

INFLUENCE OF FEMALE DEPUTY MAYORS IN
DECISION-MAKING AT LOCAL
GOVERNMENTS OF KOSHI PROVINCE:
UNRAVELLING ROLES, PARTICIPATION, AND CHALLENGES

Submitted to:
National Women Commission
Bhadrakali Plaza, Kathmandu, Nepal



Submitted by:
Nepal Administrative Staff College,
Jawalakhel, Lalitpur, Nepal
June 2024

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Disclaimer

This study was conducted by the Nepal Administrative Staff College with funding from the National Women Commission, Nepal. The findings and opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Nepal Administrative Staff College or the National Women Commission, Nepal. The author(s) take full responsibility for the contents and findings presented herein.

Acknowledgements

We express our sincere gratitude to the National Women Commission for providing the financial support that made this study possible. Their commitment to promoting gender equality and supporting research initiatives in this domain is commendable.

Our deepest appreciation goes to the mayors, chairpersons, female deputy mayors, vice-chairperson, and chief administrative officers who graciously participated in interviews for this study. Their valuable time, experiences, and insights were instrumental in shaping the findings and conclusions of this research. Without their key contributions, this study would not have been possible.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Dr. Rajan Khanal, Executive Director of Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC), for creating the opportunity to conduct this study. His support has been invaluable throughout the research process.

We are immensely grateful to Mr. Bishnu Prasad Lamsal, Deputy Executive Director of NASC, for his continuous guidance and support throughout the entire research process. His expertise, invaluable insights, and meticulous attention to detail have been instrumental in ensuring the quality and rigor of this study from inception to completion.

Our sincere thanks extend to Mr. Pramod Niroula for his consistent assistance in navigating the administrative processes associated with this research. His dedication and professionalism have been instrumental in facilitating a smooth and efficient research journey.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the entire NASC family for their unwavering support and guidance at every stage of this endeavor. Their encouragement and collaborative spirit have been invaluable in making this study a reality.

Last but not least, we acknowledge and thank all individuals who directly or indirectly contributed to this research project. Their support, valuable feedback, and moral encouragement have played a crucial role in the successful outcome of this report.

List of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iii
List of Contents	iv
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
Executive Summary.....	viii
Chapter-1: Introduction	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Purpose and Research Questions	2
1.3 Rational of the Study.....	2
1.4 Study Methods	3
Chapter-2: Literature Review.....	7
2.1 Women’s Political Participation in Nepal.....	7
2.2 Female Mayor and Deputy Mayor in Koshi Province.....	9
2.3 Legal Framework, Policy and Plan.....	9
2.4 Studies on Decision-Making Politics in Nepal	14
Chapter-3: Findings and Reflections.....	17
3.1 Patriarchal Orientation.....	17
3.2 Reluctance in Accepting Female Leadership.....	19
3.3 Authorized Role and Practical Realities	22
3.4 Power Imbalance.....	27
3.5 Secretiveness in Agenda Sharing.....	30
3.6 Participation in Budgetary Affairs	34
3.7 Political Affinity and Congruence	37
3.8 Delegation of Authority.....	42
3.9 Conflict and Collaboration.....	44
3.10 Supportive Environment	47
3.11 Employee Support.....	50

3.12 Role Capacity and Competency.....	55
3.13 Navigation of Opportunities.....	58
3.14 Future Aspirations	60
Chapter-4: Conclusion and Recommendations	63
4.1 Conclusion	63
4.2 Recommendations	64
References	69
Annex 1: Checklist.....	71

List of Tables

Table 1: Studied Local Governments	5
Table 2: Female Deputy-Mayor and Vice Chairperson at Koshi Province	9

List of Figures

Figure 1: Map of Koshi Province	4
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Executive Summary

As Nepal transitioned into a federal democratic republic, local governments gained significant power and responsibility for driving socio-economic development at the local level. This shift underscores the importance of understanding the roles and influences of key stakeholders in local governance structures, particularly female deputy mayors and vice-chairpersons. This study delved into the influence of female deputy mayors and vice-chairpersons in decision-making processes within the local governments of Koshi Province. It aimed to uncover perceptions of their roles, the factors that facilitated or hindered their influence, and the challenges they encountered. By exploring these dimensions, the study shed light on the opportunities and obstacles faced by female leaders in local governance, providing valuable insights for policy and strategy development to enhance women's meaningful participation and influence in decision-making at the local level.

The study employed a qualitative approach to investigate the influence of female deputy mayors on decision-making processes in the local governments of Koshi Province. It focused on exploring feelings, perceptions, and experiences through in-depth interviews with female deputy mayors and chairpersons in 15 local governments. The selection of these local governments was purposeful, and interviews were conducted using an open-ended interview guide.

Female deputy mayors faced significant challenges in asserting their rightful roles and receiving the recognition and respect they deserved. They often encountered unequal opportunities compared to their male counterparts, coupled with marginalization, disregard, and dismissive attitudes from male officials in local government.

Despite occupying positions of authority, female deputy mayors often encountered skepticism, lack of trust, and resistance from segments of society due to deep-rooted traditional beliefs regarding gender roles and capabilities. These ingrained perceptions undermined the legitimacy and acceptance of women in leadership roles, posing significant barriers to their meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

Many female deputy mayors felt that their roles were mere formalities or symbolic gestures, lacking substantive authority or influence in decision-making processes. This perception of marginalization and tokenism revealed a significant gap between the intended authority of their positions and their actual impact.

A notable power imbalance was evident in local governments, where mayors held considerable authority and dominated decision-making processes. Female deputy mayors often found themselves excluded from crucial discussions and deliberations, with their opinions and proposals frequently disregarded or dismissed.

There are significant barriers for deputy mayors due to a lack of transparency and timely access to crucial information. They often receive meeting agendas and important details only a day before, or sometimes attend meetings without any prior agenda, hampering their ability to prepare and contribute effectively to decision-making processes. They encounter resistance when voicing dissenting opinions or presenting divergent perspectives during meetings, reflecting a lack of openness to diverse viewpoints. Additionally, they often lack insight into how agendas are decided and prioritized, further marginalizing their influence on decision-making processes.

Systematic exclusion from budget meetings and discussions by mayors and chief administrative officers, despite their legally mandated roles, is another challenge faced by female deputy mayors. They are not consulted or involved in the budgeting process, and their proposed priorities and agendas are often sidelined or removed from the final budget. They also express frustration over mayors' unwillingness to delegate even basic tasks or responsibilities to them, effectively rendering their positions mere formalities devoid of substantial decision-making influence.

Female deputy mayors employed diverse approaches in navigating power dynamics and resolving conflicts within local government decision-making processes. Some prioritized cooperative and conflict-avoidant stances to maintain harmonious relationships, while others assertively opposed instances where their input was disregarded.

Both female deputy mayors and chief administrative officers acknowledged the importance of extensive discussions, open deliberations, and consensus-seeking mechanisms to facilitate the comprehensive consideration of diverse perspectives and concerns.

Many female deputy mayors encountered a prevailing lack of support and cooperation from mayors, chief administrative officers, and even their own party members. However, some female deputy mayors reported positive experiences of support and collaboration, characterized by active involvement and mutual support. They consistently reported a lack of support and cooperation from chief administrative officers, who tended to prioritize the mayor's instructions over the deputy mayor's input and directives. This dynamic was exacerbated by explicit statements from chief administrative officers indicating a refusal to follow directives from female deputy mayors, highlighting a clear gender bias.

Female deputy mayors reported prevailing biases and perceptions among male counterparts, including mayors and chief administrative officers, regarding the perceived lack of competence and capability of female deputy mayors. They also expressed concerns regarding the lack of institutional support and proactive efforts from local governments to provide capacity development and empowerment opportunities.

Female deputy mayors expressed a unique opportunity to directly engage with diverse community members, listen to their concerns, and gain firsthand insights into local problems and challenges. This direct connection to the grassroots level was perceived as a valuable platform for understanding and addressing the concerns of the people, enabling a better comprehension of local realities, and advocating for community-centered solutions within decision-making processes.

While some considered the deputy mayor's position a crucial stepping stone and a valuable supporting and advisory role in local government decision-making processes, others expressed disillusionment with the inherent limitations and constraints of the role. Additionally, there was a clear aspiration among female deputy mayors to advance to higher leadership positions, particularly aspiring to become mayors.

Chapter-1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Nepal's transition to a federal democratic republic marked a significant milestone in the country's history, facilitating decentralized governance and ensuring the representation of women in decision-making processes. This transformation has been underpinned by the constitution promulgated in 2015, which enshrines the principles of inclusivity, equity, and proportional representation. One of the most progressive aspects of this constitution is the mandate ensuring women's right to participate in all state bodies, reserving 33% of seats for women in public positions. This legal framework has catalyzed a notable increase in the number of women elected to leadership roles, such as mayors, deputy mayors, chairpersons, and vice-chairpersons¹ at the local level. The constitutional emphasis on gender inclusivity has led to significant strides in women's representation and leadership across various sectors in Nepal. However, the mere presence of women in leadership roles does not necessarily translate into meaningful participation and influence in decision-making.

Despite the constitutional provisions designed to empower women and promote their active involvement, practical realities often tell a different story. Female deputy mayors, despite their positions, encounter a range of challenges that hinder their ability to influence decision-making. These challenges stem from entrenched gender norms, power dynamics, societal expectations, and structural barriers within the political and administrative systems. Considering this, the study seeks to explore the role and actual influence of female deputy mayors in decision-making in the local governments of Koshi Province. By focusing on Koshi Province, this study unravels the complexities surrounding the roles and participation of female deputy mayors. It explores their roles and responsibilities, the opportunities available, and the obstacles they face in their efforts to influence decision-making.

This study holds practical implications for the ongoing efforts to promote gender equality in Nepal. By highlighting the lived experiences of female deputy mayors, it contributes to the broader discourse on women's leadership. The findings can help create a more supportive environment for women in leadership positions, ensuring their active and meaningful participation in local governance.

¹In this study, the term "Deputy Mayor" is used interchangeably with "Vice-Chairperson" to maintain consistency in writing. Both titles represent similar positions. The elected official holding this position in a rural municipality is referred to as the Vice-Chairperson, while in the municipality; it is referred to as the Deputy Mayor.

1.2 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of female deputy mayors on decision-making processes in local governments of Koshi Province. To achieve this purpose, the following research questions were formulated:

- How do female deputy mayors perceive their roles and responsibilities in the decision-making process of local governments, and what implications do these perceptions have for their actual influence?
- What factors facilitate or hinder the influence of female deputy mayors in the decision-making process? How do these factors interact and impact their ability to shape decision-making processes?
- What challenges do female deputy mayors encounter in actively participating and contributing to decision-making processes, and how do these challenges impact their ability to participate effectively in the decision-making process?

1.3 Rational of the Study

Nepal's transition to a federal democratic republic through the promulgation of the Constitution of 2015 has effectively decentralized power and authority to local governments. This constitutional shift positions local governments as pivotal drivers of socio-economic development and progress at the grassroots level. The constitution emphasizes inclusivity, equity, and proportional representation of marginalized communities, including women, in all spheres of governance. Notably, it mandates a 33% reservation for women in public positions and outlines provisions for leadership roles, such as the positions of mayor/chairperson and deputy mayor/chairperson.

While these constitutional provisions aim to empower women and ensure their active involvement in decision-making processes in the local government, the actual influence and roles of female deputy mayors in local governments remain largely unexplored. Furthermore, the factors that either facilitate or impede their decision-making influence, including gender norms and power dynamics are insufficiently researched. This study holds significance as it endeavors to investigate the influence of female deputy mayors in the decision-making processes of local governments in Koshi Province. By delving into their roles, responsibilities, supportive and inhibiting factors, and strategies they employ to assert their influence, the study will offer insights into the opportunities and challenges they encounter in decision-making at their respective local governments. Understanding this is crucial for developing strategies and policies that can create an enabling environment for women's meaningful participation and influence in local governance.

The findings will not only enhance understanding of women's participation in local governance but also provide valuable insights for policymakers, political parties, and local government

stakeholders to fortify women's leadership and promote equitable decision-making processes at the local level. It will contribute to the broader discourse on women's empowerment, gender equality, and inclusive local governance in Nepal's federal context. The study will generate evidence-based recommendations to inform policies, programs, and practices aimed at strengthening meaningful participation in decision-making within local governments across the country.

1.4 Study Methods

1.4.1 Introduction of the Study Area

Koshi Province is one of the seven provinces of Nepal, covering an area of 25,905 square kilometres, which constitutes about 17.5% of Nepal's total area. According to the National Census 2021, Koshi Province has a population of 4,961,412, with 51.28% females and 48.72% males. There are 1,191,556 households in the province, with 30.9% headed by females. The overall literacy rate in Koshi Province is 79.7%, with a male literacy rate of 86.1% and a female literacy rate of 73.6% (National Statistics Office, 2023).

Economically, Koshi Province contributes 15.8% to Nepal's national GDP (Ministry of Finance, 2023). The agriculture sector is the primary driver of the province's economy, followed by the service sector. Of the total population, 71% aged 10 years and above are economically active, while 28.9% are economically inactive (National Statistics Office, 2023). According to the Nepal Living Standard Survey, 13.80% of the population lives below the poverty line (National Statistics Office, 2024).

