



# IMPROVING WORKFORCE DIVERSITY WITHIN THE UNCT: A good practice from Nepal

## Declaration of Joint Principles on Workforce Diversity

Eighteen members of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) committed themselves to improving workforce diversity through a Declaration of Joint Principles of Workforce Diversity signed in January 2010. The Declaration seeks to address discrimination based on gender, caste, ethnicity, language or religion, through the principle of non-discrimination and equality by improving workforce diversity in the staffing of the United Nations in Nepal. It also seeks to follow the spirit and provisions of the Interim Constitution of Nepal.<sup>2</sup>

**The Goal is to improve access of male and female candidates from the widest possible background, especially from historically excluded groups and regions, to professional opportunities within the UN system in Nepal.**

## Anchored in human rights principles and the Interim Constitution of Nepal

*The UNCT in Nepal is committed to the human rights principle of non-discrimination and equality. It has developed a unique initiative to improve the representation of women, minorities, and disadvantaged indigenous peoples' in the UN workforce.*

The UNCT not only prioritises programmatic interventions to address the historical exclusion and marginalisation of communities in Nepal, but also institutes measures to improve participation and representation of individuals from such communities in the staffing of the United Nations.<sup>1</sup>

The Declaration lays out key steps to improve workforce diversity through the following measures:

- Developing and implementing recruitment and performance assessment practices sensitive to candidate backgrounds;
- Creating and supporting opportunities for access to internships and other professional training programmes with a focus on historically excluded groups;
- Building awareness and sensitivity to work force diversity among UN managers and staff;
- Reviewing on a semi-annual basis, through disaggregated staff composition surveys, the status of workforce diversity at various job levels in each organisation;
- Proactively sharing useful experiences, lessons and best practices emerging from workforce diversity; and
- Engaging partner organisations to explore and practice new ways to increase and enhance diversity within UN-supported projects and partner organisations.

<sup>1/</sup> Historically excluded and marginalised groups in Nepal include Dalits, disadvantaged Adivasi/Janajatis, Madeshis, religious minorities, women, and women from these communities.

<sup>2/</sup> Under the right to equality, Article 13(2) states that "No discrimination shall be made against any citizen in the application of general laws on grounds of religion, race, sex, caste, tribe, origin, language or ideological conviction or any of these". 13(3) further states that "provided that nothing shall be deemed to prevent the making of special provisions by law for the protection, empowerment or advancement of the interests of women, Dalit, indigenous ethnic tribes, Madeshis or peasants, labourers or those who belong to a class which is economically, socially or culturally backward and children, the aged, disabled and those who are physically or mentally incapacitated".

# IMPLEMENTING THE DECLARATION: Steps taken by the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator's Office and UNCT

Since the signing of the Declaration in January 2010, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator's Office (RCHCO), and individual organisations of the UN Country Team in Nepal have undertaken the following initiatives:

- **Focal points:** The RCHCO appointed a Social Inclusion Action Group (SIAG) Coordinator within his Office to oversee and support the implementation of the Declaration. The SIAG Coordinator is also supported by Human Resources departments and diversity focal points in organisations who have signed the Declaration on a range of workforce diversity issues.
- **Dissemination of information/vacancies:** The RCHCO maintains a mailing list of socially excluded groups and organisations which it regularly updates and shares with other UN organisations. The SIAG Coordinator transmits vacancy announcements through this mailing list and other methods of outreach to the widest possible range of networks, individuals, and organisations from historically marginalised groups.
- **Staff Database:** An internal UN staff database has been established and is regularly updated to analyse workforce diversity statistics. This informs the RCHCO and heads of UN agencies in their discussions on further measures to support diversity in the UN workforce in Nepal.
- **UN Joint Traineeship programme:** The RCHCO launched a UN Joint Traineeship programme in April 2011 which provides professional learning opportunities for candidates from socially excluded communities for a period of 11 months. The goal is to enable them to improve their professional skills and competencies through access to mentoring programs and practical training in a UN environment on a range of issues. The criteria includes: 1) Bachelor's degree; 2) belonging to a socially excluded group; 3) passion for work in the development sector; 4) appreciation of core UN values; 5) strong commitment to learning and willingness to work with others; 6) basic communication skills (oral and written) in English and Nepali languages; and 7) a commitment to completing the 11 month traineeship. The first batch of thirty one trainees was selected in April 2011. They were hosted by the Resident Coordinator's Office, FAO, OHCHR, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNHCR and WHO.

## Individual UN organisation initiatives: UNDP-Nepal

UNDP created a task force in 2006 to examine workforce diversity. The task force report revealed that 78 percent of the total staff came from only five ethnic groups, while the Nepal census recognised some 102 ethnic groups. Data on staff composition further revealed that women were concentrated in support positions, and men from particular ethnic groups/communities dominated professional positions. In response UNDP-Nepal developed a policy and strategy to diversify its work force. This included specific statements in vacancy announcements which especially encouraged "women, Dalits, Janajatis, Madeshis, and persons with disabilities and other minorities" to apply. Vacancy announcements had to be disseminated as widely and broadly as possible through media, civil society, UNDP field and project offices. An administrative requirement was put in place for equal composition of male and females in recruitment committees.

Applicants were then categorised into three priority groups.<sup>3</sup> Affirmative action was applied to applicants in the first two groups. The number of years of experience was lowered by 2 to 3 years for project positions. Candidates were also assessed for their potential to advance in the job and provided capacity building support in the first six months of employment. At least one question on gender inequality and social exclusion formed part of the interview process.

3/ First group : Madeshi, Dalits, persons from religious minorities, disadvantaged Janajatis (indigenous peoples), and women with disabilities

Second group: Madeshi, Dalit, persons from religious minorities, disadvantaged Janajatis, men with disabilities, and women from Brahman/Chhetri or advantaged Janajati groups

Third group: advantaged Janajati groups (Newars, Gurungs, Thakalis) and male Hill Brahman/Chhetri

# IMPLEMENTING THE DECLARATION: Steps taken by the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator's Office and UNCT

## Individual UN organisation initiatives: OHCHR-Nepal

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal (OHCHR-Nepal) created a social inclusion and non-discrimination Working Group in 2006 comprised of senior management and a social inclusion focal point. In addition to developing OHCHR's thematic work, the Working Group sought to improve staff diversity. All staff was trained on the principles of non-discrimination and equality. OHCHR human resources disseminated vacancy announcements in English and local languages widely.

Over time OHCHR developed a full program of work on Anti-Discrimination and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It applied the same policy as UNDP in Nepal since the recruitment of its national staff is subject to UNDP rules and procedures. Through this initiative, OHCHR has been successful in bringing individuals from Dalit, Madhesi, and indigenous communities into professional and administrative support positions within its national staff.

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## IMPACT

**The diversity initiative has increased staff capacity and understanding of discrimination and marginalisation. This understanding is promoting inclusion and a greater sensitivity to the importance of diversity among staff recruited by the UN system in Nepal.**

**Since the signing of the Declaration of Joint principles in January 2010 there has been some increase in representation of individuals from disadvantaged Janajati groups, and religious minorities in the UN Country Team in Nepal.**

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Diversity programme trainees, Nepal

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