



# NGS PRECEEDING REPORT 2024

**Strengthening Subnational Governance  
for Inclusive Economic Development**

## Organizers



## Organizing Partners



## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Governance Lab (Govlab), an initiative of the Daayitwa Abhiyaan continues its journey in bringing together researchers, policy makers and various other stakeholders who have a major role in sustainable development of Nepal. National Governance Symposium (NGS) , initiated in 2022, is one of our efforts to create a platform for constructive discussions, networking and knowledge dissemination among national and international policy researchers, advocates and decision makers. It's a privilege to have organized this symposium for the third consecutive year, especially with a growing number of stakeholders keen to be a part of this and contribute in their own ways.

This year's NGS was held under the theme **"Strengthening Subnational Governance for Inclusive Economic Development."** The two-day event featured over six panel sessions facilitated by researchers, governance experts, and practitioners. Participants focused on sharing knowledge and ideas aimed at enhancing local governance as a pathway to Nepal's prosperity. This report seeks to present the key insights and outcomes from the sessions and highlights innovative practices adopted by various stakeholders at both national and local levels to promote the country's economic development.

The success of this year's National Governance Symposium (NGS) was made possible through the collective efforts of Govlab and the Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC). We extend our sincere gratitude to NASC for their invaluable support in coordinating the panel sessions, facilitating the participation of attendees from across the country, and, most importantly, for their warm hospitality. Govlab is also deeply grateful to the institutions and individuals who contributed as knowledge and organizing partners. Their time, expertise, and commitment were instrumental in the symposium's success. Finally, heartfelt thanks go to the dedicated team at Daayitwa Abhiyaan, whose tireless work behind the scenes ensured the smooth execution and overall success of NGS 2024.

Sincerely,

Nisha Onta, PhD  
Founder & Executive Director



Faces behind NGS 2024: Daayitwa Abhiyaan Team

# TABLE OF CONTENT

I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. OBJECTIVES.....	1
III. PARTNERS.....	2
IV. DAY 1 .....	3
KEYNOTES REMARKS.....	3-5
SESSION 1 .....	6
SESSION 2 .....	7
SESSION 3 .....	8
CLOSING REMARKS : DAY 1.....	9
OPENING REMARKS : DAY 2.....	10
KEYNOTE REMARKS .....	11
KEYNOTE REMARKS .....	11
SPECIAL REMARKS .....	12
SESSION 4 .....	13-14
SESSION 5 .....	15-16
KEYNOTE PANEL .....	17
CLOSING REMARKS .....	18



## I. INTRODUCTION

The National Governance Symposium (NGS) is an initiative of Governance Lab (Govlab) at Daayitwa Abhiyaan (DA) since 2022. It brings together government representatives, the private sector, civil society, and academia to engage in discussions on governance innovations and inclusive development in Nepal. In its third year of setting the trend, the NGS 2024 was successfully held on December 19 and 20, 2024, with the theme "Strengthening Subnational Governance for Inclusive Economic Development."

This year the symposium was conducted in collaboration with Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC) and was supported by government partners including the OPMCM, MoF, and NPC. The presence of the MuAN and NARMIN President also ensured that the symposium brought together experts representing the voices of local government, who shared their insights and perspectives on innovations, inclusion, local governance, and economic development to help advance Nepal's governance landscape.

The goal of NGS 2024 was to promote an enabling environment for the development of a strong, effective and inclusive sub-national government in Nepal. This was a platform to bring together stakeholders from various national and local governments and create an environment conducive for conversations and knowledge sharing which would give some outputs on ideas to accelerate economic development.

Nepal's transition to a federal democratic republic in 2015 with power devolved across federal, provincial, and local governments aimed to restructure historical inequalities, empower marginalized communities, and enhance public service delivery by bringing governance closer to the people. However, the effectiveness of this transformation depends heavily on strengthening subnational governance systems. Robust economic governance at the subnational level is essential for inclusive economic development, enabling regions to address disparities, create opportunities, and contribute to national prosperity. NGS24 aimed at delving deeper into these issues by bringing together key stakeholders working in the frontline to empower subnational entities as key drivers for inclusive economic development.

## II. OBJECTIVES

Organised in collaboration with NASC, wherein Daayithwa and Nepal Leadership Academy were the organizing partners, and OPMCM, MoF, & NPC the government partners, NGS 2024 had clear objectives outlined as under:

- Enhance Coordination Between Federal, Provincial and Local Government
- Strengthen Capacity of Sub-National Governments
- Promote Economic Governance that fosters Inclusive and Sustainable Development

### III. PARTNERS

The two-day event, consisting of six sessions filled with productive discussions, would not have been achievable without the collective efforts and support of our partners. Governance Lab is grateful to the following partners for their assistance and support.