Koshi Province is rich in religious and cultural diversity, home to 122 ethnic groups. Chhetris are the largest group, followed by Hill Brahmins, Rai, Limbu, and Tamangs. The majority of the population practices Hinduism, followed by Kirat, Buddhism, and Islam. There are 93 spoken languages in Koshi Province, with most people speaking Nepali as their mother tongue, followed by Maithili, Limbu, Tharu, and Bantawa (National Statistics Office, 2023). The province is renowned for its religious sites such as Pathibhara Devi Temple in Taplejung, Haleshi Mahadev in Khotang, Satakshi Dham in Jhapa, Barah area in Sunsari, and Budha Subba in Dharan. It is also famous for its tourist destinations like Everest Base Camp, Namche Bazar, Kanyam, Bhedetar, and Antu Danda.

Koshi Province comprises 14 districts: Bhojpur, Dhankuta, Ilam, Jhapa, Khotang, Morang, Okhaldhunga, Panchthar, Sankhuwasabha, Solukhumbu, Taplejung, Tehrathum, and Udayapur. The capital city is Biratnagar, the only metropolitan city in the province. Additionally, Koshi Province has two sub-metropolitan cities: Dharan and Itahari. There are 46 municipalities and 88 rural municipalities in the province. For the purpose of this study, 15 local governments were selected (highlighted in Figure 1).

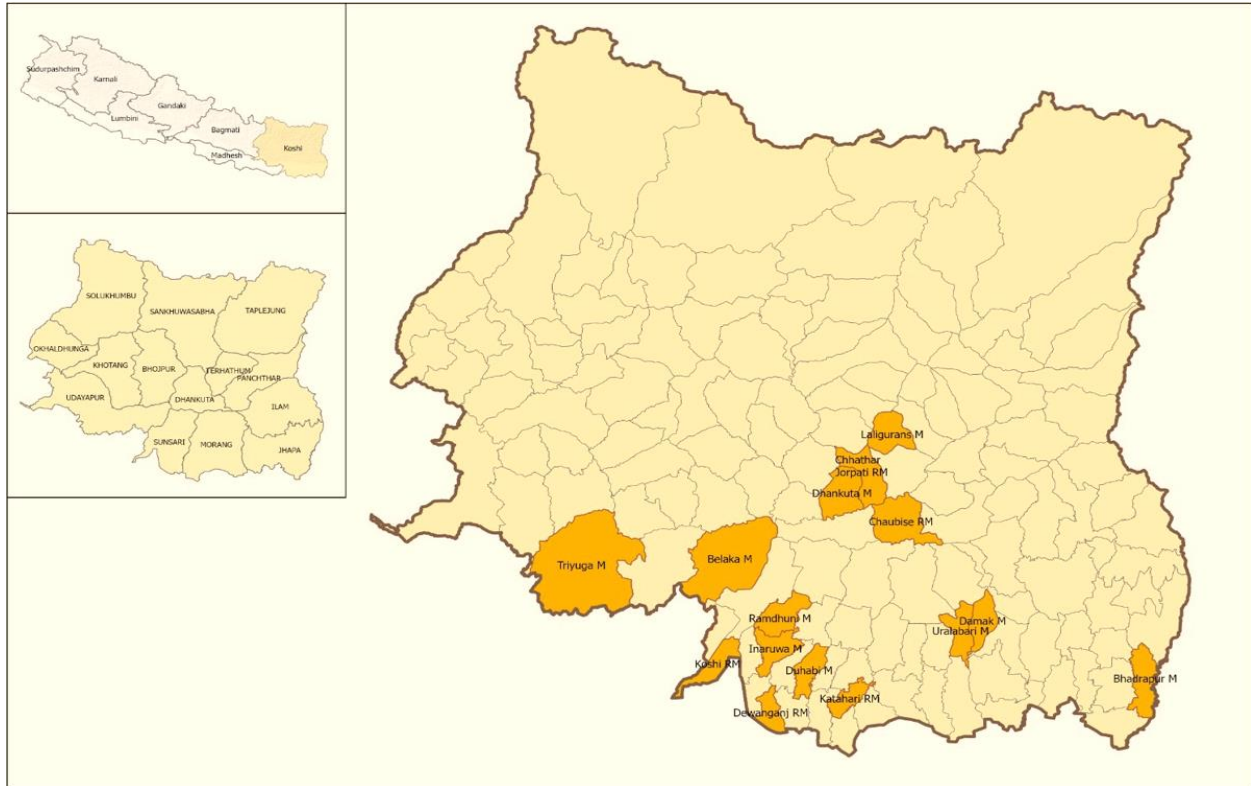


Figure 1: Map of Koshi Province

1.4.2 Approach and Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach allows for exploring feelings, perceptions, and experiences through naturalistic inquiry in real-world settings and inductive human interactions (Limb & Dwyer, 2001). It provides ample opportunities to explore social phenomena and gain a deeper understanding of the person(s) being studied (Best & Khan, 2006). Studying the influence of female deputy mayors on the decision-making process at the local government level is complex and requires an in-depth exploration of the structure, roles, behaviors, practices, challenges, and other factors involved in the decision-making process. Each female deputy mayor has different experiences regarding decision-making in local government. Therefore, the study team closely engaged with them, learning about them through their historical and social perspectives, and gaining a comprehensive understanding of their context or situation by meeting with them in person at their respective local governments. Information was collected from 15 local governments in Koshi Province where females headed the positions of deputy mayor (see: Table 1).

Table 1: Studied Local Governments

S.N	Local Governments	LISA*		Research Participants
		Overall Score (Out of 100)	Social Inclusion Score (Out of 10)	
1	Dewanganj Rural Municipality, Sunsari	50.25	6	Vice-Chairperson and CAO
2	Koshi Rural Municipality, Sunsari	59	2.5	Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and CAO
3	Duhabi Municipality, Sunsari	80	8	Deputy Mayor
4	Inaruwa Municipality, Sunsari	67.75	7.5	Deputy Mayor
5	Ramdhuni Municipality, Sunsari	73	6.5	Deputy Mayor and CAO
6	Damak Municipality, Jhapa	84	9.5	Mayor, Deputy Mayor and CAO
7	Bhadrapur Municipality, Jhapa	77.5	9	Deputy Mayor
8	Urlabari Municipality, Morang	85.5	8	Deputy Mayor
9	Triyuga Municipality, Udayapur	77	9	Deputy Mayor
10	Katari Municipality, Udayapur	93.25	9.5	Deputy Mayor
11	Belaka Municipality, Udayapur	72.25	8	Deputy Mayor
12	Dhankuta Municipality, Dhankuta	62.5	5.25	Deputy Mayor and CAO
13	Chhathar Jorpati Rural Municipality, Dhankuta	86	7	Vice-Chairperson and CAO
14	Chaubise Rural Municipality, Dhankuta	77	9	Vice-Chairperson
15	Laligurans Municipality, Terhathum	70.25	5.5	Mayor and Deputy Mayor

* <https://lisa.mofaga.gov.np/home>

The selection of these local governments was purposeful, taking into account the Local Government Institutional Capacity Self-Assessment (LISA) score of 2079/80, as provided by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration. Detailed information was gathered from these local governments through in-depth interviews. Before the interviews, an interview guide was prepared to ensure uniformity in the interview process across all participants. This interview guide consisted of open-ended questions complemented by probing questions, aligned with our research questions. Specifically, the interview guide focused on exploring the behavior, practices, roles, challenges, and opportunities related to decision-making processes of local affairs (refer to Annex 1 for details). Local governments, particularly those with female deputy mayors, were contacted via telephone to request their participation in the study. During these conversations, the purpose of the study was clearly communicated to them. Some denied participation in the study, citing various reasons for unavailability. Others, who had initially agreed, showed unwillingness during the field visit due to various reasons. In such cases, others were requested to participate in the study. During the request, an official letter from the National Women Commission was shared, assuring that the information obtained from them would only be used for the research process. Similarly, assurance was also given that anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality would be maintained.

Upon receiving approval, informal meetings were arranged with the participants for the interviews. The timing and location of the interviews were scheduled based on the participants' convenience and comfort. Interviews were conducted with the participants' consent through informal conversations in Nepali in their familiar social settings. A supportive and enabling environment was created to encourage participants to share their experiences freely without any disruptions. Extensive follow-up questions were asked to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the decision-making process in local affairs. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Additionally, informal conversations were also held with the mayor and chief administrative officer regarding the female deputy mayor's roles, opportunities, challenges, and engagement in the decision-making process. These informal conversations took place with those who were available at the time of the interview at the local government offices. However, most mayors and chief administrative officers were unavailable during the scheduled interview times, making it impossible to capture their perspectives for all the local governments under study (see: Table 1).

During the interview process, participants were requested to allow voice recording, but all participants declined. Therefore, detailed notes were meticulously taken by two research team members. Following the completion of each interview, field notes were summarized immediately in the same manner as the interview was conducted, as the human mind is prone to forgetting quickly. Subsequently, a systematic process of coding and categorization was applied to derive themes and sub-themes. Several quotations were formed under these themes and sub-themes, and their essence was generated through a reasoning process. To complement and supplement the insights gained from the interviews, a document analysis was conducted. The document analysis included the Constitution of Nepal (2015), and the Local Government Operation Act (2017), among others. Throughout the entire research process, ethical standards and quality measures were upheld to ensure the credibility of the study.

Chapter-2: Literature Review

2.1 Women's Political Participation in Nepal

Various literatures show that women have played significant roles in shaping and contributing to political processes and reforms in Nepal. Initially, the focus was on fairness and social justice for women. A notable figure, Yogmaya Neupane, vehemently advocated for women's rights during the Rana regime. She submitted her demands to Prime Ministers Bir Shamsheer and Juddha Shamsheer, emphasizing the need for Dharma Rajya and demanding respect for women's social and political participation (Lotter, 2017). Although the Rana rulers committed to meeting her demands, they were never fulfilled. Yogmaya boldly challenged the regime by forming a women's group to exert further pressure. She and her group members even attempted self-immolation but were arrested, making her the first woman to be jailed in Nepal's history (Upreti et al., 2020). Inspired by Yogmaya, various women later established organizations advocating for structural reforms to address women's issues.

The political engagement of women in Nepal was minimal before 1950, with limited chances to participate in elected or appointed government roles, a condition unchanged even after the Rana regime ended (Khakurel et al., 2011). In the first parliamentary elections in 1959, there were only six women candidates from different political parties, but all of them lost (Acharya, 2013). During the Panchayat era (1961-1990), women's political participation was significantly limited due to the autocratic and patriarchal nature of the government. In the 1981 elections, out of 28 women candidates, only two were elected to the Rastriya Panchayat. In the 1986 elections, only eight women were elected out of 140 seats (Acharya, 2013). Despite some notable women leaders, women were largely excluded from political decision-making processes. The Panchayat system, dominated by men, did not provide formal structures or political parties for women's participation. Notable women leaders during this period included Sadhana and Sahana Pradhan, Mangala Devi Shrestha, and Kanak Lata Shrestha, who played significant roles in fighting for women's rights (Upreti et al., 2020) and organizing political movements and armed insurgency against the state/monarchy. The women's movement, which began during the Rana regime, continued during the Panchayat era, facing numerous challenges, including social and cultural norms that restricted their participation in politics. Despite these challenges, the activism during this period laid the groundwork for future gains in women's political representation.

The promulgation of the 1990 Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal marked a significant change, mandating that at least 5% of political party candidates in the lower house of parliament elections must be women (Mahato et al., 2019). However, women's political participation from 1991 to 1999 was marked by limited representation and continued

patriarchal dominance. In the 1991, 1994, and 1999 parliamentary elections, the number of women candidates increased, but only a few were elected: six (2.9%) in 1991, seven (3.4%) in 1994, and twelve (5.8%) in 1999 (Acharya, 2013). The increased awareness and activism among women during this period helped pave the way for more significant representation and influence in the years to come (Pradhan, 2004).

The interim constitution of Nepal in 2007 required political parties to ensure proportional representation for women, Dalits, indigenous peoples, backward regions, Madhesis, and other groups. It stipulated that at least one-third of the total nominated candidates should be women (Government of Nepal, 2007). This constitutional requirement compelled political parties to allocate political seats to women during the 2008 elections. According to election commission data, 30 women candidates won seats under the first-past-the-post system in the 2008 constituent assembly election, representing 12.5% of the 240 seats. However, this number dropped to 10 women (4.17%) in the 2013 constituent assembly election. On the proportional representation side, the number of total candidates increased by 54.4% due to more political parties participating. In 2008, 161 women were elected out of 335 constituent assembly members through the proportional representation system, making up 48.05% of the total. In 2013, 162 women were elected under proportional representation (48.36% of 335 seats), maintaining relatively stable representation despite the increase in total candidates (Acharya, 2013). Despite this representation, women's influence in decision-making and constitution-building processes was often limited (Upreti et al., 2020). Many decisions were made by top male leaders during informal sessions and subsequently presented in the assembly, leaving women waiting for the decisions of their male leadership before voting in parliament (Falch, 2010).

