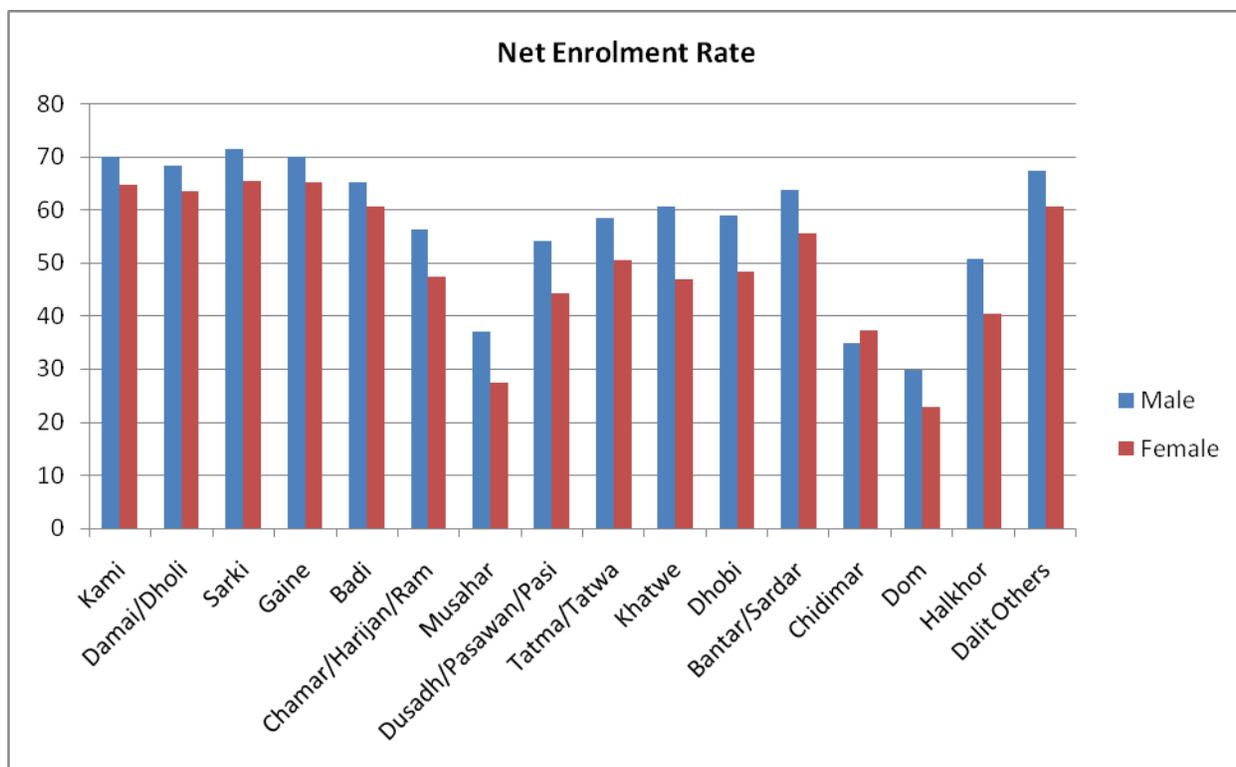
Census 2011 figures for persons who have completed SLC and above is 18.89%. Again, both Madhesi and Hill Dalit groups are at the bottom (except Muslims). Only, 3.57% of Madhesi Dalits have completed SLC and above which is six times lower than the national average. It appears that there are virtually no persons who have completed SLC and above among the Dom and Musahar community. Average figures for all Dalit women is 3.9%.



The net enrolment rate at basic, secondary and tertiary level is defined as the ratio of the total number of people aged 5-21 enrolled at basic, secondary and tertiary level education. The figures on net enrollment, contrary to the above educational indices, show no sharp or remarkable disparity. The lowest in the hierarchy is the Muslim community (46%) followed by the Madhesi Dalits (50%). Hill Dalits (67.%) appear to do well compared to Madhesi Dalits and other caste groups (61.9%).



Nevertheless, looking within Dalit groups and at the male-female comparison, Dom (26%), Musahar (32%) and Chidimar (36%) groups are at the bottom. Female enrollment among Dom groups figures as low as 22% and at 27% for Musahar. As can be seen in the figures, the Dom and Musahar community are systematically at the bottom of all of the educational indicators. Despite this disparity between Dalit groups, the figures for net enrollment are different. For example, the average net enrolment rate for Dalit boys is 63.9% with 57.6% for Dalit girls. These figures are not too far from the national average of 69% net enrollment rate.



The relatively high rate of net enrollment suggest that Dalits are equally aware of the importance of the education of their children. This refutes the common belief and explanation that blames the Dalit themselves for their illiteracy and ignorance. Although disaggregated data on dropout rates are not readily available, data suggests that high drop-out rates are to blame for the systematically low educational attainment of Dalit girls. This situation demands further analysis of the causes for the high dropout rates of Dalit girls. FEDO’s study on “Late Comers in School: The status of Dalit girls in Education” carried out in 2010 suggests that there are at least three possible causes for the high dropout rates. The first is the school environment which reinforces the inferior perception of Dalit girls as less worthy .Secondly, that the child experiences humiliation and finds little trust in the system in its interaction with teachers and non-Dalit students. Thirdly, the family requires that Dalit girls support other members from early on as compared to Dalit boys.

These statistics, while revealing, fail to bring forward the psychological impact on Dalits, often retrieved in these spheres. Schools and colleges continuously remind Dalits of their status. School curricula hardly resonate with Dalit culture and respect for them. Even when Dalits gain a position in the middle or upper class, their status as Dalit is not eroded. Schools as spaces where Dalit girls can build self-respect and confidence or depart from the degrading sense of self are yet to be realized.

Table 1: Differentials in educational attainment between Dalit women and all women

At present, a majority of Dalits in Nepal are deprived of education. As Table 1 shows, the literacy rate of all women in Nepal is 54.5%, but only 34.8% for Dalit women. Similarly, only 11.8% of Dalit girls are enrolled in secondary or higher levels of education.

These education disadvantages cement the social and economic disadvantages of the Dalit community. To address this, it is essential that education is made compulsory, and that full scholarships are provided to Dalit girls from primary to higher education levels, in both technical and non-technical fields.

There is also an underrepresentation of Dalit women in the teaching profession, and particularly in higher levels of education (SSR Core Document, 2008). Statistics for all women are already below par: the proportion of female teachers by level in all types of schools is 38.6 percent at primary level, 24.7 percent at lower secondary level and 15.9 percent at secondary (Flash Report, 2008). The position of Dalit women is even worse. Underrepresentation in the teaching profession contributes to continued discrimination against Dalit girl students in schools. It also reflects Dalit women's lack of access to professional, reasonably paid work throughout Nepal.

3. Dalit Women and Health

Health services are nothing but a dream for many Dalit women, especially in rural areas. A significant number of Dalit women lose their lives in the absence of basic health services. The maternal mortality rate of Dalit women is higher than for any other group of women in Nepal (Source: *Maternal and Child Health in Nepal: The Effects of Caste, Ethnicity, and Regional Identity Further Analysis of the 2011 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey, 2013*). In addition, Dalit women are plagued with more health-related problems than people of other castes, often because of poor living conditions engendered by poverty or the continued (illegal) practice of untouchability. Most Dalit women are unaware that health care is their right, thus they do not raise their voices to demand better services. Data for health is not sufficient for assessing the health conditions of Dalit women. Among three indicators used to assess the health status, only the data on mean age at first marriage have gender disaggregated figures. We have obtained information on the two other indicators namely women facing challenges in accessing health services from NDHS 2011 and access to modern toilets from Census 2011. Both have data disaggregated only by social groups. Women's health is regarded as one of the basic indicators of living standard. Good health is intrinsically linked to education, economic situation and human capabilities.