#### GOVERNMENT PARTNERS



**Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers**



**Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies**



**Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration**



**Ministry of Finance**

#### CO-ORGANIZER



#### ORGANIZING PARTNERS



NEPAL  
LEADERSHIP  
ACADEMY

#### KNOWLEDGE PARTNER



YoungInnovations

Federalism & Localization Centre

## IV. DAY 1

### INAUGURAL SESSION

#### WELCOME REMARKS

##### Dr. Pukar Malla, Chairperson, Governance Lab

Dr. Pukar Malla welcomed the guests and highlighted how symposiums as this play a vital role in building a cohesive environment that addresses efforts of the government and other stakeholders to enhance governance reforms in Nepal. With the negativity and distrust causing barriers to positive governance reforms, NGS stands as a platform to showcase positive government initiatives. He emphasized how crucial the role of subnational governance and evidence-based policymaking is in fostering inclusivity.

He gave an outline of how the symposium was structured into six sessions with presentations, discussions, and roadmaps all aimed at fulfilling the objectives of enhancing subnational governance for the country's economic prosperity.

He shared how the event promoted collaboration across government levels, both at federal and subnational levels and advocated for further collaborative approaches between them to achieve larger victories. He emphasized on starting with small actions and prioritizing evidence based policymaking for transformative regulation systems.



Dr. Pukar Malla

#### KEYNOTE REMARKS

**Hon. Ms. Sapana Pradhan Malla**, Justice, Supreme Court of Nepal, Former member of the Constituent Assembly.

Hon. Ms. Sapana Pradhan Malla highlighted how Nepal has transitioned in terms of policy reforms since the reinstatement of its constitution. She emphasised how our constitution highlights the critical need for foundational principles such as inclusivity and federalism which are crucial in shaping effective governance frameworks. With these, comes the need of embracing diversity for reduction of social and economic inequalities. She highlighted how inclusivity was presented in the constitution not only as a policy objective but as a fundamental human right, with attention given to both its empowering potential and the challenges it may entail.

She highlighted a key focus on the equitable redistribution of resources to ensure fair access to opportunities and services across different communities. The use of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators was proposed as a reliable means to measure progress toward inclusivity and equity at the community level.

Additionally, she highlighted how the focus should now be for greater gender equity in leadership positions, emphasizing the need to dismantle systemic barriers that hinder women and marginalized groups from advancing. Nepal's pioneering legislative action to criminalize marital rape was cited as a landmark achievement and a model of progressive reform in the pursuit of inclusive governance.



Hon. Ms. Sapana Pradhan Malla

**SPECIAL REMARKS****Mr. Anjan Shrestha, Senior Vice President, Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce & Industries (FNCCI)**

Mr. Anjan Shrestha

Mr. Anjan Shrestha outlined the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry's (FNCCI) role in supporting local-level governance during periods without elected bodies at the local level. He raised concerns regarding the government's insufficient attention to the private sector, with a call for more inclusive policies that prioritize gender equity within the business environment. It was shared how this will help in enhancing the perception of Nepal's private sector by the international community, including SAARC countries. He highlighted successful initiatives such as *Ek Gaun Ek Utpaadan* and *Ek Jilla Ek Utpaadan* as examples of effective collaboration and localized economic development. He emphasized the urgent need to build and strengthen trust between the government and the private sector to foster more cooperative and sustainable progress.

He concluded his remarks by appreciating the recent legislative progress within FNCCI, particularly the passage of a bill that strengthens the inclusivity of women in its governance structure, presenting it as a positive step toward broader representation and equity in the private sector.

**SPECIAL REMARKS****Mr. Ek Narayan Aryal, Chief Secretary, Government of Nepal**

Mr. Ek Narayan Aryal praised the collaboration between Daayitwa and NASC, highlighting their role in promoting civic engagement and supporting local development. He appreciated the government's adoption of similar models and stressed the importance of positive national initiatives like "Happy Nepali, Prosperous Nepal" amidst growing public negativity. Aryal emphasized multi-level governance and the need for stronger coordination among government tiers. He acknowledged legal contradictions and advocated for evidence-based policy reforms, noting that eight out of eleven proposed legal amendments have been implemented. He stressed the importance of digitalization for government efficiency and reform, called for inclusive economic transformation, and urged the use of national products in public offices. He concluded by encouraging youth fellows to actively engage in national development.