Elections held in 2017 and 2022 showed a slight increase in the number of elected female members in the House of Representatives, Provincial Assembly, and National Assembly under the first-past-the-post system. Although there has been a notable increment, female members often seem to be present primarily to fulfill the proportional representation provision defined by law (Chalaune & Manandhar, 2023). Nepal has made significant strides in increasing women's political representation in the 2017 and 2022 local-level elections. The 2017 local elections were significant for women's political representation. Of the 35,041 representatives elected in 2017, approximately 40.95% (14,352) were women. In the 2022 local-level elections, the number of elected women increased to 14,466, making up 41.21% of the total. Despite a decline in the number of women contestants in 2022 compared to 2017, the number of women successfully elected increased. In the 2017 local elections, 18 women (7 mayors and 11 chairpersons) were elected as chiefs, while in 2022, this number rose to 25 women (13 mayors and 12 chairpersons). The number of women elected as ward chairs also saw a modest rise from 61 in 2017 to 68 in 2022. However, the number of women elected as deputy chiefs

significantly decreased from 700 in 2017 to 568 in 2022 (Election Commission, 2022). A legal loophole has affected women's representation in deputy chief positions. Section 17 (4) of the Local Level Election Act 2017 mandates that political parties must field a woman candidate for either the chief or deputy chief post. However, this provision does not apply if parties form alliances and field a joint candidate for just one of the two top posts. As political parties fielded alliance candidates during the 2022 local elections, the number of women deputy chiefs decreased drastically.

2.2 Female Mayor and Deputy Mayor in Koshi Province

The number of women elected as deputy mayor from Koshi Province was 48 in 2017 and 42 in 2022. Additionally, 57 women were elected as vice-chairpersons in 2022. Among the 49 municipalities, 42 have female deputy mayors. Biratnagar Municipality of Jhapa and Haleshi Tuwanhung of Khotang have female mayors. In terms of rural municipalities, there are a total of 86 rural municipalities in Koshi Province. Among these, 57 have female leadership as vice-chairperson. Notably, Kanepokhari of Jhapa, Likhu of Solukhumbu, and Jantedhunga of Khotang have female chairpersons. Additionally, Gauraganj Rural Municipality of Jhapa has female members in the positions of Chairperson and vice chairperson.

Table 2: Female Deputy-Mayor and Vice Chairperson at Koshi Province²

Districts	Urban Municipality	Rural Municipality	Deputy Mayor	Vice Chairperson	Total
Morang	9	6	9	5	14
Taplejung	1	8	1	5	6
Panchthar	1	7	0	2	2
Ilam	4	6	3	3	6
Jhapa	8	7	7	5	12
Sankhuwasabha	5	5	5	5	10
Tehrathum	2	4	2	3	5
Bhojpur	2	7	2	6	8
Dhankuta	3	4	3	4	7
Sunsari	6	6	5	6	11
Solukhumbu	1	7	1	6	7
Khotang	2	8	0	3	3
Udayapur	4	4	4	1	5
Okhaldhunga	1	7	0	5	5
Total	49	86	42	57	101

Morang district's Kanepokhari rural municipality has a female chairperson and a male deputy chairperson; Birtamod municipality has a female mayor and a male deputy mayor; Gauraganj municipality in Jhapa district also has both a female chairperson and a female vice-chairperson; Solukhumbu district's Likhu rural municipality has a female chairperson and a male vice-chairperson; Khotang district's Haleshi Tuwanhung municipality has a female mayor and a male Deputy Mayor; and Jantedhunga rural municipality of Khotang district has a female chairperson and a male vice-chairperson.

2.3 Legal Framework, Policy and Plan

2.3.1 Constitution of Nepal, 2015

² <https://election.gov.np/np/page/local-level-elections-2074-a-glance>

The 2015 Constitution of Nepal envisions an inclusive state, committed to fostering social and cultural solidarity, tolerance, harmony, and unity in diversity. This commitment is evident in the recognition of Nepal's multi-ethnic, multilingual, multi-religious, multicultural, and diverse characteristics. The Constitution aims to establish an egalitarian society based on principles of inclusivity and participation, ensuring economic equality, prosperity, and social justice by eliminating all forms of discrimination. Article 18 of part 3, which outlines the right to equality, explicitly prohibits discrimination based on various factors, including origin, religion, race, caste, tribe, sex, economic condition, language, region, ideology, or other similar grounds. It also ensures that there is no gender-based discrimination concerning remuneration and social security for the same work.

Article 38 guarantees women's right to participate in all state bodies based on proportional inclusion. Article 42 of part 3, which outlines the right to social justice, ensures that socially backward groups, including women, Dalits, indigenous people, indigenous nationalities, Madhesi, Tharu minorities, persons with disabilities, marginalized communities, Muslims, backward classes, gender and sexual minorities, youths, farmers, laborers, oppressed citizens of backward regions, and indigent Khas Arya, have the right to participate in state bodies based on inclusive principles. Part 8, article 84, concerning the composition of the House of Representatives, mandates that political parties field candidates under the proportional electoral system, ensuring representation for women, Dalits, indigenous people, Khas Arya, Madhesi, Tharu, Muslims, and backward regions in proportion to their population. Geographical and territorial balance is also considered. The Nepalese constitution reserves 33% of seats for women in all government functions, including parliaments. Additionally, alternating seats must be provided for men and women in the highest positions, such as president and vice president, head and deputy head of parliament, mayor, and deputy mayor, with at least two seats occupied by women.

Despite these progressive provisions, the real challenge lies in the implementation and enforcement of these constitutional mandates. The history of Nepali politics has shown that legal provisions alone are insufficient to dismantle entrenched social norms and power structures. Effective enforcement mechanisms, public awareness campaigns, and continuous monitoring are essential to translate these constitutional ideals into reality. Furthermore, political will and commitment from all sectors of society are critical to overcoming resistance and ensuring that these provisions lead to substantive change.

2.3.2 Local Elections Act, 2017

The Local Elections Act 2017 marked a significant step forward in enhancing women's political representation in Nepal. According to section 17(4) of the Local Level Election Act 2017, political parties are mandated to nominate a female candidate for either chief or deputy chief positions at the local level, except in cases where parties formed an alliance and nominated

candidates for just one of the top two posts. Additionally, parties are required to ensure that 50% of their candidates for chiefs and deputies of district coordination committees are women. This provision extended to urban and rural municipalities, where at least two out of every four ward members are mandated to be women, with one representing a Dalit caste (Election Commission, 2017). Article 17(5) further stipulated that parties must nominate at least one Dalit woman candidate for women ward member positions, except when only one woman is nominated for the ward member post (Election Commission, 2017).

These affirmative measures indeed led to a noticeable uptick in women's representation in local politics. While the mandatory provisions have undoubtedly increased women's numerical representation in local politics, substantial challenges remain for their effective participation in decision-making processes. Merely increasing numerical representation without empowering women to actively shape and influence decision-making would undermine the purpose of these affirmative measures. Addressing deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes, stereotypes, and power structures that impede women's full and equal participation in politics is a complex and multifaceted challenge that requires sustained efforts across various domains.

2.3.3 Local Government Operation Act, 2017

The Local Government Operation Act 2017 defines the functions, duties, and rights of the vice-chairperson and deputy mayor as follows: serving as the coordinator of the judicial committee, assuming portfolios in the absence of the chair or mayor, coordinating activities of non-government organizations, overseeing work related to the protection of consumer interests, monitoring and supervising plans and programs, and presenting reports at meetings. Additionally, this act stipulates that the vice-chairperson and deputy mayor can exercise power and rights only when delegated by the chairperson or mayor. It also addresses the fiscal jurisdiction of rural municipalities and municipalities and provides for the establishment of a local revenue advisory committee, which consists of six members, among whom the vice-chairperson or deputy mayor should be the coordinator. The committee's duties include the formulation, reform, and amendment of revenue-related policies and laws, providing necessary consultations regarding adherence to these policies, analyzing revenue sources, circles, and rates, making revenue estimates for the coming fiscal year, conducting internal income analysis and estimates based on rates and revenue areas, providing consultations on tax policies that contribute to promoting local industries and businesses and generating employment, and offering consultations related to tax revenue rates, non-tax revenue, service tariffs, and fees, among other matters.

Similarly, this act states that the vice-chairperson and deputy mayor are coordinators of the resource estimation and budget ceiling determination committee. Their responsibilities include estimating internal income, funds from revenue sharing, grants, loans, and other income, as well as outlining balanced distributions and determining the budget ceiling. It also outlines the

functions and duties of the vice-chairperson and deputy mayor as coordinators of the budget and program formulation committee, primarily responsible for formulating the annual budget and program at the local level based on income projections and the determined budget ceiling. Importantly, it also highlights the role of the vice-chairperson and deputy mayor in tabling and endorsing the budget, which involves presenting program and budget estimates for the next fiscal year before the Assembly by Ashad 10 each year, after obtaining approval from the executive.

Despite the comprehensive delineation of roles and functions in the LGOA 2017, there is a notable gap between legislative mandates and practical implementation. Political parties in Nepal often relegate women to secondary positions within these structures, limiting their influence and decision-making authority. This discrepancy raises questions about the actual empowerment and meaningful participation of women in local governance, highlighting the need for more concerted efforts to bridge this gap and ensure gender-inclusive governance practices.

2.3.4 National Gender Equality Policy, 2021

The Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens introduced the National Gender Equality Policy, 2077 in 2021, aligning to minimize gender-based discrimination across economic, social, and political domains. This policy focuses on empowering women, particularly in enhancing their participation in political and decision-making realms. It includes strategies like developing and implementing capacity-building programs for women at all government levels and emphasizes enacting and sustaining laws for women's political representation. It targets capacity-building and equal involvement in lawmaking while stressing women's representation in government institutions. The policy also ensures coordination between provincial and local authorities to create women-centric laws and programs. Additionally, the policy reserves six seats on local bodies for representatives from marginalized communities and encourages initiatives to boost women's participation in various activities. Special arrangements are made to increase women's presence in the civil service, with the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens supporting their preparation for these roles.

The National Gender Equality Policy 2077 represents a positive step toward addressing gender inequality in Nepal. However, its true impact will be determined by the commitment and efforts of all stakeholders, including the government, civil society organizations, and the broader society, to translate its provisions into tangible and sustainable changes in the lives of women across the country.

2.3.5 Fifteen Periodic Plan

The 15th Periodic Plan (2019/20-2023/24) of Nepal emphasizes gender equality, aiming to transform Nepal into a gender-equal society by ensuring comprehensive and meaningful

participation of women. A core objective is to facilitate women's equal access to resources, opportunities, and benefits, fostering their leadership in driving economic prosperity and sustainable development. To realize these ambitions, the plan delineates six strategic approaches, with particular emphasis on establishing a gender-responsive governance framework across all sectors and levels of governance. The associated policies within these strategies prioritize measures to achieve a 50% representation of women in decision-making bodies, structures, and developmental processes at all governmental levels. Furthermore, the plan commits to enhancing women's involvement in policy formulation, program implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms throughout the state's sectors and levels. While the plan indicates a positive move towards ensuring gender justice, its successful implementation remains challenging. The government of Nepal has continued the gender justice agenda into the 16th Plan to pave the way for a more equitable and prosperous society.

2.3.6 Sixteen Periodic Plan

The recently issued 16th Periodic Plan (2024/25-2029/30) of Nepal emphasizes gender equality in chapter eight: gender equality, social justice, and inclusive society. This chapter comprehensively addresses various facets, including challenges, transformational strategies, key programs, and measurable goals aimed at promoting gender equality and inclusivity. A significant focus is placed on addressing the persistent lack of meaningful gender equality participation across all three levels of government. Moreover, it outlines ten transformational strategies aimed at bridging current gender gaps across different sectors and levels. These strategies emphasize the need for ensuring meaningful participation of women, Dalits, and marginalized communities in policy formulation, law-making, budgeting, program implementation, and monitoring and evaluation processes at all government levels. This plan sets ambitious targets for increasing women's representation: in the federal parliament from 33.6% in fiscal year 2079/80 to 40% by fiscal year 2085/86; in provincial assemblies from 34.5% to 40%, and at the local level from 40.9% to 45% over the same period. Additionally, it proposes enhancing women's representation in the public sector from 29.5% to 35% and increasing their participation in the policy-making process from 13.7% to 20% by fiscal year 2085/86. The comprehensive approach and ambitious targets outlined in this plan signal a strong commitment to advancing gender equality and inclusivity in Nepal. However, translating these aspirations into tangible outcomes will require sustained political will, robust implementation mechanisms, stakeholder collaboration, and continuous monitoring. These efforts are necessary to address challenges and capitalize on opportunities for transformative change in Nepali society.

2.4 Studies on Decision-Making Politics in Nepal

A diagnostic study conducted by The Asia Foundation in 2017 shed light on the discrepancy between representation and active engagement. While there are provisions for adequate representation, elected women and Dalit representatives from reserved seats encounter challenges in actively contributing to decision-making processes and often lack defined roles in local governance. The study also observed the desire of women ward members, including Dalits, to advocate for gender-friendly policies and programs. However, many of these representatives, especially those in reserved seats, expressed discontentment due to the lack of clear roles in the local government.

Another study conducted by The Asia Foundation in 2018 delved into the requirements and capabilities of locally elected women representatives in Nepal. It discovered a common concern among these representatives regarding training needs, irrespective of their educational background or age. Specifically, they highlighted difficulties in financial and budget management, emphasizing the necessity for training to enhance their job performance in these areas. Moreover, women representatives expressed a keen interest in receiving training in leadership, empowerment, laws, and government policies. They also pointed out the importance of acquiring skills such as gender-sensitive public speaking and effective communication. Despite encountering limitations in skills and capacity, many elected women representatives exhibited enthusiasm for their roles, showcasing a readiness to learn and actively contribute to local development. Nonetheless, they acknowledged that capacity and skills constraints posed significant challenges in effectively empowering elected women representatives.