The average age of first marriage in Nepal is age 18.9. Both hill and Madhesi Dalits are slightly below the national average. Looking at the mean age of first marriage among the Dalit groups, the first age of marriage among the Dom, Chidimar and Chamar community is substantially lower with 13, 14 and 15 percent respectively. The impact on women's health from marriage at this early age and its causes, especially for Dalit women, requires further studies. The following tables provide data on mean age at first marriage:

Mean Age at first marriage by social groups and sex (Year)

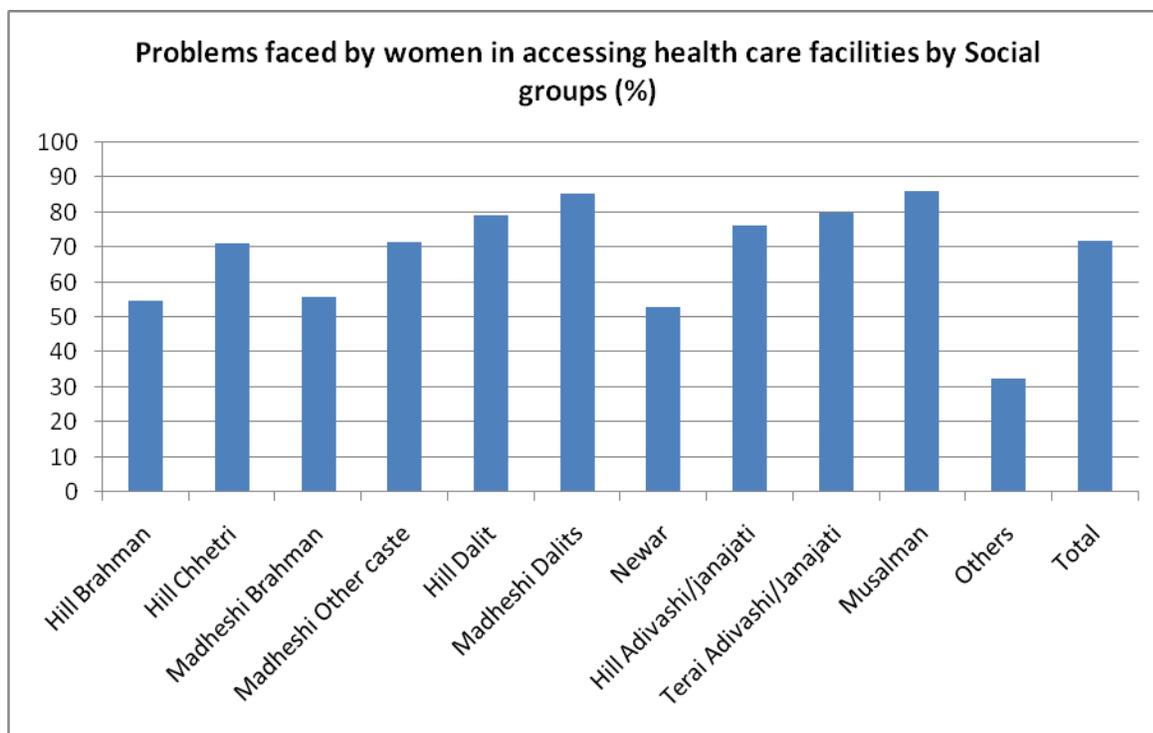
Social Groups	Male	Female	Total
Hill Brahman	22.3	17.2	19.4
Hill Chhetree	21.2	17.7	19.2
Madhesi Brahman	21.7	17.8	19.6
Madhesi Other caste	19.3	16.5	17.8
Hill Dalits	20.1	17.1	18.3
Madhesi Dalits	18.6	16.2	17.3
Newar	23	19.4	21
Hill Adivashi/Janaajati	21.3	18.5	19.7
Terai Adivashi/Janaajati	19.5	17	18.2
Musalman	19.3	16.5	17.8
Others	22.5	18.4	20.4
Total	20.7	17.5	18.9

Mean age at Age first marriage by social group and sex (Year)

Dalit	Male	Female	Total
Kami	20.1	17.2	18.4
Damai/Dholi	19.8	16.9	18.1
Sarki	20.2	17.2	18.5
Gaine	19.9	17.2	18.4
Badi	20	17	18.2
Chamar/Harijan/Ram	18.2	15.9	17
Musahar	19	16.3	17.6
Dusadh/Pasawan/Pasi	18.4	16.1	17.1
Tatma/Tatwa	18.6	16.1	17.3
Khatwe	18.6	16.2	17.2
Dhobi	18.5	16.2	17.3
Bantar/Sardar	19.6	16.8	18.1
Chidimar	16.9	14.2	15.4
Dom	16.1	13.6	14.8
Halkhor	18.1	15.5	16.8
Dalit Others	19.4	16.6	17.8

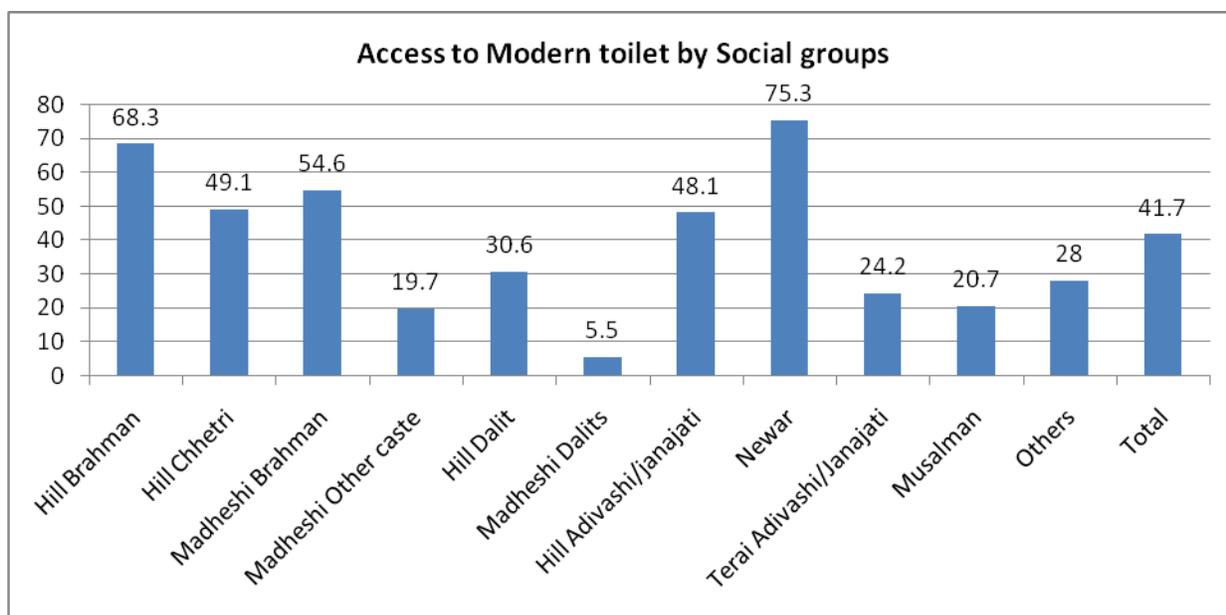
Similar to other indicators, Dalits are reported to face more challenges in accessing health services. In the 2011 NDHS, women were asked whether or not either of the following factors would be a significant problem for them in seeking medical care. The first was getting permission to go for treatment, second was getting money for treatment, and the third was distance to a health facility, and not wanting to go alone.