Mr. Ek Narayan Aryal

**iii) Chief Guest : Rt. Hon. Mr. Devraj Ghimire, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Government of Nepal.**

Rt. Hon. Mr. Devraj Ghimire

Rt. Hon. Mr Devraj Ghimire extended his best wishes for the successful and fruitful completion of the symposium. Reflecting on the ten years since the promulgation of Nepal's constitution, he acknowledged the ongoing and necessary discourse surrounding the improvement of existing government laws.

He emphasized the distinct responsibilities held by the three tiers of government—federal, provincial, and local—each playing a crucial role in ensuring long-term national development. He stressed that inclusive participation from all sectors of society is essential when evaluating and enhancing the effectiveness of governmental legislation.

Speaking from his position as a government official, he reaffirmed his commitment to supporting legal and procedural reforms. In this context, he highlighted the valuable collaboration between Governance Lab and the government itself, particularly in the area of leadership training

He noted that events such as this symposium are instrumental in informing and strengthening government operations, especially in policy formulation and capacity-building across different levels of governance.

Hon. Ghimire concluded his address by underscoring the necessity of coordinated efforts among various organizations and levels of government. He strongly advocated for evidence-based policymaking, emphasizing that such an approach provides a reliable foundation for determining policy priorities and identifying areas in need of reform.

**Program Chair: Dr. Rajan Khanal, Executive Director,  
Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC)**

Dr. Rajan Khanal began by acknowledging the collaborative efforts between Governance Lab and NASC that led to the successful organization of the symposium. Emphasizing the significance of this symposium, he noted that it was the result of joint efforts among multiple organizations committed to governance reform and policy innovation. He expressed his gratitude to the dignitaries on the dais for their insightful remarks and the valuable recommendations they shared. Dr. Khanal highlighted the central theme of inclusivity and underscored its importance in the context of governance and policy-making. He reflected on practices from the United States, particularly the strong collaboration between policy researchers and government bodies, and suggested that Nepal could draw useful lessons from such Western models. He stressed the need to critically examine the pros and cons of federal governance structures as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen good governance in Nepal.



Dr. Rajan Khanal

Furthermore, he called for the conclusions and new policy recommendations emerging from the National Governance Symposium (NGS) to be formally submitted to the government. These outcomes, he argued, should be used to streamline policy execution and improve public administration. He identified organizations such as Daayitwa, NASC, the National Planning Commission (NPC), and Governance Lab as key partners capable of assisting the government in refining and delivering well-researched, effective policies.

In closing, Mr. Khanal reiterated that while federal systems have both advantages and challenges, informed dialogue and collaboration between institutions are crucial. By adopting evidence-based practices and learning from global experiences, Nepal can move toward more inclusive and efficient governance.

## SESSION 1 STRENGTHENING CAPACITY OF SUBNATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

The session on “Strengthening Capacity of Subnational Governments” delved into the challenges and opportunities faced by Nepal’s local and provincial governments in fostering effective governance. Speakers highlighted key issues such as weak institutional capacities, lack of resources, and poor coordination among bureaucrats, representatives, and government tiers. Chiri Babu Maharjan, Mayor Lalitpur Municipality emphasized Lalitpur’s leadership in governance innovations, advocating for long-term economic visions to build public trust. Mr. Hari Lamsal, Principal Secretary, Office of Chief Minister and Council of Ministers, Bagmati Province called for evaluating federal systems and improving collaboration among institutions to address systemic inefficiencies. Ms. Lila Devi Gadtaula, Former Chief Secretary, Government of Nepal criticized outdated bureaucratic recruitment processes, advocating for comprehensive training and transparent service delivery mechanisms.

Mr. Satar Ansari, Executive Director, Province Research & Training Center, Madhesh Province shed light on Madhesh Province’s unique challenges, including high population density and marginalized communities, emphasizing the need for tailored capacity-building programs and behavioral reforms among bureaucrats. The session concluded with Mr. Bharat Mani Subedi, Secretary, Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration stressing the importance of federal government introspection and competency-building at all governance levels to ensure inclusive and sustainable development. The discussions underscored the urgent need for reforms in bureaucratic systems, institutional coordination, and resource distribution to strengthen subnational governance and achieve economic prosperity.

The session began with a presentation by Mr. Tulasi Sharan Sigdel, Senior Director of Studies, Nepal Administrative Staff College who highlighted the initiatives of NASC in enhancing the capacity of the public sector. He emphasized how collaboration and communication among the various levels of government is the key to sustainable economic prosperity and good governance. The panel session was moderated by Mr. Basanta Raj Sigdel, Senior Director of Studies, NASC.