International Alert study in 2020 delved into the dynamics of law-making in local governments, with a particular focus on six municipalities in the Lumbini province. This study uncovered a distinct pattern where only a small fraction of elected members participated in drafting new bills, leaving a significant portion of committee members unaware and uninvolved. This lack of engagement was especially noticeable among women and minority group members, who encountered obstacles such as language barriers in discussions conducted solely in Nepali. The study emphasized the prevalence of male dominance in law-making, with minimal input from Dalit and Muslim communities. This imbalance further marginalized many elected officials due to their lack of expertise and skills, discouraging their active involvement in the law-making processes.

A baseline survey conducted by the Nepal Administrative Staff College in 2021 as part of the provincial and local governance support program revealed a consistent trend of high attendance among elected representatives from women and excluded groups at executive and assembly meetings, with approximately 90% regularly participating. In the latest meeting, over 80% of these representatives were present, although occasional absences were attributed to

household responsibilities and illness. About one-third of these representatives take an active lead in meetings, with more than one-fourth claiming to have an influential role. Interestingly, 55% of those who spoke infrequently or not at all mentioned a lack of knowledge about the topics as a major reason. However, a significant majority, nine out of ten elected representatives, expressed comfort in expressing their views during these gatherings. Furthermore, nearly nine-tenths of these representatives noted that the mayor or president consistently or occasionally encourages them to contribute their opinions during these meetings.

Acharya et al. (2022) noted that in certain scenarios deputy mayors expressed a sense of exclusion from crucial decision-making processes, as decisions were frequently finalized within committees without thorough discussions. Particularly, Dalit and female members faced notable marginalization during these pivotal decision-making phases, with municipal officials assuming leadership roles while members of minority groups were relegated to mere observers during decision approvals. The 'resource projection and budgeting committee' wielded considerable influence over the mayor, swaying committee members to support proposals from women, Dalits, or minorities. The research findings indicated that 55% of committee members, encompassing women, Dalits, or minorities, reported a lack of formal notification about committee meetings and agendas from municipalities. Moreover, six out of ten members confessed to being unaware of specific decisions documented in meeting minutes. The study also highlighted the substantial influence of the mayor, deputy mayor, and chief administrative officer on committee decisions. In several municipalities, the budget ceiling was established without comprehensive discussions and consensus among all members, as certain officials prioritized self-interests in local planning and budgeting processes.

Nepal Administrative Staff College (2022) conducted a study on local governance and inclusive public finance management across Madhesh, Bagmati, and Sudurpashchim provinces in Nepal. The study involved a range of stakeholders, including local government leaders, ward chairpersons, women and Dalit representatives, and chief administrative officers. The majority of participants (64%) expressed a high level of respect for the opinions of women and marginalized community members during decision-making processes. However, there were notable differences in perception based on gender, with a higher percentage of male respondents (68%) feeling that women and marginalized community voices were highly valued compared to female respondents (49%). These variations in perception were also evident based on participants' roles, with a significant majority of ward chairpersons (74%) and local government chiefs/deputies (72%) indicating strong respect for women and marginalized community opinions. In contrast, only 38% of chief administrative officers and 50% of women and Dalit executive committee members shared this perspective. Less than half of the participants (48%) believed that women and marginalized community suggestions were

thoroughly considered when shaping development projects. A similar proportion felt that while women and marginalized community voices were heard, they were not fully integrated into the planning process. Despite opportunities for participation and expression of concerns, the impact of women and marginalized community representatives' suggestions on project design remained limited.

Chapter-3: Findings and Reflections

3.1 Patriarchal Orientation

The responses from female deputy mayors across various local governments highlight the persistent influence of patriarchal mindsets and deeply ingrained gender biases in decision-making processes at the local level. Several female deputy mayors expressed their frustration and disillusionment with prevailing societal attitudes that view women as inferior or different, hindering their equal participation and influence in decision-making roles. Female deputy mayors highlighted this issue by stating,

Patriarchal thinking deeply ingrained in our society is reflected in the decision-making process in local government (Interviewee #R15, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

I have noticed a tendency in our community to view and treat women as inferior (Interviewee #R2, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

Societal perceptions and attitudes toward women's roles haven't significantly changed. Deep-seated biases and prejudices continue to hinder our active participation in decision-making and leadership roles in local government (Interviewee #R8, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The deeply ingrained perception of women's voices, perspectives, and contributions being disregarded, marginalized, or dismissed in local government decision-making spaces persists due to societal biases and prejudices. This unfair and biased view of women hinders their effective participation and contribution in decision-making processes. The pervasive nature of patriarchal thinking manifests subtly through behavior and interactions, creating barriers to women's equal participation. Traditional beliefs that prioritize men over women are firmly entrenched in society, reflecting a systemic issue ingrained in the sociocultural fabric. These patriarchal attitudes manifest in actions and decisions, impeding women's equal treatment and meaningful participation in decision-making. The deeply-rooted unfair judgments against women pose significant challenges for their involvement in government decision-making and leadership roles.

Female deputy mayors face significant challenges in asserting their roles and receiving the recognition and respect they deserve. They often encounter unequal opportunities compared to men, which hinders their full participation in decision-making processes. This difficulty in claiming proper roles and recognition is compounded by marginalization, disregard, and dismissive attitudes from male counterparts, especially mayors and other officials in local government. Female Vice Chairperson shared,

My voice and input are often ignored or disregarded by officials in our local government, limiting my ability to assert rightful roles, receive recognition, and contribute fully to decision-making processes (Interviewee #R13, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

The difficulty in asserting their roles is further emphasized by other deputy mayors:

Women are often perceived differently in local government, which is reflected in decision-making processes (Interviewee #R3, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Ensuring my voice is heard and my perspectives are valued is a struggle in the traditionally male-dominated local government environment (Interviewee #R10, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

A patriarchal mindset is a major obstacle in bringing about change in local government. Male counterparts do not readily offer support and only cooperate after significant pressure is applied (Interviewee #R8, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Male leaders often dismiss contributions from female deputy mayors, highlighting gender inequality in decision-making. This stems from deep-seated gender stereotypes and patriarchal mindsets that prioritize male dominance and undermine women's empowerment and equal participation. The female deputy mayor struggles to have her voice heard and her opinions valued in the male-dominated local government, facing numerous challenges due to this persistent patriarchal mindset. Female deputy mayors perceive this mindset as a major barrier to implementing changes in local government, and male colleagues do not easily support or cooperate unless pressured. The patriarchal mindset in local government poses a significant barrier to meaningful participation and contribution by female deputy mayors.

The lack of genuine support from male colleagues, despite verbal assurances, exacerbates the issue. The female vice chairperson feels that although verbally supported by the chairperson, their actions contradict this support. This disconnect suggests a tokenistic approach, where women are appointed to leadership positions but not genuinely empowered or treated with equal respect. Female vice chairperson shared,

There is a lot of verbal support from the chairperson, but their actions don't reflect it (Interviewee #R1, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

This response reveals a tokenistic approach to appointing women to leadership positions without genuinely empowering them or treating them with respect. Lip service about supporting women is contradicted by actions that actually undermine their authority.

Notably, some female deputy mayors acknowledged the potential for different treatment if the deputy mayor were male; suggesting a perception that men in similar positions would receive greater respect and better treatment. Female vice chairperson shared,

I believe that if a man were in this position, he would behave differently (Interviewee #R1, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

The scenario might be different if the deputy mayor were male (Interviewee #R2, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

These responses highlight the deep-rooted nature of gender biases, where women in leadership roles do not receive the same level of recognition and treatment as their male counterparts, despite occupying similar positions.

However, it's important to note that not all female deputy mayors shared the same experiences. One female deputy mayor didn't find decision-making challenging solely because of her gender. She acknowledged the significant influence and authority vested in the mayor, irrespective of gender stating,

I don't face difficulties in decision-making just because I'm a woman. The mayor, regardless of gender, wields significant influence and authority in our local government (Interviewee #R11, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This female deputy mayor recognizes the mayor's substantial power and authority as per the law. Whether the mayor is male or female, they have a significant influence on how the local government functions, highlighting the importance of the position itself rather than solely focusing on gender.

The responses from deputy mayors highlight significant challenges faced by female deputy mayors due to deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes and biases. These challenges hinder their full participation and contribution to decision-making processes, emphasizing the urgent need to dismantle patriarchal structures and foster an enabling environment for women's equal participation and leadership at the local level. Addressing these issues necessitates a concerted effort to challenge and transform patriarchal mindsets to ensure equal recognition of women in leadership roles.

3.2 Reluctance in Accepting Female Leadership

One striking aspect of the field data is the persistence of traditional viewpoints that question women's leadership abilities. Female deputy mayors often face skepticism and a lack of trust, posing significant barriers to their meaningful participation in decision-making processes. As articulated by the female deputy mayor, the hesitation to trust women's leadership capabilities is a significant barrier. Female deputy mayor noted,

People in our society still hold traditional views about women's leadership. Many are hesitant to trust female leadership due to traditional beliefs (Interviewee #R3, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The view from the deputy mayor highlights the persistent traditional beliefs present in society that hinder the acceptance of women's leadership roles. Despite occupying positions of authority, female leaders like the deputy mayor face hesitancy and a lack of trust from segments of the population due to deep-rooted cultural perceptions regarding gender roles and capabilities. These traditional beliefs act as barriers, undermining the legitimacy and acceptance of women in decision-making positions in the local governance structures.

The narrative from another female deputy mayor further illustrates the struggles faced by female deputy mayors. One female deputy mayor shared,

Female leadership faces significant challenges due to ingrained male-centric views in our society. I face resistance and skepticism in fulfilling my municipal duties as a woman in a leadership role (Interviewee #R10, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The structural barriers and institutional resistance highlighted in the data are particularly concerning. Even when women hold leadership roles, they face considerable obstacles from the systems and organizations. This resistance manifests in various forms, from cultural biases and stereotypes to a lack of meaningful authority and influence in their positions. Simply appointing women to leadership roles is not enough; a fundamental shift in organizational culture and mindsets is required to truly support female leadership.

Despite constitutional provisions and efforts to promote gender equality, there appears to be a deep-rooted societal bias that undermines the credibility and authority of female leaders. Female deputy mayor shared,

The male-dominated mindset in our institution undermines women's authority, posing challenges for me as Deputy Mayor to assert control and drive initiatives (Interviewee #R8, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This reflects a dissonance between policy and practice, where the formal recognition of female leadership does not translate into actual empowerment. This challenge is not merely a surface-level issue but rather a deeply ingrained cultural perception that has far-reaching implications for the empowerment and meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes. The resistance to female leadership, as observed by another female deputy mayor, is evident:

Female leadership in local government encounters resistance and hesitation. Prevailing norms challenge the recognition of deputy mayors' contributions and decision-making abilities (Interviewee #R3, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Female leadership is often not accepted or taken seriously, leading to a deprivation of rightful roles and opportunities. This sentiment is echoed by female deputy mayor, who stated,

Women's leadership is often not accepted and taken seriously (Interviewee #R10, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Furthermore, the acceptance of women in leadership roles remains limited, as highlighted by another female deputy mayor,

Support for women's leadership in our local government is lacking. The chief administrative officer and the mayor are not fully accepting women leaders (Interviewee #R7, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The limited female representation and vocal participation in local governance is another critical issue that emerges from the data. Female deputy mayors expressed concern over the limited number of women in key leadership roles and face challenges in ensuring those women's voices are heard. Female deputy mayor highlights this issue, stating:

Having very few women in key roles in local government creates significant challenges for us (Interviewee #R7, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This lack of representation not only diminishes the potential for diverse perspectives in decision-making but also perpetuates a cycle of exclusion. Several female deputy mayors voiced their frustration with the perceived limitations of their roles, feeling that the deputy mayor's position often lacks meaningful authority and influence, rendering their participation in governance processes symbolic rather than substantive. One female deputy mayor expressed her disillusionment by stating,

While there's a notion to promote women's leadership, I feel it's only on paper and not truly reflected in the behaviors of the elected and selected officials of our local government. The position of the deputy mayor often becomes symbolic, lacking meaningful influence (Interviewee #R6, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Female deputy mayors often encounter active discouragement and demotivation from their peers and superiors. Female vice chairperson noted,

When women seek leadership roles, often face discouragement instead of support (Interviewee #R1, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

The perceived limitations of the deputy mayor's role and the active discouragement and demotivation faced by female leaders highlight the deeply ingrained nature of the challenges they confront. These female leaders are not only battling external societal biases but also internal resistance within their own organizations. Such an environment can be demoralizing and ultimately hinder their ability to effectively contribute to and shape decision-making processes.

However, amidst these challenges, some acknowledged varying levels of support within their local government. Female deputy mayor stated,

I wouldn't say there's a complete lack of support for female leadership in our local government (Interviewee #R11, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Furthermore, the female deputy mayor points out that the reluctance of women themselves to step into leadership roles is another dimension of the problem. Female deputy mayor noted,

I think there are positive perceptions about women in leadership roles. However, the challenge is that many women hesitate to step forward and take on these positions (Interviewee #R21, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This indicates that societal expectations and self-perception among women play a role in shaping the leadership landscape. The field data also reveals a strong determination among female deputy mayors to overcome barriers and push for greater gender equality in leadership. They emphasize the need for societal and institutional changes to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in leadership roles. Female deputy mayor shared her optimistic view, stating,

Empowering women in decision-making roles is vital for a prosperous society. With an inclusive and participatory approach, we can create a more equitable and thriving society and local government for everyone (Interviewee #R11, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The determination and resilience of female deputy mayors are inspiring. Their dedication to achieving more gender equality in leadership and creating an inclusive decision-making environment is crucial for bringing about meaningful change.

