

REPORT

NDF/FriEnt-Expert Workshop

**“Pathway to social inclusion in Nepal – solution
with risks and side-effects?”**

29 June 2016

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Nepal Dialogue Forum for Peace and Human Rights aims at the realisation of all universally acknowledged human rights, effective democratisation and sustainable peace in Nepal.

Together with partner organisations and human rights defenders from Nepal, Nepal Dialogue Forum creates opportunities for dialogue and arranges joint advocacy activities in the areas of human rights, the rule of law and peace building.

Nepal Dialogue Forum in particular focusses on Transitional Justice, Peace and Human Rights; Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, especially the Right to Food; and Social Inclusion.

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Imprint

Working Group on Peace and Development (FriEnt)
c/o GIZ, Friedrich-Ebert Allee 36
53113 Bonn

Tel. +49 (0)228 4460 3583
info@frient.de
www.frient.de/en

Responsible under German Press Law: Natascha Zupan

Authors: Birgit Felleisen, Sabine Pabst, Sonja Vorwerk-Halve
Assistant: Elsa Benhöfer

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THE ISSUE OF SOCIAL INCLUSION IN NEPAL

In post-conflict Nepal, a country featuring 102 different caste and ethnic communities, 92 languages and dialects and more than six religions (Gurung 2009), social inclusion is perceived as a crucial issue for peacebuilding. Repeatedly, failures in the implementation of social inclusion trigger or escalate violent conflicts between different social groups.

In June 2016, Nepal Dialogue Forum (NDF) and the Working Group on Peace and Development (FriEnt) invited experts on the issue of social inclusion in Nepal from Nepal, Switzerland and Germany to a Workshop to reflect and better understand challenges related to social inclusion in the Nepalese context, and to discuss ways towards its realisation. The Workshop's aim was to consider lessons learned, experiences and obstacles, as well as unintended negative impacts in connection with the implementation processes of social inclusion in Nepal.

Also a need was felt to question our roles as external actors (NGOs, donors, implementing agencies) in the course of the implementation of work for social inclusion: What can we learn from current research on inclusivity in social processes towards sustainable peace? How can specific insights gained through research be translated into practice? What are adequate approaches from local experiences and perspectives? Which factors, risks and side-effects do Nepali experts perceive as crucial? What does this mean for external actors?

SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN NEPAL – A CONFLICT DRIVER WITH A LONG HISTORY

In Nepal, the caste system created centuries of discrimination with Hinduism as a national religion and Nepali as a national language. Caste still stratifies and structures Nepalese society today. Armed conflict was a product of this long history of exclusionary governance from Panchayat to the absolute rule of King Gayendra. The multi-party democracy (since 1990) brought little change in this regard, and power remained with the elites. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2006) ended the armed conflict itself, but **changes in the area of social inclusion are still limited** (see International Alert 2015).

Nonetheless, some **improvements must be recognized** – such as, e.g., the ethnic, gender or caste-based nomination of members of the Constituent Assembly (CA), and the new constitution, which aims at ensuring equality and freedom for all citizens and upholds fundamental human rights regardless of gender, caste, sex and ethnicity. Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) are now also reflected in several governmental sector policies, quota provisions for women in leadership positions of government structures are in place – not least due to an improved knowledge base through research and documentation regarding GESI.

TWO ASPECTS OF DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICE: THE ECONOMIC AND THE SOCIAL REALM

In Nepal, the Workshop heard, **exclusionary practice is twofold: economic and social**. Poverty is found in all castes, ethnicities, locations and in all gender groups. However, depending on the specific context, certain groups' opportunities for economic and social improvement (women, Dalits, Madhesis, Muslim, Adibasi Janajatis, people with disabilities or people living in areas geographically remote from Kathmandu) are still much slimmer than those of others (see box 1).

Exclusion in Nepal, therefore, is cross-cutting, multiple and cumulative, and poor Dalit women from Humla, poor Brahmin women from Kathmandu or non-poor Dalit men from Jumla all face very different situations of exclusion. GESI and poverty alleviation are closely interwoven in Nepal (see also Gurung 2014).