The survey shows that every three in four women encountered either of the problems mentioned above in obtaining health care services. On average, 72 percent of women in the country experience problems in accessing health service. The figure for Dalit women is higher than the national average with 79 and 85 percent respectively for Hill and Madhesi Dalit women. Unlike other issues, Dalits do not appear at the very bottom as Muslims and Tarai Adivasi Janajati face higher levels of difficulties in accessing medical care. This picture, however requires further scrutiny. The following figures shows the pattern of problems faced by women in accessing health care facilities by social groups.



Sources: NDHS 2011

Access to a modern toilet is an important health indicator. This is also directly linked to the household economy and awareness. A modern toilet, defined as a flush linked to sewerage or to a concrete safety tank, is used by about 42 percent of households in Nepal. This indicates a very poor level of sanitation in Nepal. However, the access to modern toilets varies across social groups. The level of sanitation in terms of use of a modern toilet is better among the Hill Brahmins/Chhetris and the Madhesi Brahmin. The sanitation level among other groups is fairly low compared to the national average. The situation of Madhesi Dalits with only 5.5% of household with access to a modern toilet is revealing in terms of disparity.



The life expectancy of Dalit women is just 50 years of age, although it is 55 for non-Dalit women (The Musahar women, a Dalit group, have a life expectancy of only 42 years of age). The maternal mortality rate among Dalits is 850 per 1000 at the time of child birth, one of the highest rates in the world. The under-five mortality rate of Dalit children is 109 per 1000, and fifty percent of Dalit children are undernourished. Many Dalit children die from diarrhea and pneumonia. (Source: *Dalit Women: Updates on Selected Social and Economic Indicators from Census 2011, FEDO, 2013*).

- ❖ *The above statistics indicates that the health status of Dalit women is weak. The efforts made by governmental and non-governmental agencies are and have been inadequate. The Dalit movement has not been able to raise this issue with any great success in the public arena, and achievements in improving health status have been limited to date.*

The problem of uterine prolapse is also common among Dalit women because of the violence they face from birth, unequal behavior towards them, a heavy workload and the lack of proper medical and familial support during and immediately after child birth. This was highlighted in the February 2014 Amnesty report: 'Unnecessary Burden - Gender Discrimination and Uterine Prolapsed in Nepal, www.np.undp.org/content/nepal/en/home/library/human_development/human-development-report-2014/' This context needs to be taken into account in the formulation and implementation of public health strategies. It is essential that more resources are provided to prevent and treat uterine prolapse.

Aside from direct discrimination, because of increasing privatization and commercialization of health services, health services are often unaffordable to Dalit women. Privatization and commercialization should be discouraged unless equal and fair access can be guaranteed. And health services should be made easily accessible and non-discriminatory.

4. Violence against Dalit Women

Dalit women face violence from various sources. Violence against Dalit women is practiced in Nepali society on the basis of discriminatory social, cultural, economic, religious and political traditions and beliefs. For example, many Dalit women are prevented from accessing public services and places, including drinking from water sources, because of continued untouchability practices. If women resist these practices, they are usually punished with violence. Sixty percent of Dalit women experience family or other gender-based violence, being physical, sexual, psychological, social or cultural violence (FEDO, 2013, Study on the situation of violence against Dalit women and children and advocate for their prevention and protection.) The violence and inhuman treatment, such as sexual assault, rape, and naked parading, serves as a social mechanism to maintain Dalit women's subordinate position in society. They are targeted as a way of humiliating entire Dalit communities.

Dalit women also face hardship because of child marriage, bigamy and dowry practices that continue to prevail despite having been officially outlawed. Alcohol abuse and subsequent domestic violence is also a significant problem.

Sanctioned impunity on behalf of the offenders is a key problem. Police personnel often neglect or deny the Dalit women of their right to seek legal and judicial aid. In many cases, the judiciary fails to enforce the laws that protect Dalit women from discrimination.

Several UN human rights bodies such as CEDAW and CERD have raised concerns about the human rights situation of Dalit women.

Bimala Bhatta's only fault was that she didn't bring enough dowry to the family into which she married. She was from the Mahendranagar municipality, the district headquarters of Kanchanpur district, where police and legal system are available for citizens. But in the case of Bimala, these did not help. Her husband systematically tortured her for years, before finally locking her up in a room for six months, where he beat her every day and finally killed her. (Source: WOREC year book 2008)

In villages of the Terai region, *Chamars* (a particular Dalit caste group) have traditionally undertaken the role of midwives/birthing assistants. Ironically, these women are permitted to enter non-Dalit houses at the time of childbirth, but become untouchable again as soon as the birth is over. Though they provide an incredibly valuable service, particularly in a country with such a high maternal mortality, they receive only nominal payment in kind (usually 5-10 kg of grain).

Women from another Terai Dalit group, the *Badis*, are considered inferior to dogs in society. *Badis* were traditionally involved in prostitution, and although this has significantly reduced in recent years, the *Badi* community continues to be stigmatized. *Badi* women are treated as untouchable; yet there is no untouchability as far as sexual exploitation is concerned.

- ❖ *Recently B.K., a Dalit woman, was the victim of a heinous crime - she was tortured, beaten and forced to eat human excreta. The person who orchestrated this barbaric act was a supposedly educated woman: Bimala Lama. The principal of the local Gadi Bhanjyang Primary School, Lama accused B.K. of practicing 'witchcraft'.*

A great number of Dalit women (and almost only Dalit women) are victimized as a result of accusations of witchcraft (*bokshi*), oftentimes suffering severe physical abuse or mistreatment in the process. Similarly Dalit women are the most likely to be victimized in the case of inter-caste marriage. Not only do they face the most discrimination, because of the practice in Nepal of wives living with the husband's family; they are also subject to social exploitation. It is not uncommon for so-called "upper" caste members to pretend to be in love with Dalit girls, and then abandon them on the basis of their caste immediately after pregnancy or marriage. Dalit women face violence in the home, in public places and even at work on some occasions.

5. Dalit Women and Armed Conflict

The "People's War" against the state that was launched by the Maoists of Nepal on 13 February 1996 has split Nepali society in two. The conflict cost more than 13,000 lives and billions of rupees. It witnessed wide-scale human rights violations against women from both the government and non-state combatants. Violence against the Dalit community is ultimately borne by Dalit women. They suffer direct violence because of their involvement in, support for or proximity to the conflict; they suffer sexual exploitation, disproportionately so because of their low social status; and similarly they suffer economic hardship after the loss of husbands or other family members or the destruction of property.

Hundreds of men and women were imprisoned during the conflict. Many more went missing, or were raped or tortured. The conflict has caused mass internal displacement. Many male members of the family left their homes, leaving women behind to manage the household, and care for children and elderly household members. Women were compelled to do all sorts of work traditionally performed by men such as ploughing the farm and roofing. In addition to their own gendered work, without a male counterpart women have had to take on new responsibilities in the face of violence and trauma.