The data presented reminds us of the significant work needed for gender equality and empowering women in local leadership. It's a call for action to all stakeholders, from policymakers to community leaders, to prioritize and support women's inclusion in decision-making. Continue efforts are required to address cultural biases and resistance to empower female leaders and achieve gender balance in decision-making. This ongoing journey for gender equality highlights the need for sustained advocacy and systemic changes to create an environment where female leaders can succeed and make meaningful contributions to governance.

3.3 Authorized Role and Practical Realities

The role of female deputy mayors in local governments is crucial for ensuring gender representation and promoting inclusive governance. However, despite statutory recognition, female deputy mayors often face challenges that hinder their full participation in decision-making processes. Many female deputy mayors feel that their roles are symbolic rather than substantive, struggling to have their contributions recognized and valued. This sentiment is vividly captured in the words of female deputy mayor, who states,

The female deputy mayor's role often feels like a mere formality or symbolic, lacking substantive authority or influence in decision-making processes (Interviewee #R6, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This sentiment underscores the frustration with the tokenistic nature of their roles, where their presence is acknowledged but their influence is negligible. The perception of mere formality reveals a significant disparity between the intended authority of their positions and the actual impact they have, indicating systemic barriers that impede their participation and contributions. Seen more symbolic than substantive positions of authority, their roles hinder their effectiveness in representing constituents and contributing meaningfully to local governance. This perspective highlights a troubling gap between the formal recognition of their roles and their practical influence. The symbolic aspect of their positions often results in marginalization, limiting their ability to advocate for constituents and engage meaningfully in governance. The feeling of being overlooked or given little weight suggests a lack of meaningful regard for their input and viewpoints, further reinforcing a sense of powerlessness in decision-making processes.

Another critical issue identified is the gap between the constitutional rights granted to female deputy mayors and their actual ability to exercise these rights in practice. Female vice chairperson emphasizes this discrepancy, stating,

There is a gap between the legal provisions and the actual implementation of my mandated role in the decision-making processes (Interviewee #R1, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

This response highlights a critical disconnect between the legal framework and the practical realities faced by female deputy mayors. Despite robust legal frameworks, the practical application of these rights is hindered. This gap indicates institutional weaknesses and possibly ingrained patriarchal norms that obstruct female leaders from exercising their full range of responsibilities, necessitating more robust enforcement mechanisms. The gap between statutory provisions and practical implementation poses a significant barrier to their effective participation, as the statutory rights intended to empower them are not fully realized in reality.

Another issue highlighted is the restricted scope of the roles assigned to female deputy mayors. Many female deputy mayors stated that their responsibilities are confined to specific areas, such as monitoring or judiciary work, limiting their broader participation in governance. This confinement hinders their ability to contribute to a wider range of decision-making processes and limits their influence. For example, female deputy mayor notes,

My role is largely limited to monitoring and judiciary work. I do not have much decision-making power or influence in other crucial areas of local governance (Interviewee #R10, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The confinement of roles to specific functions, such as monitoring and judiciary work, limits the holistic participation of female deputy mayors. This restriction not only diminishes their potential impact on governance but also reinforces gendered divisions of labor in local governments. The feeling of having a narrow range of responsibilities and lacking decision-making power or influence in other crucial areas highlights their limited authority and impact on broader aspects of local governance. This raises concerns about the extent to which female deputy mayors are truly integrated into comprehensive decision-making processes, suggesting compartmentalization of their roles that may hinder their ability to shape governance holistically.

Another concerning issue raised is the lack of recognition and appreciation for the work and responsibilities undertaken by female deputy mayors. This sentiment is captured in the words of the female vice chairperson, who states,

We female deputy mayors hold significant responsibilities in local government. Yet, our efforts often lack the recognition deserve (Interviewee #R19, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

This highlights a cultural issue in the local government where women's contributions are often overlooked, potentially impacting their morale. The lack of recognition not only reveals deep-seated biases but also perpetuates the undervaluing of female deputy chairperson's input, hindering their empowerment and meaningful engagement in decision-making. The absence of acknowledgement diminishes the sense of value and importance attached to their roles, potentially impacting their motivation and effectiveness in governance processes. This emphasizes the necessity for a cultural transformation in local government to acknowledge and value the contributions of female deputy mayors.

Female deputy mayors encounter challenges in fully utilizing their positions due to unclear definitions of their roles and responsibilities. There is a pressing need for better understanding and education about the roles and powers of female deputy mayors to enable effective governance. The female deputy mayor highlighted the lack of clarity of their role, emphasizing the need for better education and understanding of their roles and responsibilities. For instance, the female deputy mayor emphasizes this need, stating,

We lack clarity about our roles and scope, and need better education on deputy mayor responsibilities (Interviewee #R15, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This response highlights a critical issue – the lack of clarity and understanding among female deputy mayors themselves regarding the extent of their powers and scope of responsibilities. The acknowledgement of this knowledge deficit indicates a willingness to address this gap. Empowering female deputy mayors with knowledge about their responsibilities can enhance their confidence and effectiveness in governance, overcoming barriers to their participation

and influence in decision-making processes. This emphasizes that empowerment through knowledge and assertiveness can help overcome some of the barriers faced by female leaders. It highlights the importance of self-education and proactive engagement in fulfilling the mandates of the position and ensuring that the female deputy mayor's voice is heard in decision-making processes.

Female deputy mayor also emphasized the need for active monitoring and enforcement from higher authorities to ensure that female deputy mayors are truly empowered to exercise their rights and responsibilities in decision-making processes. Female deputy mayor shared,

Monitoring from higher authorities is needed to ensure that the rights and responsibilities of female deputy mayors are properly exercised. Just having rights on paper isn't enough; oversight is crucial for the empowerment of female deputy mayors (Interviewee #R6, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This response stresses the necessity of active oversight to enable female deputy mayors to fulfill their roles effectively. The call for supervision from higher authorities highlights the role of accountability mechanisms in translating legal provisions into tangible empowerment, ensuring that female leaders can contribute meaningfully to local governance. This perspective emphasizes the pivotal role of central and provincial authorities in bridging the gap between policies and their practical implementation at the local level.

Despite the challenges, some female deputy mayors expressed a more positive outlook on their roles and responsibilities. This positive mindset, coupled with awareness of their rights and responsibilities, can significantly enhance their effectiveness. For instance, the female deputy mayor shared,

The role of the deputy mayor is highly active, and I have accepted it in a very positive manner. It is a powerful position if utilized properly (Interviewee #R11, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This perspective highlights a more positive and empowered view of the deputy mayor's role. The acknowledgement of the role as very active and powerful suggests an understanding of its potential influence. The realization of the need for properly utilizing the deputy mayor's role implies awareness that effective use of the position is crucial to realizing its power. The sense of self-assurance and knowledge of the deputy mayor's rights and responsibilities reflect a proactive approach and confidence in fulfilling the mandates of the position. This awareness and assertiveness could contribute to a more effective exercise of the deputy mayor's role in decision-making processes, ensuring that the position is leveraged to its full potential for the benefit of society.

The position of deputy mayor is also seen as an institution. The acknowledgement of the deputy mayor's position as an institution underscores the perceived importance and impact of this role. For example, female deputy mayor stated,

The deputy mayor is not merely an individual position but rather an institution. Every institution should be respected and regarded as supreme (Interviewee #R11, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This perspective emphasizes the institutional value of the deputy mayor's role. Viewing the position as an institution highlights its potential influence and the respect it should command. This approach advocates for a cultural shift in local governments to recognize and empower the role of female deputy mayors.

The perspectives of chief administrative officers and a mayor shed light on the complexities surrounding the implementation of the deputy mayor's role. Chief administrative officer noted,

The existing laws and acts do not clearly define and outline the role of the deputy mayor (Interviewee #R5, Chief Administrative Officer, 2024).

This lack of clear role definition contributes to confusion and potential conflicts between mayors and deputy mayors regarding their respective roles and responsibilities, necessitating legal reforms to delineate responsibilities more explicitly.

The chairperson asserts that the role of the deputy mayor is clearly defined in the act, stating,

The role of the deputy chairperson is clearly defined and outlined in the local government operation act 2074. There are no deviations from the responsibilities and duties assigned to this position as per the legal provisions (Interviewee #R20, Chairperson, 2024).

This response affirms the clarity of the deputy mayor's role as outlined in the local government operation act 2074. The chairperson's affirmation of no differences or deviations from the responsibilities and duties specified in the act indicates confidence in the consistency and adherence to legal provisions governing the position. This perspective contrasts with the view of the chief administrative officer about deputy mayor roles, highlighting potential disparities in perceptions and interpretations of the legal framework across different local governments. The chairperson's assertion of alignment with legal provisions suggests a need for a consistent understanding of the deputy mayor's role to ensure effective governance and clarity in responsibilities in local government.

The perspective from a mayor highlights an acknowledgement of the legal framework but also a hands-off approach that may inadvertently contribute to the marginalization of the deputy mayor. While respecting boundaries is important, active engagement and support from mayors could foster a more inclusive and cooperative governance environment. Mayor stated,

The law clearly outlines the deputy mayor's role. I avoid asking about her contributions or interfering with her duties. No one, including me, can go beyond legal boundaries. The deputy mayor assesses her influence on local government decision-making best (Interviewee #R4, Mayor, 2024).

This mayor's response sheds light on the dynamics between the mayor and deputy mayor. While acknowledging the legal provisions outlining the deputy mayor's responsibilities, the mayor's choice not to inquire about the deputy mayor's specific contributions suggests a hands-off approach that may limit oversight and support. The mayor's acknowledgement of not interfering in the deputy mayor's assigned duties indicates a reluctance to be overly involved, which could be interpreted as either respecting boundaries or missing opportunities for collaboration. However, recognizing that the deputy mayor is best positioned to assess influence aligns with promoting self-determination. This perspective highlights the complex interplay between adhering to legal frameworks, respecting autonomy, and the need for coordination and support in local governance.

The insights from female deputy mayors, the vice chairperson, the chief administrative officer, and the mayor offer valuable perspectives on the challenges, opportunities, and diverse experiences of female deputy mayors in influencing decision-making processes in local governments. While some feel empowered and actively engaged, others encounter marginalization, lack of clarity, and limited substantive authority. This highlights the critical need to address the symbolic nature of female deputy mayors' roles, bridge the gap between legal provisions and their practical implementation, and ensure broader recognition and empowerment of their contributions. Clear role definitions, continuous education, and higher-level oversight are essential to enable female deputy mayors to fulfill their potential and have a meaningful impact on governance. Addressing these challenges is crucial for promoting inclusive governance and gender representation in local decision-making processes.

3.4 Power Imbalance

The field data reveal a significant power imbalance and centralization of authority in the hands of the mayors, which poses challenges for female deputy mayors in influencing decision-making processes. They highlight the excessive power and control exercised by the mayors, often disregarding the opinions and input of others. Female deputy mayors shared their frustrations,

In the local government, the mayor holds excessive power and authority, often imposing decisions regardless of others' opinions (Interviewee #R3, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The mayor primarily holds the executive role and decision-making power, often working closely with employees and excluding me from important discussions (Interviewee #R10, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Meetings typically focus on the mayor's agendas. Discussions often revolve around the mayor's proposed agendas (Interviewee #R21, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

These responses from female deputy mayors indicate a pervasive sense of exclusion in local government decision-making processes. There is a clear perception that the mayor wields disproportionate power and authority, often imposing decisions without adequately consulting other elected officials. This dynamic results in the exclusion of female deputy mayors from crucial local governance activities, as evidenced by their consistent reports of being left out of the decision-making loop and their struggles to have their voices heard and perspectives considered. The centralization of power around the mayor not only undermines the participatory role of the deputy mayors but also reflects a broader issue of governance that prioritizes the mayor's political motives over inclusive and equitable decision-making.

This power imbalance is further exacerbated by the lack of meaningful inclusion and consideration of the female deputy mayors' perspectives and proposals in decision-making processes. Female deputy mayors expressed frustration over the dismissal or difficulties faced in getting their proposed agendas and initiatives approved and implemented. Female deputy mayors shared,

My influence is limited as the mayor removes programs from my proposed agenda. Negotiating with him is difficult due to his lack of positive attitude toward my proposal (Interviewee #R6, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The mayor's agendas get passed easily, but mine face difficulties. It's not as positive an experience as I had hoped. The mayor has an easier path to approval compared to mine (Interviewee #R7, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

I propose my agenda. The mayor accepts some of my agendas, but others are dismissed without proper consideration (Interviewee #R13, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

These responses shed light on challenges faced by deputy mayors and vice chairpersons in influencing decision-making within the local governance structure. There is a noticeable trend where the mayor's proposals are easily approved, while those from the female deputy mayors encounter difficulties and delays. This inconsistency leads to a less positive and more challenging experience for them, as some proposals are accepted while others are dismissed without proper consideration. These challenges are attributed to a lack of positive attitude from the mayor towards certain proposals, resulting in disparities in approval processes and a less favorable experience for the deputies involved. The selective acceptance of agendas further contributes to a sense of limited impact and unequal treatment in decision-making processes. This dynamic reflects a broader issue of unequal power distribution and a lack of support for initiatives proposed by female deputy mayors, ultimately hindering their effective contribution to governance and development efforts. These insights stress the need for greater

transparency, fairness, and inclusivity in evaluating and approving proposals to ensure equitable governance practices and foster effective collaboration within the local government framework.