## SESSION 2

In a dynamic panel moderated by Dr. Prativa Pandey, CEO at Herveda Botanicals, government and private sector leaders came together to discuss pathways for accelerating rural entrepreneurship and employment in Nepal. The session highlighted the experiences and insights of key stakeholders, including local government representatives, provincial and central government officials, and private sector leaders.

Ms. Bimala Aryal, Mayor of Sunuwal Municipality outlined targeted municipal initiatives such as the “One Enterprise, One Product” and “One Forest, One Enterprise” models, which focus on leveraging local resources and empowering women and youth through skill development and specialized entrepreneurship training. However, she noted that challenges persist in branding and commercialization, calling for stronger market linkages and quality assurance strategies.

Mr. Tanka Nath Ghimire, a returnee entrepreneur and owner of Ranimahal Fishing Resort, shared his personal journey of overcoming infrastructural and societal barriers in rural Nepal to build a successful hospitality venture. He stressed the need for reforms in rural lending practices, recommending that financial institutions prioritize the viability of business ideas over collateral. He also advocated for streamlined bureaucratic processes and policy incentives tailored to rural entrepreneurship.



Dr. Sharan Kumar Pandey, Secretary at the Ministry of Industry, Agriculture, and Cooperatives, emphasized the provincial government’s efforts to shift agriculture from a subsistence model to a commercial enterprise through farmer cooperatives, technology adoption, and value chain development. He highlighted ongoing training, financial schemes, and quality enhancement programs aimed at improving both productivity and market competitiveness.

From the private sector, Ms. Juna Mathema, Chairperson of FNCCI’s Startup and Innovation Forum, outlined FNCCI’s support mechanisms for rural startups, including tax incentives, advocacy for flexible loan terms, and tools for feasibility assessments and investment planning. She stressed the importance of integrating rural entrepreneurs into broader industrial value chains and ensuring sustained access to finance, markets, and mentorship.

Concluding the session, Mr. Krishna Bahadur Raut, Secretary from the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Supplies underscored the central government’s role in simplifying business registration, supporting domestic products, and enabling access to international markets. He reaffirmed the government’s commitment to infrastructural development and cross-sectoral collaboration to foster a conducive environment for rural enterprises.

A recurring theme across the panel was the need for stronger public-private partnerships (PPPs), integrated policy frameworks, and inclusive financing models to unlock rural Nepal’s entrepreneurial potential. The discussion reflected a shared commitment among stakeholders to collaborate across federal, provincial, and local levels to drive sustainable economic growth and create meaningful employment opportunities in rural areas.

### SESSION 3 : MAYORS' ROUNDTABLE - LOCAL GOVERNANCE FOR INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The session commenced with Bishnu Adhikari, Governance Director at The Asia Foundation's presentation where he shared how the three levels of government—federal, provincial, and local were established to ensure an equitable, fair, and inclusive division of power and resources. While this federal structure introduces new opportunities for decentralized governance, Adhikari highlighted challenges such as unclear functional roles among the levels, insufficient resources for local governments, and conflicting laws that undermine local authority. Despite these issues, significant progress has been made in political and administrative coordination. The session then led to a panel discussion moderated by Ms. Sama Thapa, Associate Editor, API Television.

Bimala Aryal, Mayor of Sunwal Municipality, in her discussion about Sunwal Municipality's collaboration with Daayitwa, showcased how over 100 local firms received training, workshops, and monetary support, illustrating the empowerment of local governments as essential for national progress. Aryal also raised concerns about provincial governments sometimes bypassing local authorities in decision-making, limiting local governments' rights.

Bimala Rai, Mayor of Halesi Tuwachung Municipality, stressed the importance of inclusive planning, incorporating cultural, ecological, and geographic factors, and cited the seven-step planning process to ensure community participation and preserve local heritage, referencing the challenges faced by the Majhi community.

Ran Bahadur Rai, Mayor of Suryodaya Municipality, shared his experience in utilizing specialized human resources to develop a revenue action plan aligned with Sustainable Development Goals. His long-term vision includes completing over 700 road projects, emphasizing strategic resource management.

Aani Kumar Syangbo highlighted the need for well-researched budget planning and grassroots skill development to achieve economic prosperity. He underlined that development depends on multiple factors, including education, health, and social cohesion, rather than budgets alone. Syangbo also noted agricultural initiatives in Rong Rural Municipality aimed at retaining youth through employment and branding projects like Gandruk production.

Madhu Kumar Marasini, Secretary of the National Planning Commission, concluded that local governments form the foundation for Nepal's prosperity. He advocated for contextual and demand-driven development that integrates culture, history, geography, and ecosystem considerations, with greater incentives and strengthened local governance as key to the nation's economic future.