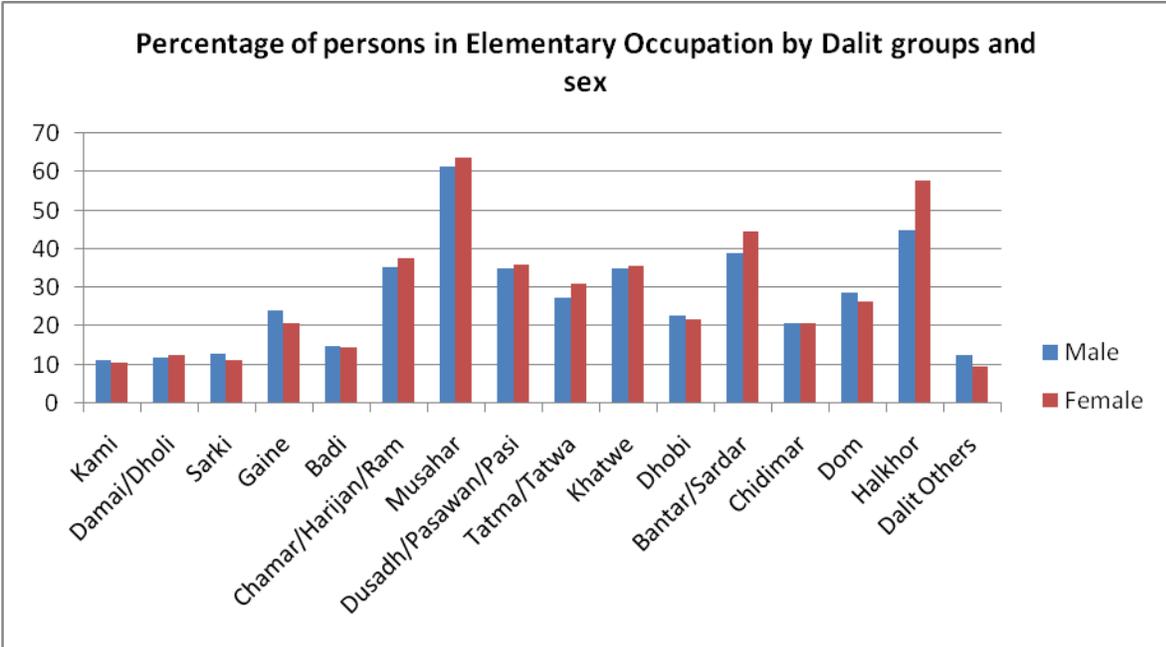
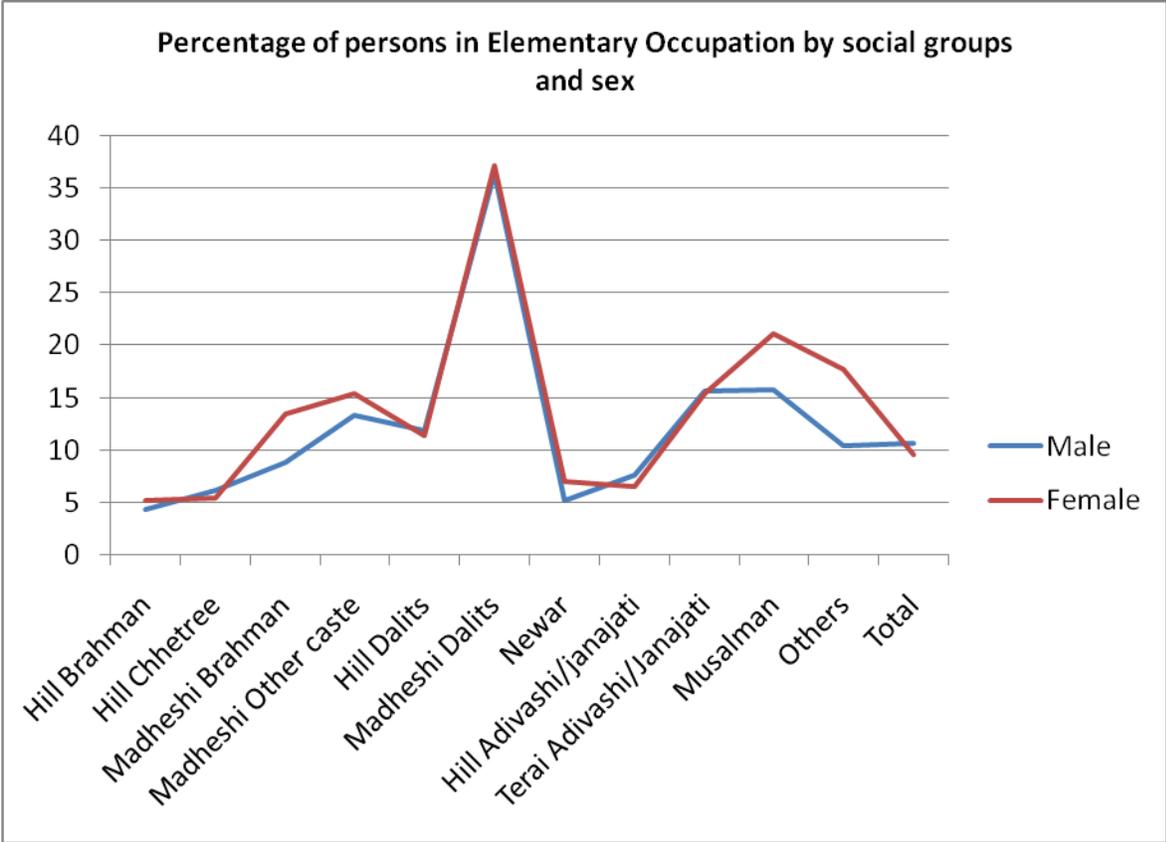
6. Dalit Women and the Economy

The overall economic condition of most of the Dalit community is miserable. It is unfortunate and unnecessary that Dalits, who have traditional skills in sustaining agrarian livelihoods, live in poverty. Displacement from their traditional occupations and lack of employment in both agriculture and the private sector are common problems of Dalit women and men. On the whole, the economic condition of Dalit women today has remained stagnant when compared to women as a whole. Dalit women in the Terai today have the worse economic situation of any group of women in any region of Nepal (Source: http://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/user_folder/pdf/New_files/Nepal/2013/IDSN_Nepal_briefing_paper_-_Dalit_political_participation.pdf, NEPAL'S TROUBLED TARAI REGION, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/files/asia/south-asia/nepal/136_nepal_s_troubled_tarai_region.ashx)

Historically, a lack of ownership of agricultural land and traditional service based occupations are typical characteristics of the Dalit economy. As a result, Dalit women have always carried out field work and domestic labour, which shows that employment in the public sphere, outside the home, is nothing new to them. A large part of Dalit women work as farm and other wage labourers and are often being forced into the most demeaning jobs. The deprived economic situation of Dalits has made Dalit women extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation and Dalit women are often victims of trafficking and forced sexual labour..

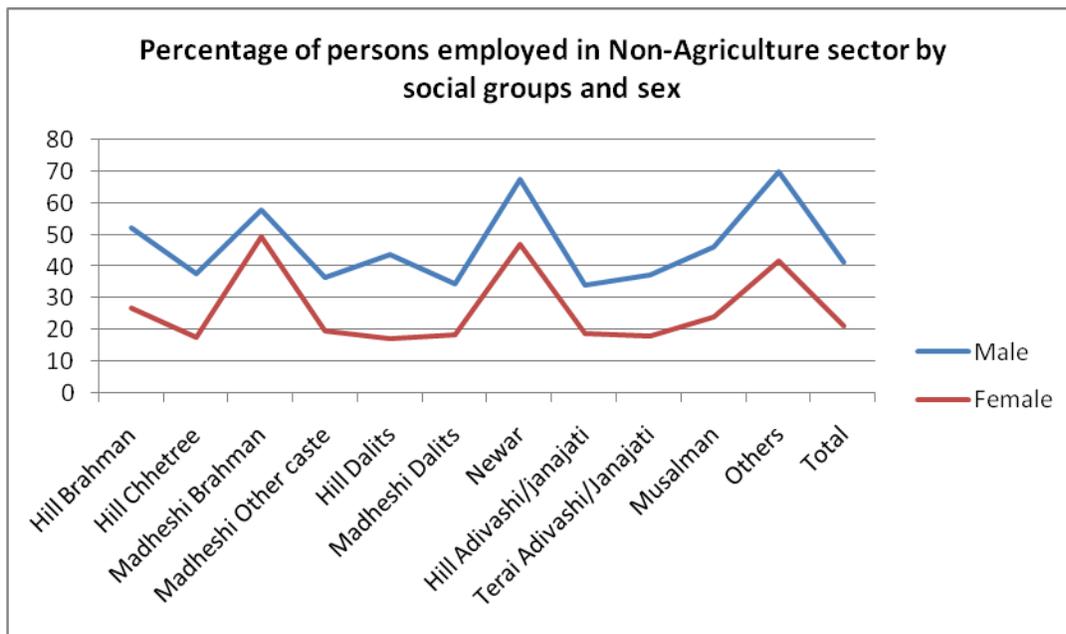
Persons in an undeveloped labor market are bound to work in elementary occupations. The elementary workers include messengers, package deliverers, luggage porters, odd job persons, meter readers, vending machine collectors, water and firewood collectors, elementary workers not elsewhere classified (For detail see (ISCO code, 2008, ILO). The elementary occupation is mostly low paid and usually entails unfriendly working environments. This is, therefore, considered exclusion from better employment opportunities which leads to poor economic participation. Around one in ten employed persons is forced to work in an elementary occupation in Nepal. The proportion of such workers is relatively high among the Madhesi and Hill Dalits with (42.9%) in such employment.