Furthermore, the field data highlight specific challenges faced by female deputy mayors in addressing issues concerning women and children, despite dedicated funding from the federal government. Female deputy mayors expressed concerns about the lack of consideration and obstacles impeding their effective utilization of these resources and advocacy for women's and children's issues in decision-making processes. For example, female deputy mayor noted,

In sectors such as child and women's issues, the budget comes from the federal government. Despite dedicated funding, it is challenging for me to work effectively and make decisions in these areas. Lingering obstacles impede my ability to fully utilize and direct resources in the most impactful way (Interviewee #R8, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Another female deputy mayor expressed panic, stating,

I am disheartened by the fact that women's voices are rarely heard or valued in decision-making. It's crucial to amplify our voices and create an environment where our perspectives and contributions are acknowledged (Interviewee #R15, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The insights provided highlight significant challenges and concerns in decision-making and resource utilization within sectors like child and women's issues in the local governance context. Despite dedicated funding from the federal government, there are obstacles hindering effective work and decision-making in these crucial areas. These challenges suggest systemic issues that limit the full utilization and direction of resources, potentially impacting the impact and effectiveness of initiatives. Additionally, there's a notable concern about the underrepresentation and undervaluation of women's voices in decision-making processes. This underscores the importance of creating an inclusive environment where diverse perspectives, especially concerning women's issues, are not only heard but also valued and integrated into governance strategies. These insights call for systemic changes promoting inclusivity, gender equality, and optimal resource utilization to address pressing social issues effectively within the local government framework.

Field data also reveal instances where female deputy mayors report positive experiences and active participation in decision-making processes. Some female deputy mayors stated that their voices are respected during executive meetings. The chief administrative officer acknowledges that the deputy mayor's proposed agendas are generally passed, albeit with some instances of having to assert her stance firmly. Female deputy mayors shared,

In executive meetings at our local government, I feel respected. When I stand up and speak, nobody ignores my opinions (Interviewee #R11, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The female deputy mayor appears less active than the mayor in executive committee meetings. When she brings forth an agenda to the mayor, it generally gets passed. However, there are instances where she has had to firmly assert her stance and advocate for her proposed agenda items to be included in the decision-making process (Interviewee #R18, Chief Administrative Officer, 2024).

The female deputy mayor is proactive in bringing forward her own agendas in executive council meetings. She shares her own ideas instead of simply following predetermined agendas (Interviewee #R14, Chief Administrative Officer, 2024).

It reveals a nuanced experience for female deputy mayors in local government executive meetings. On the positive side, there is a sense of respect when they speak, and their opinions are not ignored. This respectful environment allows them to bring forward their agendas, which, sometimes, get passed with minimal resistance. However, this is not always the case. There are instances where they must assertively advocate for their proposed agenda items to be included in the decision-making process. Despite these challenges, female deputy mayors are noted for their proactive approach. They actively contribute their own initiatives rather than merely following the predetermined agenda. This proactive stance ensures that the issues and priorities they identify receive due consideration, reflecting their ownership and commitment to addressing critical community concerns through local government policies and decisions.

The data highlight the ongoing power imbalance and challenges faced by female deputy mayors in asserting their influence and ensuring meaningful participation in decision-making. While some positive experiences are reported, many female deputy mayors express concerns about the centralization of power, lack of consideration for their voices and proposals, and obstacles in addressing issues related to women and children. Female deputy mayors often struggle to have their voices heard and their agendas considered, facing significant barriers in contributing effectively to governance. Despite these challenges, some female deputy mayors demonstrate proactive engagement and advocacy, pushing for the inclusion of crucial issues such as education and women's and children's welfare in local government policies. Legal provisions granting executive roles to deputy mayors and efforts to amplify women's voices are crucial for ensuring inclusive and equitable decision-making processes in the local government.

3.5 Secretiveness in Agenda Sharing

The field data reveal significant barriers faced by female deputy mayors in local governments, primarily revolving around issues of transparency and communication. These barriers manifest in various ways, including the lack of prior notice for meeting agendas, resistance to divergent

opinions, and withholding of crucial information, collectively undermining inclusive governance and equitable participation. Female deputy mayors highlighted that they often do not receive prior meeting agendas, impeding their ability to prepare and contribute effectively. Many female deputy mayors reported receiving agendas and important information only a day, or sometimes even attending meetings without any prior agenda. This lack of timely access to information hinders their ability to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes and undermines inclusivity and transparency. This is evidenced by statements of the female vice chairperson and deputy mayors,

The meetings' agendas aren't shared with me beforehand, leaving me unaware of decisions until after they are made. This lack of transparency and a culture of secrecy exclude me from crucial decision-making (Interviewee #R1, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

Agendas aren't consistently shared before our meetings. The mayor receives agendas about a week ahead, whereas I am only informed about the agenda a day before, sometimes even attending without it. This lack of communication hampers my preparation and effective contribution to decision-making (Interviewee #R7, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

I receive the agendas only a few hours before they are discussed. This lack of timely information makes it challenging for me to contribute effectively to decision-making in our local government (Interviewee #R15, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Although there's a practice of sharing the agenda with me beforehand, there are many instances when I don't receive prior information about the agendas. This inconsistent communication regarding the meeting agenda makes it challenging for me to prepare adequately and contribute effectively to decision-making in the local government (Interviewee #R3, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This response underscores the marginalization of female deputy mayors through the deliberate withholding of timely information, rendering them powerless to contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes. The repeated emphasis on lack of prior notice for meeting agendas points to a systemic issue in the local governance. The disparity in information dissemination, with the mayor receiving information a week in advance while the deputy mayor is informed only a day prior or sometimes not at all, highlights the systemic devaluation of their role. Female deputy mayors often find themselves unable to prepare adequately for meetings. They are often left uninformed about crucial decisions until after they have been made and are denied timely access to agendas and information, reflecting a deliberate effort to exclude them from meaningful participation. This perpetuates a culture of secrecy and reinforces existing power imbalances, effectively silencing their voices and undermining their ability to represent

their communities. This practice reflects a significant disregard for their role and suggests an intentional strategy to exclude them from meaningful participation, pointing to a broader issue of gender inequality in local governance. The lack of transparency, information secrecy, inconsistent communication, and exclusion from decision-making processes highlight the marginalization and disempowerment faced by female deputy mayors. These challenges are symptomatic of deeply ingrained patriarchal structures and gender power dynamics that permeate local governance systems.

Resistance to dissenting opinions and divergent perspectives is another concerning issue highlighted by the female deputy mayors. Female deputy mayors reported that their dissenting opinions are often not well-received, indicating a lack of openness to diverse perspectives. Female vice chairperson mentioned facing difficulties and resistance when voicing opposition to certain proposals during meetings, further suggesting a lack of openness to divergent opinions. Female vice chairperson shared,

I often don't know the agenda until the meeting starts. When I voice dissent or opposition to certain agendas, I often face resistance from other members. My divergent opinions are not always well-received or given due consideration (Interviewee #R19, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

The resistance to diverse viewpoints undermines open dialogue and inclusive decision-making, illustrating the challenges faced by female vice chairpersons when challenging the status quo or presenting divergent perspectives. This culture of resistance, particularly towards opinions voiced by female deputy mayors, reflects deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes that resist abandoning existing power structures. Such resistance stifles innovation and critical discourse, essential for effective governance. It signals a preference for homogeneity that continues biases and inhibits progress. It manifests as a clear manifestation of a patriarchal mindset discouraging challenges to existing power dynamics, sending a message that their perspectives are undervalued in decision-making processes. This stresses the need for an enabling environment that values diverse perspectives, particularly those of female deputy mayors, to respond to biases and promote progress in governance practices.

A significant barrier faced by female deputy mayors is the withholding of crucial information by the mayor and chief administrative officer. Female deputy mayor highlighted the challenges of not having access to necessary information from these officials, creating barriers to their effective participation and ability to represent society's interests. For instance, female deputy mayor expressed,

One major challenge I face is the lack of access to information from the mayor and chief administrative officer. They don't regularly provide me with necessary updates or keep me informed about important matters. This lack of transparency and communication

hinders my effective participation and contribution to decision-making in our local government (Interviewee #R12, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The deputy mayor's experience of being systematically deprived of necessary information by these officials highlights a significant barrier to meaningful participation. The deliberate withholding of information by those in positions of authority disempowers female deputy mayors and hinders their ability to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. This practice reflects a lack of transparency and suggests an intentional strategy to marginalize the female deputy mayor's role. It also reflects a deeply rooted patriarchal mindset that seeks to maintain existing power structures and marginalize women's voices. The withholding of information not only hinders the female deputy mayor's ability to make informed decisions but also undermines her capacity to represent her society effectively, pointing to broader issues of power dynamics and gender bias within local governance structures.

Female deputy mayor highlighted the lack of agenda-setting power as another significant issue. Expressing concern about not being aware of how mayors and chief administrative officers decide and prioritize agendas, female deputy mayor shared,

I am unsure how the mayor and chief administrative officer decide on agendas and prioritize them. I often learn about decisions and initiatives only after they have been made (Interviewee #R8, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This view reflects the deputy mayor's desire for a more transparent and structured approach to agenda setting. The current ad hoc decision-making without proper communication undermines transparency and accountability. The exclusion of female deputy mayors from decisions regarding agenda setting and issue prioritization reflects a deliberate effort to maintain control and perpetuate existing power dynamics. The deputy mayor's uncertainty about how agenda items are decided suggests a lack of inclusivity and democratic processes in local government.

Some female deputy mayors have reported positive experiences, highlighting a practice of pre-agenda sharing and inclusive decision-making. The proactive approach to agenda setting and consideration of proposals from deputy mayors demonstrates a commitment to transparency and participatory governance. Female deputy mayor shared,

We receive the agenda 2-3 days ahead. Agendas proposed by us in the executive committee meeting are not commonly ignored. We are expected to provide a sound rationale for our proposed agendas to ensure they are considered and passed (Interviewee #R11, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

These examples show that when female deputy mayors have equal access to information, meaningful opportunities to contribute to agenda setting, and an environment that values diverse perspectives, they can effectively participate in decision-making processes and

advocate for the interests of their society. Prior sharing of agendas, inclusion of new agendas, and the expectation of providing a sound rationale for proposals reflect a more equitable and inclusive approach to decision-making, facilitating better preparation and ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered during meetings.

The response from the deputy mayor sheds light on the challenges and barriers faced by female deputy mayors in decision-making processes. These challenges are deeply rooted in systemic issues of transparency, communication, and inclusivity, including lack of transparency, inadequate information sharing, inconsistent communication, and exclusion from decision-making processes, all of which hinder their ability to influence decision-making effectively. Furthermore, the resistance to diverse opinions and lack of agenda-setting power further marginalize their voices and influence. It indicates a culture of gender inequality deeply ingrained in local governance structures. Addressing these challenges necessitates a fundamental shift in mindsets, dismantling patriarchal power structures, and creating an enabling environment that values diverse perspectives and empowers women's leadership at all aspects of local governance. Promoting an inclusive and transparent decision-making environment, implementing measures for timely information sharing, consistent communication, meaningful involvement in agenda setting, and valuing diverse perspectives in decision-making processes are crucial to empowering female deputy mayors and enhancing the overall effectiveness of local governments.

3.6 Participation in Budgetary Affairs

Female deputy mayors face many challenges in participating in and influencing decision-making, particularly in budgeting and resource allocation. Several female deputy mayors reported systematic exclusion from budget meetings and discussions by the mayor and chief administrative officer, despite their legally mandated roles. They stated that they are not consulted or involved in budgeting. Female deputy mayors shared,

My involvement in the budgeting process is legally mandated before presenting it at the municipality assembly. However, I am not informed or included in budget-related meetings by the mayor and chief administrative officer (Interviewee #R6, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

I have a role in budgeting, but the chief administrative officer and chairperson don't involve me in the process. Decisions are made without consulting or discussing with me. They give me the budget document without prior discussion. They only involve me during the budget speech at the village municipal assembly, where I have to announce the budget. I feel like a statue, as decisions are made without my input (Interviewee #R1, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

The responses reveal a significant gap between legal mandates and their actual implementation in budget formulation processes. Despite legal requirements for their involvement, these officials are consistently left out of essential discussions. This exclusion reflects deep-rooted power imbalances and tokenistic practices. The tokenistic involvement, where female deputy mayors are expected to endorse budgets without substantive input, highlights a performative approach to inclusivity. This exclusion highlights a hierarchical governance structure where mayors and chief administrative officers dominate decision-making and ignore the female deputy mayors' roles and contributions. Moreover, the outright dismissal of their proposals and assignment of ceremonial tasks, like delivering budget speeches, intensifies their frustration and sense of disempowerment. Such disempowerment not only breaches the principles of inclusive governance but also hampers effective resource allocation and community representation. This exclusion from pivotal decision-making arenas prompts questions about the efficacy of existing legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms in ensuring meaningful inclusion and participation of female deputy mayors in local governance. The responses indicate that formal provisions alone are insufficient in guaranteeing meaningful representation and influence in decision-making processes.