Caste/Ethnic Groups	Poverty %
Hill Brahmin	10.34
Hill Chhetri	23.40
Tarai Brahmin	18.61
Tarai Middle Caste	28.69
Hill Dalit	43.63
Tarai Dalit	38.16
Newar	10.25
Hill Indigenous	28.25
Tarai Indigenous	25.93
Muslim	20.28
Others	12.34
<i>Nepal</i>	25.6*
<small>*national poverty line</small>	
<small>Source: Workshop presentation by Basudha Gurung, Berlin 29.06.2016; based on Poverty in Nepal 2010/11, CBS 2011.</small>	

Box 1: Poverty % by caste/ ethnicity

SOCIAL INCLUSION AS A KEY FACTOR FOR PEACEBUILDING

In the Workshop, **social inclusion** was indeed seen as one of the **key issues for peacebuilding** in Nepal and worldwide. Scientific evidence indicates that inclusive political settlements in peace processes are usually more successful than non-inclusive ones. This was also one of the findings of the results of the Broadening Participation Research Project of the [Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative](#) undertaken by the Graduate Institute Geneva (Paffenholz 2015). This research project aimed at broadening potential for participation and concluded that exclusion is a main driver for conflicts. It also concluded that broader inclusion only leads to a higher likelihood of agreements being reached and implemented if all actors have had moderate to strong influence within a process (see also Planta 2015).

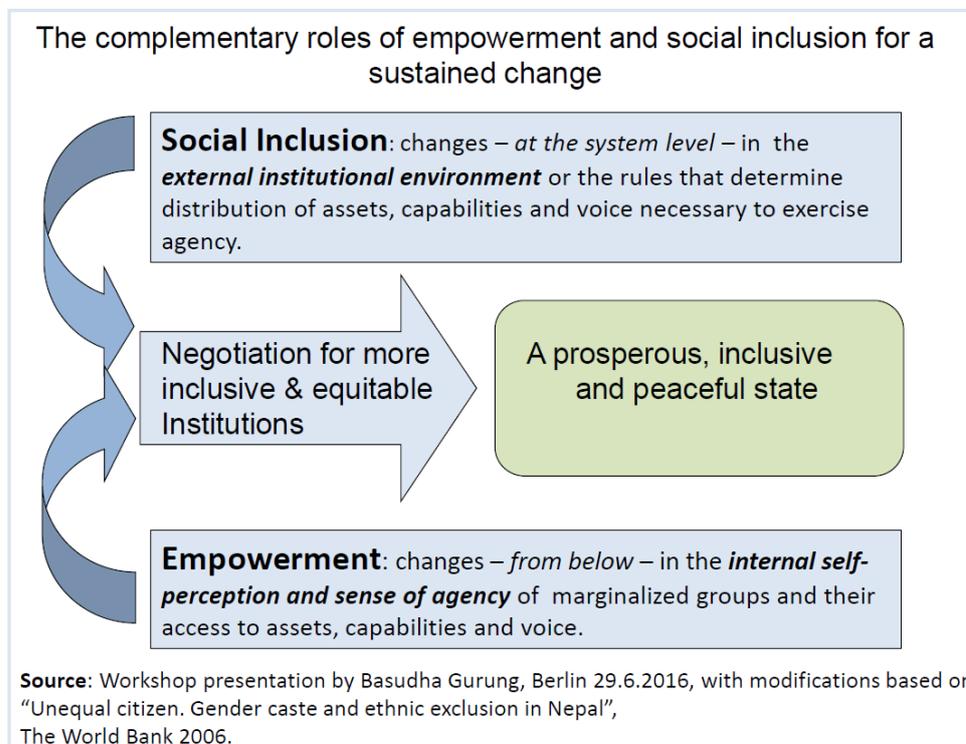
In discussing social inclusion, the Workshop heard that **active and passive forms of exclusion** have to be taken into account, the latter of which being much more difficult to identify and address. In this distinction, active exclusion is understood as a form of exclusion which is intended and often obvious, whereas passive exclusion is understood as a form of exclusion which is not necessarily intended and often less visible (such as, e.g., no or limited translation services at medical health posts, a lack of female police officers to investigate and question victims in cases of sexual or gender-based violence, or a lack of access to and information about legally guaranteed rights and social services).