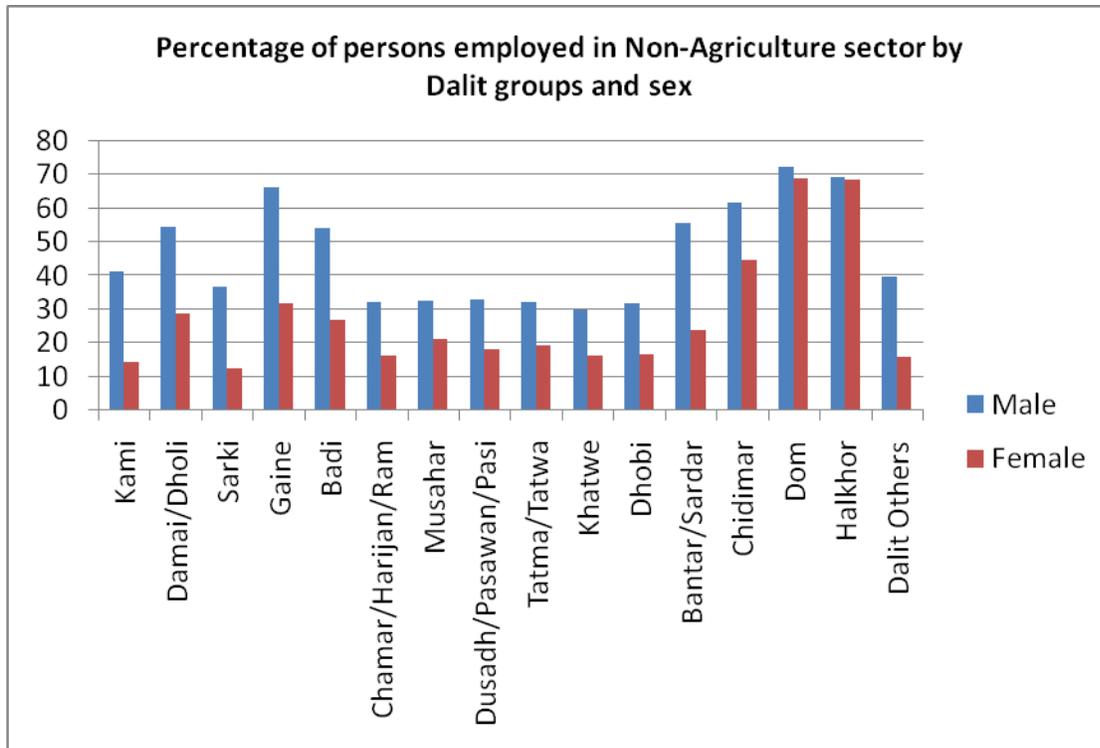
Gender differences reveal slightly more males are engaged in such occupations than females. Although the gap between males and females prevails among all groups, the proportion of females engaged in such occupations is significantly higher among the Madhesi Dalits. Muslims are in an almost similar situation. Male and Female ratio of Madhesi Dalit community shows the same gaps but sever in comparision to other communities.



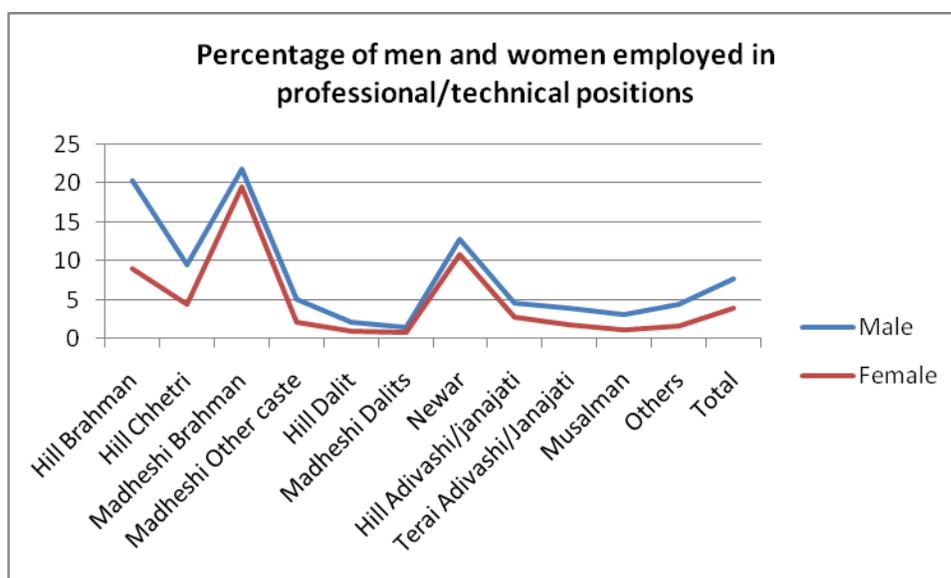
Because of minimal ownership of agricultural land, the involvement of Dalits in the agricultural sector is minimal. Employment in non-agricultural work, therefore, provides more income, leading to a better quality of life. The following figure shows the proportion of employment in the non-agricultural sector by social groups. Only one in every three persons is involved with the non-agricultural sector and this is almost similar across all the social groups.

It is also to be noted that males are twice more likely to be involved with the non-agricultural sector than females. Similar to other indices, the involvement of Dalits is much lower than that of other social groups. Although the gender gap is similar across all the groups, the Hill Dalits appear to have a relatively wider gender gap.





Involvement in professional and technical jobs is an indicator for a better economic situation. Only around one in every sixteen employed persons in Nepal has a professional/technical job. The proportion of men and women in technical jobs across social groups varies widely. Among males, one out of twelve is engaged in professional/technical jobs, whereas the proportion of females is half that. Among women, one out of twenty five is now engaged in such jobs. Madhesi and Hill Dalits are among the groups figuring in the lowest ranks of the hierarchy with 1.2 and 1.5 percent involvement. Only 0.8% of Women Madhesi Dalits are employed in professional/technical positions.