Female vice chairperson expressed concern that their proposed priorities and agendas often get sidelined or removed from the final budget, indicating a lack of influence in shaping budgetary decisions. They noted a lack of transparency and information about the budgetary decision-making process, suggesting possible gender biases in neglecting their advocated issues. Female vice chairperson shared,

I often see that the agendas and priorities I suggest are removed or given less importance during the budgeting phase. When the final budget is presented, the issues I raised are not prioritized. I lack sufficient information about how budget decisions are made. Despite being part of the budget formulation committee, I have limited insight into how budget priorities are set, which hampers my ability to ensure our community's needs are adequately addressed (Interviewee #R19, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

The response highlights the gap between the formal role of female deputy mayors as coordinators of the budget formulation committee and their actual influence in budgetary processes. Despite their key position, their agendas and priorities often encounter removal or de-prioritization, especially during the budget phase. It reflects the lack of transparency and communication in budget decisions. This situation not only diminishes the deputy mayors' roles but also mirrors broader systemic issues of gender inequality and opaque governance practices. These issues ultimately result in ineffective resource allocation and a failure to address the diverse needs of society.

Female deputy mayors shared an instance when they were left out of the budget preparation while on sick leave, indicating a perception that their role is ceremonial, limited to providing signatures without meaningful participation in decision-making. Female deputy mayor noted,

While I was sick for 15 days, the chief administrative officer and mayor carried on with budget preparation without informing me. They assumed my role was just to provide a signature, with no significant contribution or participation in the budget decision-making process (Interviewee #R6, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The case shared by the deputy mayor highlights the systemic marginalization of female deputy mayors in budget formulation processes, indicating a widespread perception that their roles are ceremonial rather than substantive. The incident, where budget preparation proceeded without her knowledge or involvement during her absence, is emblematic of a broader systemic issue where female leaders are excluded from crucial decision-making. This exclusion not only undermines their contributions but also perpetuates a culture that undervalues their potential impact on governance.

Female deputy mayors acknowledged the legal and structural constraints that limit their authority over financial and budgetary matters, with the mayor holding most of the powers in this area. They shared,

I feel limited in influencing budget decisions as the law grants the mayor sole authority to control the budget (Interviewee #R8, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024r).

The mayor holds the real power over budget allocations and decisions. I lack the same authority over financial matters (Interviewee #R7, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The mayor has full authority over the budget. Without control over budgetary and financial matters, I can't influence decisions in budget areas (Interviewee #R3, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The responses highlight a structural imbalance in local governance, where legal provisions give the mayor major authority over budgetary and financial decisions, limiting the deputy mayors' formal rights and decision-making power. This disparity profoundly restricts their ability to influence budgetary decisions, resource allocation, and developmental priorities. This imbalance reflects broader issues in governance structures that hinder collaborative decision-making. Addressing these challenges requires legal reforms and a cultural shift to recognize and empower deputy mayors in financial matters, creating a more balanced and participatory governance framework.

The perceptions of female deputy mayors' roles, both by themselves and other officials, play a critical role in their exclusion from decision-making processes. A chief administrative officer suggested that the female deputy mayor herself may not fully understand the scope of her role,

particularly regarding financial decision-making. They criticized her for not actively intervening or providing inputs during the budget preparation process and instead raising concerns afterwards, indicating a lapse in participation during the critical decision-making stage. The chief administrative officer shared,

The female deputy mayor has no direct financial control legally but is part of the budget formulation committee. During the budgeting phase, she doesn't actively intervene or provide input. Later, she raised concerns that her proposed programs weren't adequately funded. Failing to voice opinions during decision-making but expressing dissatisfaction afterwards holds no meaning (Interviewee #R5, Chief Administrative Officer, 2024).

The mayor holds exclusive authority over budgetary control, while the deputy mayor lacks such authority (Interviewee #R14, Chief Administrative Officer, 2024).

The chief administrative officer's responses reveal a complex interplay between regulatory constraints and participatory shortcomings that significantly impede the contribution of female deputy mayors in budgetary processes. Existing regulations explicitly exclude the deputy mayor from decision-making authority over budget expenditures and give the sole responsibility to the mayor. This structural limitation inherently restricts the female deputy mayor's influence in financial matters.

The experiences shared by female deputy mayors highlight significant hurdles in their participation in decision-making processes, especially concerning budget planning and resource allocation. These narratives underscore a complex interplay of systemic, structural, and individual challenges that limit the female deputy mayors' influence in budgetary decision-making. Legal frameworks and power imbalances favoring mayors restrict the ability of deputy mayors to influence resource allocation and development priorities. Moreover, gender biases further compound these challenges, diminishing the visibility and impact of issues prioritized by female deputy mayors. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach, including reviewing and strengthening legal provisions and structural mechanisms to ensure meaningful participation and influence of female deputy mayors in budgetary processes. This approach should include legal and institutional reforms, capacity-building efforts, and fostering a culture that promotes gender-inclusive governance practices.

3.7 Political Affinity and Congruence

The political landscape significantly influences the meaningful participation of female deputy mayors in decision-making processes. Several female deputy mayors highlighted the difficulties they encountered when the mayor and deputy mayor belonged to different political parties. This political divide creates an environment of mistrust, marginalization, and silencing of voices. Conflicts arising from differing political affiliations hinder effective governance, often

overshadowing professional collaboration. Female deputy mayors expressed a sense of marginalization due to belonging to different political parties than the mayor, making it challenging to influence decisions. Their experiences highlight the difficulty of influencing decisions when political allegiances differ. Female deputy mayors noted,

The challenge in influencing decision-making processes often arises from differing political affiliations with the mayor (Interviewee #R3, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The mayor and I belong to different political parties. Because of this, the mayor doesn't quickly accept or prioritize my concerns. If we were in the same party, it would be much easier for me to influence decision-making (Interviewee #R10, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

These statements directly attribute the challenge of meaningful participation and influence in decision-making processes to the political divide between the female deputy mayor and the mayor. They highlight the fundamental barrier posed by differing party affiliations, which can lead to ideological differences, conflicting priorities, and a lack of collaboration. The perception that different political party affiliations hinder meaningful participation underscores the deep-rooted partisan divides that can undermine decision-making processes. This reflects a broader issue where political loyalty can take precedence over professional cooperation, leading to a fragmented governance structure that may fail to address society's needs comprehensively.

Female deputy mayors also shared their experiences of feeling undermined due to political biases, expressing,

This political bias creates an environment where my role as deputy mayor is consistently undermined and my voice is silenced (Interviewee #R6, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This response reveals the detrimental impact of political biases on the deputy mayor's ability to fulfill their role effectively. The use of the term 'silenced' suggests deliberate marginalization and disregard for their perspectives, stemming from the political divide. This sentiment speaks to the suppression of diverse voices and the concentration of power in the dominant political faction.

Legal mandates often compel mayors to include female deputy mayors in decision-making. While laws require the involvement of the deputy mayor, the actual practice of inclusion is superficial and often resisted by the mayor and employees. This highlights a gap between policy and practice, where legal frameworks exist to promote inclusion, but cultural and political resistance can undermine their influence. Female deputy mayor's proactive stance in asserting her rights indicates a resilient approach to overcoming systemic biases. Female deputy mayor described how they must assert their right to participate, stating,

The mayor involves me in decision-making processes only because it's required by law. Sometimes, the mayor and employees try to avoid me, but I always assert my right to participate and receive updates, which then forces them to involve me (Interviewee #R12, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This statement illustrates the female deputy mayor's awareness of the underlying political dynamics at play and the challenges they face in being genuinely included in decision-making processes. The deputy mayor's perception that their involvement is merely a formality, coupled with the avoidance tactics employed by the mayor and employees, suggests a lack of genuine commitment to fostering inclusive and collaborative governance.

The field data also revealed instances where female deputy mayors found themselves marginalized and their opinions disregarded due to their minority status in the political landscape. The dynamics of majority and minority parties complicate decision-making, with majority party dominance overshadowing minority voices. The systemic marginalization of minority party members, coupled with personal biases from the mayor, reflects a governance structure where the political majority overrides democratic deliberation. This scenario demonstrates how political affiliations can skew decision-making processes, reducing the efficacy and representativeness of local governance. Female deputy mayors revealed that majority party dominance can override minority voices, leading to decisions that may not reflect diverse perspectives. Female vice chairperson stated,

I belong to a political party that doesn't have a majority in the local government. Even if I disagree, things get approved because the other party has more members (Interviewee #R1, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

This response highlights the power imbalances and marginalization experienced by the female deputy chairperson due to their minority status in local government. The female vice chairperson's opinions are overshadowed by the majority party's dominance, further exacerbating the challenges they face in influencing decision-making processes.

The clash of agendas between different political parties, as highlighted by female deputy mayors, indicates a fundamental challenge in achieving consensus in local governance. While debates and disagreements are intrinsic to democratic processes, the extent to which these conflicts impede collaboration suggests a fragmented political landscape. This fragmentation can hinder the smooth functioning of local governments and prevent the realization of cohesive and integrated policy outcomes. Female deputy mayor expressed,

I often see that my party members have different priorities than members of other parties. This causes debates and disagreements during decision-making (Interviewee #R7, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This statement acknowledges the inherent ideological differences and conflicting agendas among political parties, which can lead to contentious debates and disagreements during decision-making processes. The deputy mayor's voice suggests that a shared agenda and alignment of priorities across parties could potentially mitigate these conflicts and foster smoother collaboration within local governance structures.

While the majority of responses highlighted the challenges posed by political divides, some female deputy mayors acknowledged the relative ease of coordination and decision-making when the mayor and deputy mayor belonged to the same political party. Female deputy mayor noted,

For me, being in the same party as the mayor makes our work smoother. But I know it's tough when the mayor and deputy mayor are from different parties. Political differences can make it hard to agree on priorities and decisions (Interviewee #R15, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Smother coordination due to shared political affiliation with the mayor provides a contrast to the challenges faced by others. It suggests that political congruence facilitates better collaboration and decision-making, whereas ideological conflicts can create significant obstacles. This evidence highlights the need for mechanisms to bridge political divides and promote cooperation for effective local governance.

Interestingly, the responses also reveal that even when the mayor and deputy mayor belong to the same political party, differences in opinions and priorities can still arise, leading to challenges in decision-making. Female deputy mayor highlights that political alignment does not always guarantee consensus, suggesting that personal and ideological differences can also impede decision-making, as expressed,

I have noticed that issues can come up even when the mayor and deputy mayor are in the same party. Our differing opinions can make it hard to make good decisions for our society (Interviewee #R8, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This suggests that while political affiliation plays a significant role, it is not the sole determining factor in the ability of female deputy mayors to exert their influence. Gender also plays a critical role in the political participation of female deputy mayors. The field data sheds light on the intersectionality of gender and political dynamics.

Several female deputy mayors acknowledged the additional layer of challenges they face as women in leadership positions, as their voices and perspectives are often undervalued or overlooked in the decision-making process. Female deputy mayor stated,

Our party holds the majority, so decisions are easier to make. But even with this, I still struggle to make sure my voice as a woman is heard and respected in decisions (Interviewee #R9, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Despite the advantage of majority party status, deputy mayors still face gender-based challenges in having their voices heard, highlighting the intersection of political and gender dynamics. This situation reflects persistent gender biases that can undermine the contributions of female leaders, even in politically advantageous positions. It emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive policies and practices to ensure that women's perspectives are valued and integrated into decision-making processes.

The presence or absence of political connections significantly impacts the deputy mayors' ability to navigate local governance. Some female deputy mayors face unique challenges due to a lack of political connections, while others benefit from a strong political background. Political connections play a crucial role in navigating decision-making processes. Female deputy mayor expressed,

This is my first time as deputy mayor, and I don't have any family members in politics. Not having connections or a background in politics brings unique challenges for me (Interviewee #R13, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

I have a strong political background in my family. My connections give me some insulation and make it hard for them to ignore me completely (Interviewee #R8, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Coming from a politically affiliated family likely played a role in my entry into this position. Despite this background, I still face challenges in fully exercising my decision-making authority and contributing effectively to governance processes (Interviewee #R19, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

It reveals a contrast in the experiences of female deputy mayors based on their political connections and family backgrounds within the local government decision-making processes. Those without prior political connections or relatives involved in politics face unique challenges, making it difficult for their voices to be heard and their roles to be fully recognized. Conversely, those with strong political affiliations or politically-connected families enjoy a degree of protection, making it harder for their influence to be completely disregarded. However, even those with political backgrounds still encounter obstacles in fully exercising their decision-making authority and contributing effectively to local governance processes. This dynamic underscores the systemic biases and power imbalances that marginalize female leaders, particularly those without prior political connections, while also revealing that political connections alone do not guarantee equal influence or meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

Chief administrative officers offer valuable insights into the political dynamics affecting governance. Their observations confirm that political affiliations often dictate the working relationships and decision-making effectiveness between mayors and deputy mayors. Chief administrative officer stated,

The mayor and deputy mayor's relationship often depends on their political affiliations. If they're in the same party, they usually have a good working relationship (Interviewee #R14, Chief Administrative Officer, 2024).

The mayor and deputy mayor being from different parties creates coordination challenges (Interviewee #R5, Chief Administrative Officer, 2024).

It is evident from the insights provided by chief administrative officers that the relationship between mayors and deputy mayors is significantly influenced by their political affiliations. When they share the same party, a cooperative and productive working relationship usually develops, facilitating smoother collaboration and decision-making processes. Conversely, differing political affiliations between the mayor and deputy mayor often lead to coordination challenges, creating hurdles in governance and decision outcomes. This underscores the critical role of political dynamics in shaping leadership dynamics within municipalities and emphasizes the need for strategic alignment and effective communication to navigate potential obstacles and foster cohesive governance practices.