ISSUES OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL INCLUSION IN NEPAL

The Workshop also addressed the important issues of **how to implement social inclusion** in Nepal and how to address the cross-cutting, cumulative and multiple forms of active and passive exclusion in the country. In addition, the Workshop considered how to ensure that specific actors who are often excluded in Nepal can have a moderate or even strong influence on the process so as to ensure a sustainable process.

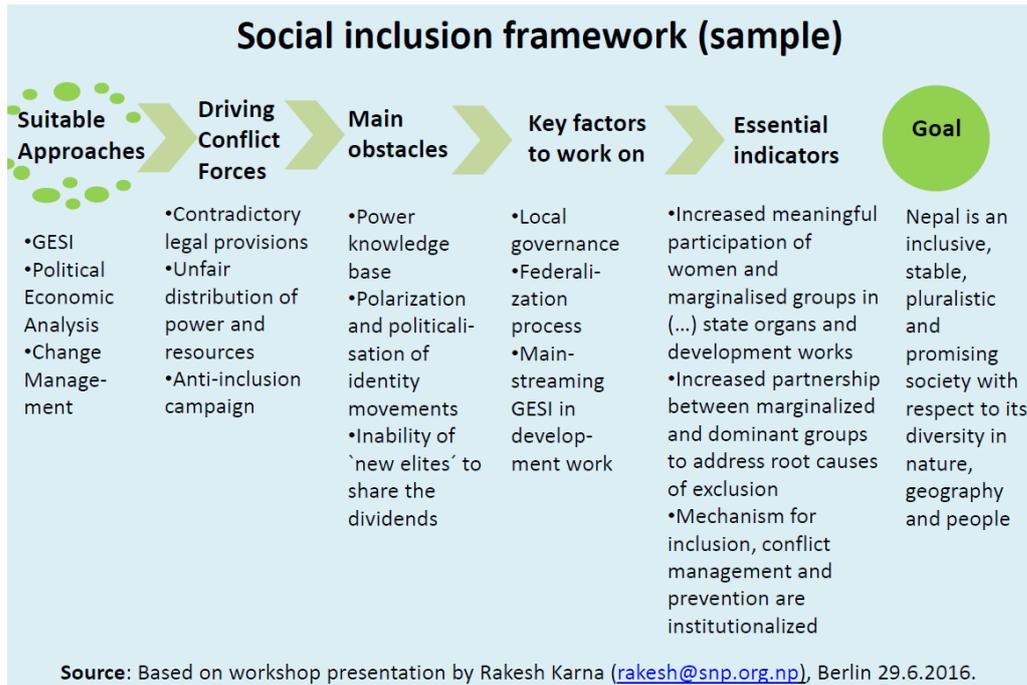
It was pointed out, that it is crucial to **strengthen capacities for social inclusion at all levels** (systems, institutions and the individual level), and to **empower socially excluded groups** in order to foster negotiations for more inclusive and equitable institutions (see box 2; see also The World Bank 2006).

It was stressed that the human rights framework with a particular GESI perspective can be used as a suitable tool for social inclusion and peacebuilding endeavours.



Box 2: The complementary roles of empowerment and social inclusion for a sustained change

Similarly, another presentation identified three steps which could serve as indicators as to whether Nepal is on the right track towards an inclusive, stable, and pluralistic country with respect to its diversity in nature and the people. These indicators were identified as (1) increased meaningful participation of women and marginalised groups in the mainstream of state organs and in development, (2) increased partnerships between the marginalised and the dominant groups in a specific context, in order to address some of the root causes of conflict (e.g. exclusion itself), (3) the institutionalisation of an inclusive local mechanism to prevent and manage conflicts at the source (see box 3).



Box 3: Social inclusion framework (sample)

ENABLING AND CONSTRAINING FACTORS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION

Research conducted as part of the [Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative](#) suggests that **two types**

Enabling and constraining factors for social inclusion

Process factors

- Institutionalization: How much has been translated into practice?
- Selection Criteria: Are groups equally represented? Legal situation? Quota?
- Monitoring: Are monitoring mechanisms in place? Who monitors?
- Decision-making: Are they part of the decision making process?