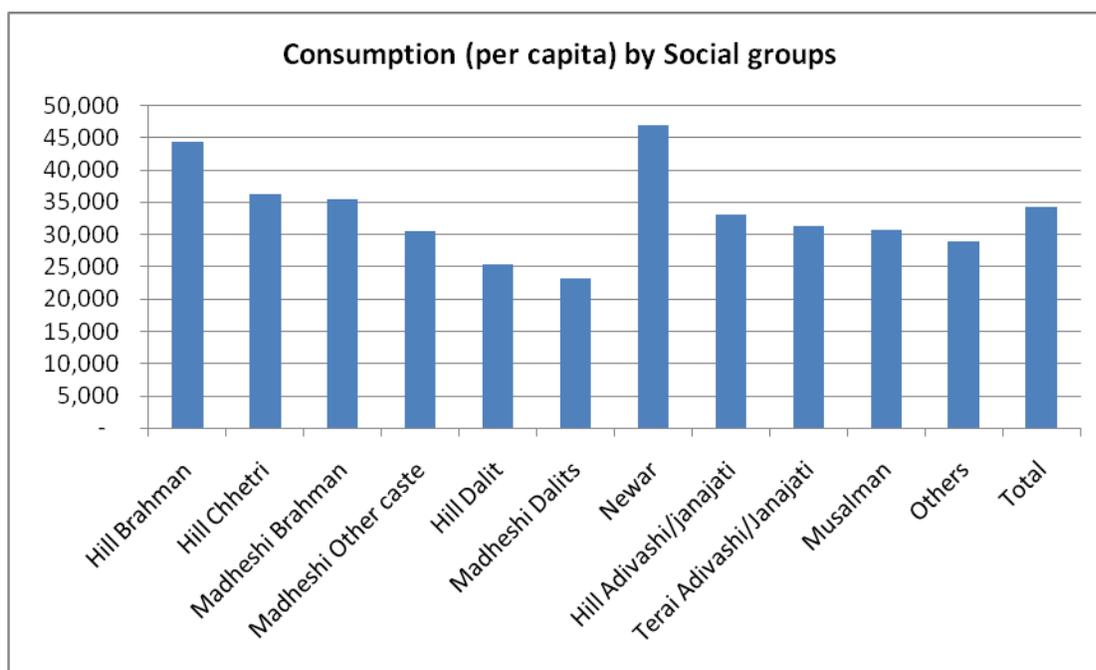


A higher consumption level implies a good standard of living. Distribution of per-capita consumption widely varies across social groups. As is evident from the data, the Madhesi Dalits have the lowest level of consumption with per capita of NRs. 23,106 followed by Hill Dalits with 25,298 per annum. The average per capita consumption in Nepal is 34,187 and the highest are found among Newar and Hill Brahman communities. The following table and figure presents the consumption data by social groups:

Per capita Consumption of Nepal by Social Groups

Social Group	Consumption (per capita NRs.)
Hill Brahman	44,304
Hill Chhetri	36,068
Madhesi Brahman	35,347
Madhesi Other caste	30,363
Hill Dalit	25,298
Madhesi Dalits	23,106
Newar	46,780
Hill Adivashi/Janajati	32,943
Terai Adivashi/Janajati	31,143
Musalman	30,677
Others	28,847
Total	34,187

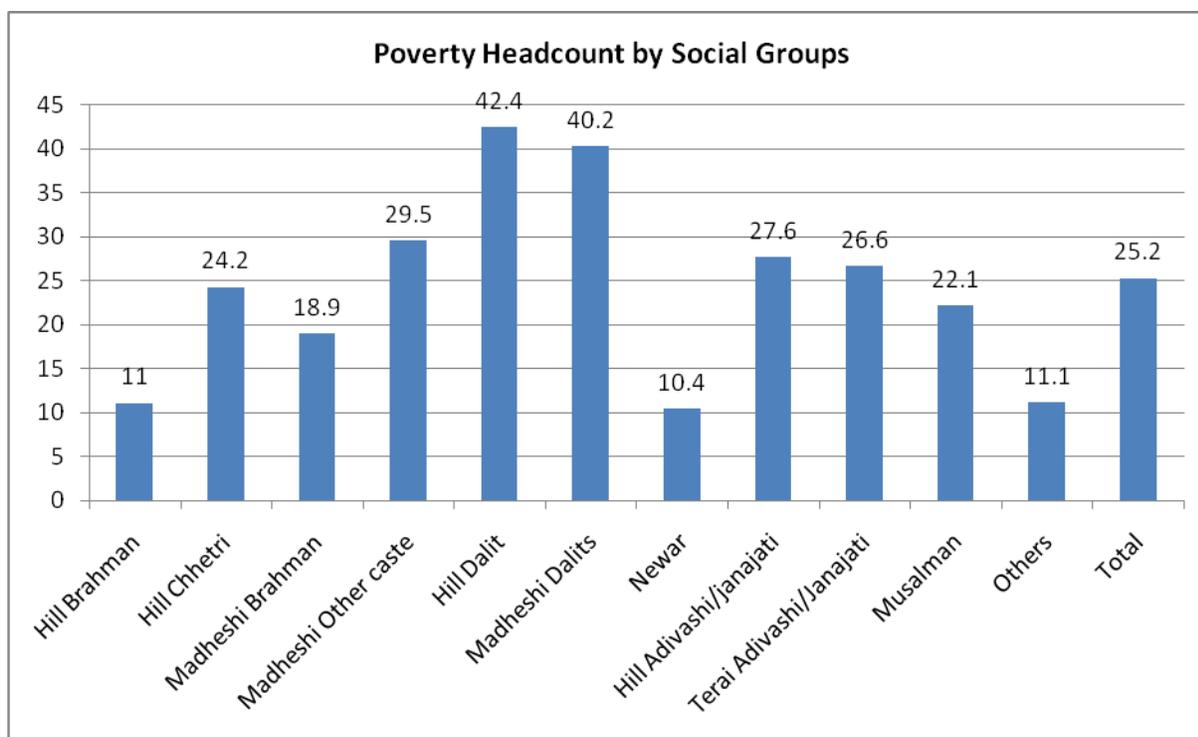
Sources: Nepal Living Standards Survey 2010



Sources: Nepal Living Standards Survey 2010

The data on poverty is obtained from the Nepal Living Standard Survey 2010. Poverty incidence for a given caste and ethnic group/area is defined as the proportion of the population who lives in households with an average per capita expenditure below the poverty line. Basic poverty indicators considered here are head count poverty.

As can be seen in the following figures, among all social groups, the Nepal Hill Bahaman and Newar account for minimum levels of poverty. Only around one out of six persons in this group are poor. Whereas, among the Dalits of both Hill and Madhes origin, every two in five persons are poor. The rest of the social groups, more or less, face the same incidence of poverty as the national average.



Sources: Nepal Living Standard Survey 2010

7. Dalit Women in Power and Decision making

One way in which political participation and decision-making power is measured is by women's percentage share of parliamentary seats. In Nepal, this has increased dramatically, from a mere 3.4 percent in 1991 and 5.8 percent in 1999, to almost 33 percent in the 2008 Constituent Assembly (CA). A similar shift has occurred in the representation of Dalit women. Until 2008, Dalit women were almost entirely absent from parliament and had only had one representative during the entire multiparty period. After the adoption of special quotas prior to the 2008 elections, there are now 25 Dalit women in the Constituent Assembly.

Table 3: Women representation in civil services by class and level, Nepal, 1991-2000

Class	No of civil servants	% of all positions held by women	
		1991	2000

Special	85	3.5	2.4
First	633	5.1	4.1
Second	2,719	4.9	3.2
Third	7,418	5.3	5.2
Non-gazetted	87,834	8.0	8.2
Total	98,689	7.7	7.8

As Table 3 indicates, the representation of women in employment in the civil services is appallingly low. Furthermore, this level of discrimination in government bodies bodes ill for the private sector. There are no recorded data on the representation of Dalit women specifically in the civil service, but from anecdotal accounts and based on other patterns of discrimination in Nepal, it seems reasonable to assume that representation of Dalit women is next to zero.

Despite a number of initiatives and provisions made by the government through different sectors, the resources allocated for empowering and including both women and Dalit women are either too low or not properly utilized. This demonstrates the very poor performance and low priority of the government towards the empowerment of women and gender equality. It is clearly a matter of weak political will.