## CLOSING REMARKS : DAY 1

The first day of National Governance Symposium 2024 concluded with emphasis on the importance of collaboration, inclusivity, and clear policies to foster sustainable economic growth and effective governance. Ms. Darshana Shrestha, First Vice President, Federation of Women Entrepreneurs' Association of Nepal (FWEAN) highlighted the need to support women entrepreneurs and marginalized groups through financial instruments and capacity development. She stressed the importance of focusing on key sectors like agriculture, tourism, and entrepreneurship, while advocating for well-defined and flexible policies to empower all levels of governance.

Mr. Kalanidhi Devkota, Executive Director, Municipal Association of Nepal (MUAN) pointed out the contradictions between systems and training procedures, underlining the necessity of promoting effective service delivery and implementing financial federalism to strengthen local governance.

Dr. Kiran Rupakhetee, Joint Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers (OPMCM) brought an optimistic perspective, sharing inspirational quotes and linking societal issues to economic growth through impactful data. He highlighted that reducing child marriage could boost Nepal's GDP by 8% and that every \$1 invested in nutrition yields \$16 in return, emphasizing the economic benefits of addressing social challenges. Recognizing the progress at the local level, he encouraged stakeholders to maintain momentum and continue on the path of sustainable development. The session reinforced the need for collaboration, innovative policies, and inclusivity to ensure equitable and impactful governance across all levels in Nepal.

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## DAY 2 : OPENING REMARKS



Mr. Susit Dhakal, Executive Director of Daayitwa and Leadership Coaching Advisor at the Nepal Leadership Academy, opened his remarks by thanking the emcee, the dais, and the audience. Reflecting on Nepal's progress over the past decade, he highlighted significant achievements such as the promulgation of the constitution and the country's transition into federalism. He underscored the urgent need to create employment opportunities for youth and to harness Nepal's potential through various economic avenues, particularly by leveraging the subnational levels of government.

Mr. Dhakal emphasized Daayitwa's decade-long commitment to promoting employment generation and evidence-based policymaking. He elaborated on the Daayitwa Nepal Public Service Fellowship, which supports the formulation and execution of effective public policies. Commenting on the relevance of the day's sessions, he stressed their timeliness and importance for fostering inclusive economic development.

He expressed hope that the discussions would be interactive and participatory, leading to practical solutions and forward-looking prospects. Mr. Dhakal concluded by asserting that the present moment calls for actionable solutions and reminded participants that "Hope lives in Nepal"—a sentiment that, he noted, should shape the session's ultimate message. He reiterated the critical role of evidence-based policymaking in enhancing good governance and employment, and the indispensable role of subnational governments in this effort.



## KEYNOTE REMARKS



Ms. Laxmi Devi Pandey, President of the National Association of Rural Municipalities in Nepal (NARMIN) and the first woman elected as the Chair of Hupsekot Rural Municipality, delivered the keynote address from 9:52 AM to 10:08 AM. She began by expressing her gratitude to the dais, the organizing team, and the audience. Her speech centered on the critical themes of inclusivity, character development, and economic progress within the framework of Nepal's federal system.

Ms. Pandey emphasized that federalism marks a historic foundation for inclusive economic development but cautioned that inclusivity alone does not define the entirety of the approach. She advocated for a holistic model at the ward level—one that incorporates marginalized and disadvantaged communities in decision-making and leadership. Reflecting on the two election phases since federalism, she noted the first as a period of learning and the second as a time for action and implementation.

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She highlighted the pivotal role of both state and local levels in undertaking fundamental developmental work, underscoring the need for smooth leadership transitions, capacity building, and empowerment at the grassroots. Ms. Pandey stressed that inclusive character development has already encouraged broader participation at local levels and that Nepal has sufficient internal resources to drive its own economic upliftment.

Key principles outlined in her address included equity- and equality-based governance, comprehensive decision-making, and a strong commitment to collaboration and cooperation across all levels. She called for inclusive leadership, particularly increased involvement of women, and urged that leadership styles and their impact be analyzed not to challenge but to inform future progress. According to her, everyone holds an equal role in driving inclusive development, and the practices at local levels should serve as learning models.

Ms. Pandey concluded that inclusive character development, an equity-based approach, and a collaborative governance system are essential to the success of subnational power decentralization and the sustainable advancement of grassroots communities.

## SPECIAL REMARKS



Dr. Ram Prasad Ghimire, Secretary at the Ministry of Finance, delivered insightful remarks on the critical role of local governance in driving inclusive national development. He emphasized that the advancement of local levels is not merely beneficial but essential for the overall inclusive growth of the nation. Stressing the foundational philosophy behind federalism, he highlighted that it was adopted to integrate citizens historically excluded from mainstream development and to directly address grassroots issues.