Context factors

- Elite support resistance
- Public buy-in

Source: Based on workshop presentation by Estefania Charvet, Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative, Berlin 29.06.2016.

of factors enable and constrain the influence actors can exert in a given process (see box 4) : (1) **Process factors** encompass factors referring to (quality of) institutionalisation, to selection criteria, monitoring and decision-making; (2) **Context factors**, on the other hand, refer to the (quality of) elite support or resistance and public buy-in.

Box 4: Enabling and constraining factors for social inclusion

In addition, according to the Workshop's speakers, it is often particularly difficult to assess which factors aggravate a situation of exclusion, since in a **stratified society** such as the Nepalese (with its cross-cutting, multiple and cumulative factors of exclusion) **members of excluded groups often work in the informal and the "unrecognised" sectors** and their situations are difficult to research.

It is widely recognised that **socially excluded groups are not homogenous**. In this respect, therefore, it is not sufficient to look at "men's" and "women's" realities – it is important to consider carefully "**which women**" and "**which men**" are being talked about, and to specify the respective context. Thus, **information on the specific local context is crucial** when identifying a suitable strategy for social inclusion. This requires **collaboration, sharing of information**, etc. between all involved.

The Workshop considered that a mind-set of **dependency and patronage** was still very deeply rooted in the Nepali culture. The need for a shift from this mindset of dependency and patronage to one of individual and collective responsibility, as Bennet (World Bank 2006) phrased it, is still a major **constraining context factor**. Possibly, it is the unwritten cultural pattern of social relations and the way power is used within these, why the **buy-in of elites** in Nepal is being discussed as **a crucial factor for the implementation of social inclusion**. **Winning support from (individuals of) dominant and elite groups and building partnerships** with these groups at a communal level is often a decisive **enabling process factor**. The importance of securing the **buy-in of local elites** by recognising and potentially transforming their personal fear of losing power (or privileges) cannot be overstated. One way towards this was found in practice to lie in convincing elite and dominant groups that engagement in inclusion processes is an investment into their own future, too – one vision for all.

A further **important process factor** in Nepal was identified as the **contextualisation of the situation of local elites as well as the context of the socially excluded**. This is found to be

an important consideration before entering into **informal dialogue**. Even in cases where it is not possible to win support from members of dominant and/or elite groups, it may be possible to achieve a decrease in their resistance to social inclusion. It was also recognised that, on a positive note, political interferences are less common at communal level.

Participants of the Workshop stressed that **affirmative action** is still important for marginalised groups. This, however, is a double-edged sword. While marginalised groups do see the downside of “making their way into” a system which they do not necessarily support, getting a “**foot into the system**” is often the only way to achieve a type of political representation which also includes decision-making opportunities within organisations and institutions. It was noted, however, that the rules of the game will not be changed by replacing individuals within “the system” with persons from marginalised groups. Those individuals from marginalised groups who do make it into the system are still faced with an existing (legal) structure. They are also faced with the daunting task of continually improving an inclusive local governance structure and pressing for the implementation of existing laws and regulations (such as the Local Governance Act, the Constitution and other laws and policies promoting GESI).

Advocacy towards social inclusion is more likely to be successful if it is backed by legal provisions, speakers concluded, and the **media** are often needed as a supportive factor to achieve public buy-in, potentially followed by the elite.

In Nepal, a lack of secure data also often hinders successful work on inclusion and GESI. **Information gathering and more conclusive data** about access, rights, entitlements etc. were therefore identified as additional **enabling process factors** contributing to GESI in Nepal; ideally, this data should be gained through participatory processes by the community concerned, followed by social mobilisation, participation and empowerment in and throughout the process.

Social inclusion was an important issue in Nepal in the aftermath of the CPA in 2006 and has remained important since. Many programmes have been implemented, papers have been written and much data has been collected (despite shortcomings, see above). Nevertheless, Workshop participants from Nepal reported that they are increasingly confronted with the **trivialisation of the issue of social inclusion**, both in the development world and in academia and the public sphere, making it more difficult to press for change in this regard. Also there is much concern about the **polarisation and politicisation** of some of the identity movements in Nepal.