8. Opportunities and the Dalit woman:

Inspired by egalitarian doctrines, the Dalit communities in India have been fighting for basic human and civic rights since the middle of the nineteenth century. In her book, *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India*, Paik focuses on the struggle of Dalit women in one arena - the realm of formal education – and examines significantly interconnected social, cultural and political questions. What did education mean to women? How did changes in women's education affect their views of themselves and their domestic work, public employment, marriage, sexuality, and childbearing and rearing? To deal with these questions, Paik challenges the triumphant narrative of modern secular education and analyses the constellation of social, economic, political, and historical circumstances that precluded and at the same time provided opportunities to many Dalits.

Despite the various initiatives at different levels of government, some 103 provisions which discriminate against women continue to exist in various Acts and regulations, and this, despite a guarantee of equality in the 2007 Interim Constitution and 2011 legislation.

In addition, while laws do prohibit untouchability, widespread practices such as the denial of access to any public place or depriving someone of the use of public utilities, continue in reality, and the enforcement of the law is weak.

Every year, Dalit women are victimized, and very few manage to achieve justice or compensation. Some Dalit women, however, are working to achieve what was previously thought to be impossible. A temple in Kathmandu's Baneshwor area now has a Dalit woman as a priest.

At present, even citizenship itself is problematic for many Dalit women, especially those in the Terai, because of their high levels of landlessness. Although nothing in the legal code requires proof of land ownership as a basis for citizenship, officials continue to demand it.

Laws against discrimination have been on the books for a long time in Nepal, but the caste system continues to ostracize one community. It is clear that unless Dalits, and especially Dalit women, are given the opportunity to educate and economically empower themselves, the practice will continue to find new victims.

9. Dalit Women in Media

The reach of Dalit women in the media is weak, despite the need to create media to assist Dalit women in becoming well-informed and well-educated. The press council has only one woman on its board of 13 members. There are no women on the boards of state-owned media entities such as Nepal Television, Gorkhapatra, Radio Nepal and National News Agency. There is also a lack of specific policies for women journalists, resulting in unfriendly and sometimes discriminatory working environments for women. In this situation anybody can imagine how long it might take for Dalit women's meaningful participation and representation in Media.

Despite this, the number of girls and women joining media has increased. However women still tend to be involved as presenters and announcers rather than working in reporting, editing, and other more technical aspects. In spite of the somewhat dismal state of women's participation in media at the moment, some proactive steps for promoting gender integration have been taken by media organizations and institutes.

New information and communication technologies have emerged which provide opportunities to share information and resources, and link and network with each other faster. Women's presence in this new communication space still lags far behind. Access to this new medium is particularly difficult for women in poorer and less urbanized areas where telecommunications infrastructure is poor and unaffordable. Lack of skills, training and language accessibility also serve as major deterrents. As a result, the gendered division of labour is highly pronounced in production, creative and technical departments, which are male-dominated.

10. The Girl Child

As with the general population, most girls live in rural areas in Nepal. The Constitution of Nepal and international human rights instruments which Nepal has ratified, especially the CEDAW and CRC, proclaim equal rights for all girls, irrespective of caste, religion and gender. However these aims have not been achieved. In everyday life, boys and girls are not treated equally. Girls are still considered a burden to parents and the family, while the birth of a boy is celebrated. Many girls are neglected, humiliated, oppressed and exploited in their everyday life.

Table 4: Mortality rates for boys and girls per 1000 children

	Boys	Girls
Infant mortality rate	144.50	150.38
Under 5 mortality rate	108.00	133.00

Source: CBS

Trafficking of girls is also a significant problem in Nepal. Girls are trafficked for different purposes, including domestic and agricultural work, forced beggary, marriage, and carpet weaving, circus and sex trade. It is estimated that about 20% (approximately 40,000) of the total number of girls and women who have been trafficked for sex are girls below 16 years of age (CWIN Annual report 2006). Annually, approximately 12,000 girls and women are trafficked. Among them, Dalit girls are the most vulnerable because of the socio-economic condition of their families, and because of their illiteracy.

Child marriage is also a significant problem which afflicts the Dalit community particularly, in part, because of the non-participation of Dalit girls in education. Still some 7.7% of Dalit girls from the Terai, 3.1 % from the hills, and 3.4 % from the mountain regions are forced to marry before they reach 10 years of age (Team Consult, 1999:27).

The traditional practice of chaupadi (isolation and deprivation of resources during menstruation) is also still practiced in many parts of Nepal. Traditionally, women and girls have been regarded as “untouchable” during menstruation. In some parts of far-western Nepal, women are not even allowed to stay inside the house – instead, they are often forced outside into cattle shelters or

other small huts not designed for human habitation. Other traditional forms of exploitation of girls such as deuki (offering daughters to the temple) continue despite legal prohibition.

Conclusion

The Government of Nepal endorsed its strong commitment to abide by the Beijing Platform for Action and accelerate its effective implementation in front of the United Nations General Assembly. However, despite various national and international commitments and some legal changes, no significant policy changes or programs are actually observed to increase women's participation and empowerment in any significant way. There is clearly an overall lack of political will in bringing gender discrimination to the forefront. Partly as a result of the systematic, entrenched and significant gender discrimination, the few opportunities which are available to women tend to fall to the most privileged women. Dalit women, who are marginalized on both gender and caste grounds, remain highly disadvantaged and largely outside the reach of government policies.

The government in Nepal must start by reforming itself. It is time for the discriminatory culture within the civil service to be overhauled, and a new and representative civil service to be built which includes Dalit women, as well as non-Dalit women and Dalit men. The areas of health and education, for which government has the primary responsibility, must be given greater resources and must be extended in a sensitive and thoughtful manner to ensure they include the most disadvantaged members of society, most specifically Dalit women. Without access to health and education, Dalit women remain economically and socially insecure, as well as politically incapacitated. The government of Nepal has been very happy to promise inclusion and empowerment, but now it is time for action. The awakening voices of millions of Dalit women in Nepal demand it.

The government in Nepal must start by reforming itself. FEDO calls for coordination between the government, civil society organizations, international organizations and others to bring about changes in the existing situation of Dalit women with a commitment to time bound action plans.

Dalit women to be given attention in all measures on Caste-based discrimination and sectors of education, employment, health care, access to land and personal security

- The State should take into account the situation of women and girls in all measures taken to address caste-based discrimination and should adopt specific provisions to ensure the human rights of women and girls affected by caste-based discrimination. Particular attention should be paid to combating intersecting forms of discrimination in the sectors of education, employment, health care, access to land and personal security. Furthermore, relevant acts should be implemented and amended to address shortcomings and loopholes in legislation.

Political representation and participation of Dalit women

- The participation and partnerships of Dalit women in all state structures and mechanisms should be increased. Legislation should be enacted and implemented to ensure the meaningful presence of Dalit women at the decision-making level of the constitutional, administrative and security bodies. Twenty percent of the existing 33 percent reservation quota reserved for women should be allocated to Dalit women. The State must establish concrete goals and timetables so as to accelerate the increase in the representation of Dalit women in elected and appointed bodies in all areas of public life. Furthermore, the representation of Dalit women within the Dalit community in the governance structure should be ensured.

Special attention to be given to Dalit women and girls in health and education

- Dalit women and girls must be given special attention in the areas of health and education. The government should ensure free health care services, free quality education at all levels, increase Dalit women's access to employment; and ensure special facilities for Dalit women and education loans

Land reform programmes targeting Dalit women

- Land reform programmes should be implemented with the objective of redistributing government owned land resources to the landless, targeting Dalit women residing in rural areas, to use it for agriculture based income generating activities. Special subsidies should be made available for Dalit women on agriculture loans, land ownership tax etc.