Dr. Ghimire underlined the importance of a shift in mindset toward equality and equity, noting that service enhancement must begin with accurate need assessments rather than blanket distribution. He raised a series of thought-provoking questions, challenging both policymakers and citizens to reflect: Are we merely focused on distributing resources, or are we ensuring their effective use by the right people at the right time? Are we fulfilling our duties selflessly, or are they politically motivated? While we claim our rights, are we equally diligent about our responsibilities?

He pointed out that a strong foundation is crucial for sustainable structures and warned against the exploitation of resources without proper analysis. According to him, long-term, holistic planning is the key to development, and collaborative federalism must be genuinely cooperative to be fruitful. Acknowledging existing shortcomings in governance, Dr. Ghimire called for reflection and reform, emphasizing that capacity development goes far beyond infrastructure and includes knowledge, leadership, and strategy.

He noted significant initial gaps—such as the lack of local-level data at the start of federalism—and advocated for revisiting and refining resource allocation formulas, eliminating dysfunctional structures, and clarifying authority agendas. Dr. Ghimire also underscored the need for stronger understanding between youth and government bodies, arguing that deeper awareness of policy processes is necessary to dispel myths and foster trust.

He expressed concern over the role of social media in widening the gap in understanding between the state and citizens, urging investment in proper education to close this divide. Addressing pressing challenges—unemployment, economic stagnation, and youth retention—he concluded by asserting that trust-building and the cultivation of civic enthusiasm are fundamental to strengthening Nepal's economy.

*"The role of federalism in uplifting the citizens, providing them mainstream services, along with transformation of learning into practices is challenging but instrumental in a holistic development of a nation." – Dr. Ram Prasad Ghimire*

## SESSION 4: WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL ELECTION: INSIGHTS INTO WOMEN'S NETWORKS, COALITIONS, AND GENDER BIASES

This panel brought together distinguished experts, politicians, and researchers to explore the current status, challenges, and future prospects of women's participation in local governance in Nepal. Dr. Prabin B. Khadka of *Inclusion Economics Nepal at Governance Lab (IEN)* and Ms. Pratigya Neupane of NARMIN opened the session by presenting evidence-based insights on women's political engagement, and highlighted key research questions: Is federalism truly enabling women's inclusion in politics? What are the barriers that hinder their participation? And what interventions can address these barriers?

Dr. Khadka presented evidences from research done by Inclusion Economics Nepal at Governance Lab. While the number of women in political positions has grown—from just 18 women compared to 753 men in 2007, to 69 women and 568 men in 2017—the overall increase remains inadequate. Despite constitutional guarantees, true political inclusion is hindered by gatekeeping within party structures. When women are provided with information, incentives, and encouragement, their willingness to run for local-level office rises significantly. However, in 2023, only 700 of the 7,000 women aspirants were nominated at the local level. Among 1,446 party selection committees, only 5% of members were women—underscoring structural bias. He concluded that a major challenge lies not only in systems but also in public perception, with voters still hesitant to accept women in leadership roles.

Ms. Pratigya Neupane, Program Coordinator at NARMIN, emphasized that societal gender stereotypes remain deeply entrenched. She noted that collective national development is not possible without full participation from women, and political empowerment of women is a key lever for transformative change—even in budgetary and policy-making spaces.

Returning to the discussion, Dr. Khadka reiterated three takeaways:

- Federalism has enabled access for some marginalized groups like Janajatis, but Dalit and women's participation still lags.
- Political party selection committees are a major bottleneck for women's political entry.
- Building women's leadership networks at all governance levels is critical to sustain change.



Ms. Mahalaxmi Dina Upadhyay, Joint General Secretary of *Nepali Congress*, acknowledged that although constitutional mandates—such as reserving two ward committee seats for women and encouraging gender balance in mayor-deputy mayor roles—exist, societal mindsets remain unchanged. She shared an anecdote from Dang to illustrate how even symbolic gestures of respect toward women leaders are resisted, reflecting deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes.

Ms. Rekha Sharma, Standing Committee Member of the *CPN (Maoist Centre)* and Member of Parliament, highlighted that the Maoist movement has historically championed inclusion, with the party currently maintaining 35% women's representation. She argued that legal mandates are essential to enforce fair nomination practices and hold parties accountable. When asked why women are rarely nominated for high-level positions like mayors or ward chairs, Ms. Sharma pointed to resistance in implementing constitutional provisions and emphasized the necessity of legal frameworks that compel parties to act.