Support and **buy-in from the public at large and the media** are vitally important as a **process factor** to ensure a sustainable impact of projects on social inclusion. Promoting diversity in society must be seen an asset, not a burden.

As far as **process factors** are concerned, the meeting concluded that **it is not sufficient to enable the mere participation** of those disadvantaged by social exclusion in political processes. The implementation of agreements which derives from such processes depends on whether those concerned had actual influence in the process. The Workshop stressed that it was not adequate to define social inclusion as participation, but that **social inclusion needed to be defined as real power sharing**.

The Workshop participants also warned that social inclusion measures which are not based on a deep knowledge about the local context and which are conducted without serious monitoring may have **unintended negative impacts** by creating another layer of “privileged groups” among the so-called marginalised groups. Interventions without a profound knowledge of the local context may also unintentionally create a negative view towards

GESI by government representatives, may cause criticism of GESI activities and thus further reinforce the trivialisation of social inclusion. The experts' group present at the Workshop also stressed that, sadly, the "movement for GESI" in Nepal is still very fragmented, with many interest groups championing their own causes, rather than utilising potential synergies and collective power for GESI in Development.

WHAT DO THE WORKSHOP'S FINDINGS MEAN FOR EXTERNAL ACTORS?

Over the last decade, a lot of efforts by civil society organisations and external donors have been invested into the support for social inclusion in Nepal. The outcome is not yet satisfying. The **role of external actors in the field of social inclusion is perceived as critical**, and it is particularly important that they use their potential influence and options on the political and implementation levels. The Workshop gathered a number of recommendations for external actors to support further GESI endeavors in Nepal.

Importantly, they unanimously agreed that **GESI requires a long-term commitment with a strategic approach**, but also requires actors to **remain flexible**. Participants clearly stressed that international donors in particular needed to look at each local situation individually, and give processes space to develop. With regard to impact assessment, outcome expectations and timelines of projects in the area of social inclusion, external actors need to accept that different processes of social inclusion can develop very differently from each other. Donor flexibility is vital to ensure that **emerging opportunities in the process** can be fully utilised.

For instances, the [Basic Operating Guidelines \(BOGs\)](#) signed by several donors and implementing organisations could be used as a **code of conduct for fundamental principles** of impartiality, transparency, accountability and for social **inclusion** (and as a red line for cooperation). As for the community level, Workshop participants pointed to their experience that **informal dialogue** is also a useful instrument to engage with the Government and political parties for **GESI on the political (track I)** level.

It was concluded that there is still **room for improvement on the level of implementation when addressing social inclusion**. Participants hoped for ambitious and progressive, yet realistic, indicators, profound baseline studies with disaggregate data, and impact assessments, reporting and reflecting about results.

As the number of organisations supporting GESI in Nepal is manageable, it is a noteworthy **aim for the future to improve interconnectivity** and collaboration among actors supporting GESI and across sectors – a classical field of engagement for external actors.

Political interference by political parties, and affiliation with political parties by (governmental or non-governmental) partner organisations was named as a crucial issue to be discussed further.

Participants observed, that today government institutions, donors, the bigger (I)NGOs and implementing agencies are still **dominated by staff of higher caste groups**. This perception is confirmed by the results of the baseline survey of the staff composition and diversity management of the association of international NGOs in Nepal in 2011. The baseline summarises that 64.4 percent of the staff belong to Brahman, Chhetri or Newar, and 25.7 percent to Janajatis. Only 9,6 percent belong to Dalit, Madhesi/Terai castes, Muslim or other

ethnic minorities (AIN 2011). By the Workshop participants this was seen as a burning issue which should be looked at and discussed with partners in Nepal with more severity.

The Workshop concluded that interesting issues remain for further discussion. These include:

- How is „power sharing“ defined by the actors involved?
- Which entry points exist to increase public buy-in? How is it possible to engage more media actors for social inclusion?
- What role does social inclusion play in education in Nepal?
- Which aspects of our project work are aimed at ensuring that those concerned have real influence in the planning, the design and the running of processes on social inclusion? Which best practice examples exist? How can these successful approaches be fruitful for others?

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