Violence against Dalit women: Protection and access to justice

- Women and girls affected by caste-based discrimination are particularly vulnerable to various forms of sexual violence, forced and ritual prostitution, trafficking, domestic violence and punitive violence when they seek justice for crimes committed. Measures should be taken to increase protection from these crimes and to tackle impunity and discrimination in access to justice. Such measures can include police and judicial training and monitoring, legal assistance for prosecution of crimes, strengthening laws against domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, awareness campaigns to help prevent exploitation, and investing resources into education for women and girls affected by caste-based discrimination. The State must also effectively implement measures to eradicate harmful traditional practices.

Separate Bench or Special Court to hear Dalit cases

- A separate bench in the Supreme Court or a special court to hear the cases related to Dalits should be established. The National Dalit Commission should be given a constitutional status while the Dalit Development Committee should oversee cases of violence against women

Social rehabilitation, reintegration and dignity of Dalit women

- The state should take results-oriented steps to address serious concerns and continue efforts in the campaigns for social rehabilitation, reintegration, dignity and improving the lives of Dalit women living in inhuman conditions due to social taboos connected to inter-caste marriage and issues such as dowry, forced and low-paid labor and witchery.

Citizenship through the mother

- Citizenship through the mother should be ensured to resolve issues related to the family identities of Dalit women and children

Acronyms and Abbreviations

BPFA	: Beijing Platform for Action
CA	: Constitution Assembly
CBS	: Central Bureau of Statistics
CEDAW	: Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	: Convention on the Rights of the Child
CWIN	: Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre
FEDO	: Feminist Dalit Organization
NDHS	: Nepal Demographic Health Survey
NGO	: Non Governmental Organization
NLSS	: Nepal Living Standards Survey
UN	: United Nation
UNDP	: United Nations Development Programme
WOREC	: Women's Rehabilitation Center

Annex

Cluster and analysis of issues and recommendations from UN institutions on Dalit women in Nepal

Summary

- Special Rapporteurs that have addressed the plight of Dalit women in Nepal include; the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women ([2012](#)) and the Special Rapporteur on Racism ([2011](#))
- Treaty Bodies that have addressed the plight of Dalit women in Nepal include; CEDAW ([2011](#)), CESCR ([2008](#), [2014](#)) and CRC (OP [2012](#))

Issues/Recommendations from Special Rapporteurs on Dalit women in Nepal

[Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Rashida Manjoo](#)

Thematic report on gender-related killings:

In Nepal, particularly in the southern Terai region, elderly women, widows, destitute women and women of low caste are often targeted and deprived of their property rights or victimized to settle a personal vendetta. [A/HRC/20/16, 2012](#)

[Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Githu Muigai](#)

Women and girls face multiple discrimination, including through sexual exploitation or forced prostitution (A/HRC/7/19 and Corr. 1, para. 71). Women are socio-economically positioned at the bottom of the caste, gender and class hierarchy, and face violence in their family and communities, and from actors in other castes. Women in Dalit Communities in Asia are subjected to physical abuse, sexual harassment, trafficking and sexual violence (E/CN.4/Sub.2/2001/16, para. 45). Violations of land and property rights also affect these women (A/HRC/10/7/Add.1, para. 52), who suffer disproportionately in terms of health care, education, and subsistence wages. Dalit women in India and Nepal make up the majority of landless labourers and scavengers. In Nepal, badis are viewed as a prostitution caste. Many Dalit women and girls, including badis, are trafficked into sex work. [A/HRC/17/40, 2011](#)

Issues/Recommendations from CEDAW and other treaty body reviews on Dalit women in Nepal

Violence against women

- The persistence of sexual exploitation, in particular among the Dalit community. [CEDAW Concluding Observations Nepal 2011](#)
- Dalit women are victims of multiple discrimination as they are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, trafficking and various forms of violence, including domestic violence. The State is to take specific and targeted measures to protect the rights of Dalit women. [CESCR Concluding Observations Nepal 2014](#)
- The Committee is concerned about the prevalence of gender-based violence, including domestic and sexual violence, in particular among the Dalit and other disadvantaged groups [CESCR Concluding Observations Nepal 2014](#)

Education

- Strengthen its efforts to achieve universal provision of quality education for girls at each level of the education system in urban, rural and remote areas, provide access to education to girls with disabilities through improvement of infrastructures and provision of support systems, with special attention to girls from Dalit, Indigenous and other disadvantaged. [CEDAW Concluding Observations Nepal 2011](#)

Political life

- the very low representation of women, in particular Dalit and indigenous women, in high-level decision-making positions, the public service, the judiciary and the diplomatic service, in the National Human Rights Commission and at the local level. [CEDAW Concluding Observations Nepal 2011](#)
- Establish concrete goals and timetables so as to accelerate the increase in the representation of women, including Dalit and indigenous women, in elected and appointed bodies in all areas of public life from local level, including at the Village Development Committee level, to national and diplomatic levels. [CEDAW Concluding Observations Nepal 2011](#)
- The Committee urges the State party to ensure that in the Constitutional process currently underway, all sectors of society, including disadvantaged and marginalized groups, in particular the Dalit, the Madhesi and indigenous communities, and especially women within these groups, are represented in decision-making bodies at all levels. It recommends that concrete and active efforts be made to promote the participation of these groups in the Constituent Assembly, which, following the election of its members in 2007, will embark on the drafting of a new Constitution. [CESCR Concluding Observations Nepal 2008](#)
- The Committee recommends that the State party increase the representation of women, including Dalit and indigenous women, in decision-making positions in public and political affairs. The Committee further recommends that the State party address obstacles to the career advancement of women through temporary special measures and education of men and women about equal career opportunities. [CESCR Concluding Observations Nepal 2014](#)

Harmful practices

- the Committee expressed concern over harmful practices such as *deuki* (offering girls to deities to fulfil religious obligations); *jhumas* (offering young girls to Buddhist monasteries for performing religious functions); *kamlari*, (offering girls for domestic work to the families of landlords), and *badi* (widespread practice of prostitution among the Badi caste) which still persists in the State party and constitute serious breaches in the State party's obligations under article 2 (a) of the OP" (para 27 in the Concluding Observations). [CRC OP Concluding Observations Nepal 2012](#)
- It is particularly concerned that women and girls, in particular of Dalit origin, continue to suffer from harmful traditional practices such as forced and early marriages, accusations of *boxi* (witchcraft), *deuki* tradition (offering girls to deities to fulfil religious obligations), *jhumas* (offering young girls to Buddhist monasteries for performing religious functions, *kamlari* (offering girls for domestic work to families of landlords) *chapaudi* (isolating menstruating girls), and *badi* (widespread practice of prostitution). (art. 3, 10) (a) effectively implement measures to eradicate harmful traditional practices; (b) reinforce its awareness-raising campaigns among the population and in particular in districts and social groups where such practices are prevalent, reiterating that these practices are violating human rights and that they have long lasting negative effects. (c) enforce its Domestic Violence Act of 2009, investigate cases of harmful traditional practices and punish those responsible; (d) provide protection and rehabilitation to victims; (e) expedite the adoption of the Bill prepared by the National Women's Commission to criminalize all kinds of harmful practices, as well as of the National Strategy to End Child Marriages. [CESCR Concluding Observations Nepal 2014](#)

General

- the continued strong caste discrimination, particularly towards the Dalit as well as the prevailing legal and de facto discrimination against women and girls” (para. 21 in the Concluding Observations). [CRC OP Concluding Observations Nepal 2012](#)
- The Committee is deeply concerned about the multiple forms of discrimination against disadvantaged groups of women such as Dalit and indigenous women, widows and women with disabilities. [CEDAW Concluding Observations Nepal 2011](#)
- The Committee urges the State party to prioritize combating multiple forms of discrimination against women from various disadvantaged groups through the collection of data on the situation of these women, and the adoption of legal provisions and comprehensive programs, including public education and awareness raising campaigns involving the mass media as well as community and religious leaders, to combat multiple discriminations. [CEDAW Concluding Observations Nepal 2011](#)