Dr. Binda Pandey, former Member of the House of Representatives from the *Communist Party of Nepal (UML)*, provided historical context. She noted that a provision in 2054 BS for one woman per ward committee resulted in over 40,000 women candidates, sparking momentum for future change. Today, although women make up 41% of Nepal's political representatives (30% at ward level), this is still insufficient. She advocated for laws mandating 50% female participation and emphasized the importance of allowing women to choose their constituencies. She called for dismantling harmful stereotypes and involving more women in decision-making roles within political parties.

Ms. Rita Thapa, Founder of *Tewa* and *Anupam Abhiyaan*, provided an external perspective, reflecting on four decades of observing Nepali politics. She discussed how frustration among women has transformed into political activism. However, patriarchal strategies continue to sideline women—placing them in weak constituencies and subjecting them to exclusion through informal power structures. She emphasized the need for behavioral change, genuine implementation of constitutional provisions, and civil society support to amplify women's voices.

Hon. Dr. Janaki K. Tuladhar, Election Commissioner of Nepal, emphasized the growing recognition of women's voices following the advent of democracy. She highlighted the need for legal measures and quotas to ensure women's active participation in politics, especially at the local level. She concluded the session with affirmations that The Election Commission remains committed to promoting inclusivity and will consider the issues and solutions discussed in the session.

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## SESSION 5: DIGITAL GOVERNANCE FOR ENHANCED SERVICE DELIVERY

The session began with MR. Saroj Bista, Director of Governance and Impact, Young Innovations presenting on key facts about the digital landscape in Nepal. He highlighted how the digital platforms, currently 85, are aimed at enhancing governance and service delivery. The core elements of digital governance include people, resources, processes, and technology. To improve services, three main approaches are employed: top-down, bottom-up, and sectoral. The government's strategy emphasizes making services faceless and paperless, aiming to increase convenience and efficiency. However, challenges remain, such as widespread lack of awareness about digital services among the general public, persistent bureaucratic accountability issues, and significant security concerns—90% of users express worries about privacy and confidentiality of their personal data. He emphasized on how there is a recognized need for policy revisions, institutional strengthening, and public awareness campaigns to build trust. Moreover, gaps remain unaddressed due to insufficient responsiveness to public feedback and poor integration between various government digital platforms.

The session then moved to a panel discussion, moderated by Ms. Shrinkhala Khatiwada, CEO, Gaatha, where the experts highlighted key issues and proposed solutions. Mr. Dipesh Bista pointed out that while multiple platforms and resources exist, they are not yet fully utilized to serve citizens effectively. He stressed the importance of data as the foundation of digital governance and advocated for better data sharing and interoperability among platforms, such as the reuse of a birth certificate across services. He emphasized the need for a data exchange policy among federal bodies to enhance connectivity and service delivery.

Mr. Asgar Ali, IT Adviser to the Hon. Prime Minister discussed the evolution of the Nagarik App, which has facilitated access to government services such as licenses and fines, making them more convenient and accessible. The app represents a step toward a seamless, hassle-free digital experience for citizens and service providers alike.

Challenges at the local level were raised by Ms. Bimala Rai, Mayor, Halesi Tuwachung Municipality, Khotang, who noted difficulties in digital governance implementation due to low literacy and limited digital skills in rural areas. Mr. Rudra Tamang, Provincial and Local Governance Support Program, Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, echoed his concerns, citing poor data synchronization between different government levels and bureaucratic hurdles. He called for a unified data system to avoid repetitive data collection and improve interdepartmental cooperation. Efforts are underway to connect all 753 local bodies to strengthen digital governance.



Regarding slow progress in data exchange, Mr. Dipesh Bista, CEO, e-Governance Commission, Government of Nepal acknowledged structural and timing issues but expressed optimism about upcoming transformations with the introduction of a National Identity Database (NID) that will feature layered identities—digital, payment, exchange, and consent—to facilitate secure and efficient data sharing. He emphasized that e-governance is an ecosystem requiring digitization and integration of all institutions, which would enable proactive governance beyond just service delivery.

Looking ahead, Mr. Ali stressed the importance of enforcing inter-linkages across government bodies under prime ministerial authority. He noted that much infrastructure is already in place, and the main task is executing the plan to interconnect platforms, which could solve most existing problems. Ms Rai highlighted the importance of capacity building at the grassroots level, including early IT education for students, to ensure digital governance is accessible and effective for all citizens.

Mr. Tamang pointed out the crucial role of provincial governments in coordinating digital governance efforts. Coordination among the seven provinces and 753 local bodies is essential, and work is ongoing to address policy maintenance, infrastructure, human resource development, and platform improvements.

Chair Radhika Aryal, Secretary, Ministry of Communication and Information Technology summarized the progress made, noting a significant shift from manual to digital service delivery, which has improved efficiency. She stressed the importance of cyber security, digital literacy, and the government's regulatory role in information technology. However, she also acknowledged citizen distrust due to privacy concerns and called for better regulation, especially in purchasing and utilizing digital equipment effectively. Data security remains a major concern, particularly as much data is stored outside the country. The ministry is working on regulations to address these issues and aims to leverage digital governance as a pillar of the economy, projecting significant revenue generation. For true success, interoperability, data security, legal frameworks, and clear guidelines are essential and require collective effort across all government levels.



## KEYNOTE PANEL - THE ROAD TO SUBNATIONAL GOVERNANCE FOR INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The keynote panel, *“The Road to Subnational Governance for Inclusive Economic Development,”* highlighted the critical role of provincial and local governments in driving Nepal’s economic transformation. Chaired by Hon. Prof. Dr. Shiva Raj Adhikari, Vice Chairperson, National Planning Commission, and Moderated by Dr. Pukar Malla, Chairperson, Governance Lab at Daayitwa Abhiyaan, the session featured experts who emphasized inclusive governance, public-private partnerships, women’s empowerment, and youth participation as pillars for sustainable development.

Dr. Khim Lal Devkota, Chairperson, Federalism and Localization Center, presented a roadmap for empowering subnational governments through localized policies and capacity building. Panelists stressed the need for decentralization, evidence-based decision-making, and stronger coordination among government levels to address regional challenges effectively.

Dr. Dilli Raj Aryal, Vice Chairperson, Province Policy and Planning Commission, Lumbini Province focused on tailored development plans in Lumbini Province, linking agriculture, industry, and tourism to job creation and poverty reduction, while warning against politically motivated projects lacking sustainability. Dr. Raghu Raj Kafle emphasized public-private partnerships as key to bridging resource gaps and accelerating growth, citing Gandaki Province’s success in agriculture, energy, and tourism.

Mr. Kedar Nath Sharma, Principal Secretary, Office of Chief Minister and Council of Ministers, Koshi Province highlighted market access issues hindering employment despite high production, advocating for equal treatment and positive mindsets for better governance. Dr. Usha Jha, Former Member, National Planning Commission underscored women’s crucial economic role, especially in agriculture, calling for gender-sensitive policies and expanded digital access for women.

Dr. Sohan Prasad Sha, Vice Chairperson, Province Policy and Planning Commission, Madhesh Province, discussed technological capacity and governance challenges in his province, promoting pragmatic, incremental digital solutions amid federal delays. The panel acknowledged political instability and leadership turnover as barriers to consistent progress but noted that persistence and cooperation can still drive results.

Youth engagement emerged as vital for fresh perspectives and effective governance, with calls for genuine inclusion in decision-making. The session concluded with Dr. Adhikari urging a balance of political will and technical precision, prioritizing efficiency, equity, and evidence-based policy to strengthen provincial governance.

Overall, the panel affirmed that inclusive governance—combining government, private sector, women, and youth participation—is essential for Nepal’s sustainable and equitable economic development.



## CLOSING REMARKS

Mr. Krishna Gyawali, Senior Governance Advisor at Daayitwa, highlighted the importance of innovation—either by doing new things or doing existing tasks differently—and stressed the need for trust between political leaders and bureaucrats. He emphasized fully utilizing experts’ knowledge and adopting the 3A policy: Attitude, Acknowledgement, and Accountability. Gyawali noted that resource availability is less an issue than its effective utilization.

Mr. Bishnu Prasad Lamsal, Deputy Executive Director of NASC, underscored that it is never too late to improve government performance and called for constructive criticism. He urged a stronger focus on marginalized and rural communities, pointing out that while inclusive economic development is underway, it has not met expectations.

## Special Remarks

Mr. Raj Kumar Shrestha, Secretary at the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, stressed delivering tangible results over promises to avoid raising false hopes. He highlighted the importance of time-bound actions, focusing on production rather than donations, and enhancing policy-making through digitalization and better coordination among government bodies. He called for improving the quality, strength, and promotion of government work.

## Vote of Thanks

Dr. Nisha Onta, Founder and Executive Director of Governance Lab, expressed gratitude to supporting organizations and volunteers, reaffirmed commitment to evidence-based policymaking, and announced plans to institutionalize the symposium annually, including expansion to provincial levels by next year.



# Photo Gallery



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