The analysis highlights the influence of female deputy mayors in decision-making processes in local government is heavily mediated by political party affiliations. The narratives reveal a complex interplay of political dynamics, gender biases, and power structures that significantly influence the ability of female deputy mayors to participate effectively in decision-making processes in their respective local governments. Addressing the challenges faced by female deputy mayor requires a multi-faceted approach that not only promotes greater political unity and collaboration but also dismantles the systemic biases and barriers that impede female deputy mayor's meaningful participation in decision-making. Fostering an environment of inclusive decision-making in local governments is crucial for ensuring that the diverse perspectives and experiences of all stakeholders, including female deputy mayors, are valued and integrated into policies and initiatives that serve the best interests of the society they represent.

3.8 Delegation of Authority

The field data reveal a concerning lack of delegation of authority and decision-making powers to female deputy mayors by their respective mayors. Many deputy mayors expressed frustration over the mayors' unwillingness to delegate even basic tasks or responsibilities to them. This lack of delegation not only limits their influence but also reinforces the marginalization of their roles. The lack of trust and reluctance to share power effectively render

their positions as mere formalities, devoid of any substantial decision-making authority or influence on governance processes. Female deputy mayors shared,

The mayor has not delegated authority to me, even for basic tasks like approving leave for over 10 days. This lack of delegation and trust severely limits my influence in decision-making (Interviewee #R8, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The mayor has not delegated any authority to me. Even in his absence, I am not trusted with decision-making responsibilities. This lack of trust renders my position a mere formality, with little influence on our local government (Interviewee #R10, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Even in the mayor's absence, he does not delegate any authority to me for additional responsibilities (Interviewee #R3, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The responses reveal a striking pattern of mayors withholding delegation of authority and decision-making powers from female deputy mayors. Despite their positions, the female deputy mayors consistently report that mayors do not entrust them with meaningful responsibilities. Even basic tasks like approving leave or taking on additional duties in the mayor's absence are not delegated to the female deputy mayors. This lack of trust in their capabilities and reluctance to share power effectively render their roles as mere formalities, devoid of any substantial decision-making authority or influence over governance processes. The statements clearly convey a sense of inequality, where the female deputy mayors are denied opportunities to contribute effectively or make impactful decisions. The reluctance to share power not only undermines their roles but also perpetuates a systemic imbalance that hinders inclusive local governance.

Notably, the female deputy mayor highlights the potential influence of deep-seated gender biases and mindsets that question the legitimacy of a woman in a position of authority. The mayor's reluctance to delegate stems from an unwillingness to share power and authority with the female deputy mayor, revealing deep-rooted biases that undermine her legitimate role and standing. One female deputy mayor shared,

Despite the mayor and I belonging to the same political party, he refuses to delegate any authority or responsibilities to me when on leave (Interviewee #R9, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

It reveals the potential influence of deep-seated gender biases and discriminatory mindsets that undermine the legitimate roles and authority of female deputy mayors in local governments. Despite being from the same political party, the mayor's refusal to delegate authority to female deputy mayors during his absence highlights a reluctance rooted in patriarchal attitudes. This reluctance to share power and decision-making capabilities appears to stem from a mindset that questions the legitimacy of a female deputy mayor's position and

authority. The female deputy mayor's observation suggests the presence of ingrained biases that challenge the notion of a woman holding a leadership role and exercising equal rights and powers as male counterpart. This mindset not only disregards the female deputy mayor's legitimate position but also perpetuates gender-based discrimination and marginalization. It highlights the need for concerted efforts to address the underlying biases and power dynamics that impede the effective participation and empowerment of women in leadership positions in local government.

3.9 Conflict and Collaboration

The field data show that female deputy mayors take different approaches to handling conflicts in decision-making. One approach involves avoiding conflicts with the mayor to maintain a harmonious relationship, even if it means their concerns aren't fully addressed. Female deputy mayors shared,

I make a conscious effort to avoid arguments or confrontations with the mayor. The people have placed their trust and faith in him, and I do not wish to undermine that by engaging in conflicts. Instead, I choose to maintain a cooperative approach, even if we have differing perspectives on certain matters (Interviewee #R7, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

I believe that moving forward collaboratively with the mayor, rather than engaging in arguments and conflicts, would be more productive. A spirit of partnership and cooperation would enhance our ability to contribute effectively to decision-making processes (Interviewee #R7, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

I don't want to quarrel. In another municipality, the mayor and deputy mayor are constantly fighting. Engaging in unnecessary arguments over minor issues only creates further tensions and hinders our ability to work effectively together. I choose to focus on the bigger picture and avoid escalating trivial disagreements (Interviewee #R2, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

The female deputy mayors' responses reflect a conscious strategy to prioritize cooperation over confrontation with the mayors, even when their perspectives are disregarded. Driven by a desire to maintain a collaborative partnership, avoid undermining public trust in the mayors, and prevent escalating tensions, the deputy mayors adopt a conciliatory stance, refraining from arguments or direct conflicts. However, this approach raises concerns about reinforcing existing power imbalances and perpetuating the marginalization of their voices in decision-making processes. While a cooperative mindset may foster harmony, the suppression of diverse perspectives and avoidance of asserting their legitimate roles risk undermining the principles of inclusive governance.

Some female deputy mayors take an assertive stand, opposing when their input is ignored. However, others adopt a more balanced approach, avoiding direct conflicts while remaining vigilant and assertive in decision-making, particularly in budget matters. One female deputy mayor shared,

I do not face direct conflicts in my role. However, if there are attempts to violate my rightful involvement, I am not hesitant to speak up. If my proposed agenda or priorities are not included in the budget, I refuse to endorse the budget (Interviewee #R12, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The shared insights highlight an assertive approach to leadership and decision-making in local governance. While not directly facing conflicts, the focus remains on safeguarding rightful involvement by addressing attempts to violate roles or exclude proposed agendas and priorities from the budget. The refusal to endorse the budget in such cases demonstrates a dedication to upholding crucial principles and priorities for effective governance. This assertiveness stresses the significance of advocating for roles and priorities, ensuring their acknowledgement and inclusion in decision-making processes to foster transparent and inclusive governance practices within the local government context. This stance contrasts with a more passive or conciliatory approach, showcasing the deputy mayor's readiness to address instances of marginalization or disregard for their perspectives.

The female deputy mayor also acknowledged conflicts arising in budget-related issues. She recognizes the complexity of budget decisions, highlighting the presence of debates and discussions reflecting diverse perspectives and priorities. Female deputy mayor shared,

When it comes to budgeting, there is always a lot of debate and discussion (Interviewee #R9, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The female deputy mayor's view highlights the extensive debate and discussion surrounding budgetary matters in local government decision-making processes. This acknowledgement suggests an environment where diverse perspectives and priorities are actively negotiated and deliberated upon, contrasting with scenarios where budgetary decisions are made without substantial discourse. The presence of open debate and discussion provides an avenue for the deputy mayor to assert their priorities and advocate for their proposed agendas during the budgeting process.

Some female deputy mayors emphasized the importance of consensus-building and deliberative processes in decision-making. They express a collaborative approach where extensive discussions and deliberations take place beforehand, allowing for thorough consideration of diverse perspectives and concerns. Female deputy mayors shared,

I rarely encounter intense debates or conflicts. Minor debates are quite common. We extensively engage in discussions and deliberations beforehand, ensuring that all

perspectives and concerns are thoroughly considered. This collaborative approach leads us to conclusions that align with the needs of our society (Interviewee #R11, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

There is no conflict among us. We work through coordination. The mayor presents the agenda, and then we discuss and make decisions based on consensus (Interviewee #R16, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The view of female deputy mayors shows a relatively harmonious decision-making environment in their local governments, characterized by open dialogue and consensus-building rather than intense debates or conflicts. This approach facilitates the development of well-informed policies that align with the diverse needs and interests of the society. The emphasis on coordination and consensus-based decision-making implies a cooperative dynamic between the female deputy mayors and their counterparts. This environment of open discussions and consensus-seeking provides a potential avenue for female deputy mayors to actively contribute their perspectives and shape policy outcomes through collaborative deliberations.

The field data also provides insights into the interactions and collaboration between chief administrative officers and female deputy mayors. A positive and collaborative working relationship is highlighted by a chief administrative officer, stating,

We don't face major conflicts while working with the female deputy mayor. She adopts a more submissive approach rather than being aggressive, which facilitates easier coordination and collaboration with her (Interviewee #R18, Chief Administrative Officer, 2024).

While noting the lack of major conflicts, the chief administrative officer expresses concerns about the female deputy mayor being perceived as submissive rather than assertive. This perceived submissiveness is seen as facilitating easier coordination and collaboration between the chief administrative officers and the deputy mayor on various governance matters. The chief administrative officers' observation suggests that a more assertive stance from the female deputy mayor could create challenges or tensions in their working relationship. However, this raises concerns about underlying power dynamics and the potential marginalization of the deputy mayor's voice in decision-making processes. Portraying the female deputy mayor as submissive may indicate a suppression of her perspectives or reluctance to assert her legitimate authority. This dynamic could perpetuate existing power imbalances and hinder the equal consideration of diverse viewpoints in local governance.

The chief administrative officer also praises the deputy mayors' collaborative and solution-oriented approaches. They perceive positive qualities in the female deputy mayor, including her constructive approach, focus on solutions, and ability to address issues without blame. For instance, a chief administrative officer shared,

I appreciate our female deputy mayor's positive and constructive approach. Even in challenging situations, she avoids blaming or finger-pointing and focuses on finding solutions to move forward productively. This quality is commendable as it fosters a collaborative and problem-solving mindset in decision-making processes. Her ability to address issues without blaming creates an environment for open discussions and effective decision-making (Interviewee #R14, Chief Administrative Officer, 2024).

The chief administrative officer's statement highlights the positive and constructive approach adopted by the female deputy mayor in navigating decision-making processes in the local government. This approach avoids counterproductive blame-shifting or finger-pointing and fosters a collaborative and problem-solving environment conducive to open discussions and effective decision-making. The deputy mayor's focus on finding constructive solutions rather than assigning blame is appreciated as a valuable attribute that facilitates productive deliberations and contributes to a positive working dynamic. The chief administrative officers' appreciation of the deputy mayor's constructive approach suggests her potential to navigate challenges and assert her influence through collaborative problem-solving rather than confrontational tactics.

The data reveals a diverse range of experiences and approaches adopted by female deputy mayors in influencing decision-making processes. While some choose cooperative approaches to avoid conflicts, others take assertive stances to defend their roles and ensure their input is considered. This variation in strategies is reflected in the level of coordination and cooperation with mayors, resulting in some deputy mayors facing disregard for their input while others enjoy collaborative working relationships. Chief administrative officers also play a role in shaping these dynamics, with some appreciating the deputy mayors' collaborative and solution-oriented approaches. Female deputy mayors emphasize the importance of consensus-building and deliberative processes, highlighting the need for inclusive decision-making that considers diverse perspectives and aligns with society's needs.

3.10 Supportive Environment

Several female deputy mayors expressed a lack of support and cooperation from their respective mayors and chief administrative officers. This lack of support manifests in various ways, such as interruptions, dismissals of proposals, and a general lack of collaboration. One female deputy mayor stated:

I receive no support from the mayor and the chief administrative officer. The mayor takes charge of planning and budgeting, often dismissing my proposals with the chief administrative officer's collaboration (Interviewee #R10, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Another female deputy mayor shared similar frustrations:

I lack genuine support and cooperation from mayors, chief administrative officers, and executive committee members. Male members in meetings don't support me (Interviewee #R6, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This response highlights a major issue of exclusionary practices in planning and budgeting. The mayor's sole control and dismissal of the deputy mayor's proposals show a concentration of power and marginalization of her role. The lack of support from male members isolates the female deputy mayor, preventing her from exercising her responsibilities effectively. This absence of support makes it hard for her to contribute and influence decisions within her scope. The collaboration between the mayor and chief administrative officer reinforces this power imbalance, favoring the mayor's authority and perpetuating gender inequalities. Such dynamics hinder the deputy mayor's capacity to fulfill her duties and influence decision-making.

One female deputy mayor acknowledged the cooperation of a new chief administrative officer, stating,

The mayor and chief administrative officer don't support me on budget issues. But our new chief administrative officer is cooperative (Interviewee #R12, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

It reflects the significant impact that individual administrative officers can have on support and cooperation in local government. The cooperation of the new chief administrative officer marks a positive shift in power relations and support structures, suggesting that personnel changes can significantly alter the support female deputy mayors receive. This highlights the potential for individual agency and leadership to foster more inclusive and supportive governance environments.

Interestingly, one female deputy mayor expressed a lack of support even from her own party members, despite sharing the same political affiliation. She shared,

I lack support from my own party members in decision-making in the local government. Even though we are in the same party, they don't encourage me (Interviewee #R6, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The insights shared by the deputy mayor highlight a significant challenge in local governance dynamics, wherein the lack of support from one's own party members in decision-making processes can impede effective leadership. Despite being part of the same party, the absence of encouragement and backing from fellow party members creates a barrier for the female deputy mayor in influencing and implementing decisions. This observation stresses broader issues of internal dynamics and support structures within political parties, which can profoundly impact leadership effectiveness and decision outcomes in the local government. Such challenges necessitate a deeper exploration into intra-party dynamics and strategies for

fostering internal cohesion and collaboration to enhance leadership efficacy and governance effectiveness.

Female deputy mayor also emphasized the need for a supportive ecosystem that values women in decision-making roles. She shared,

The lack of cooperation from the mayor and employees makes things harder. We need a supportive ecosystem that values women's abilities in decision-making roles (Interviewee #R8, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The insights underscore a critical issue within local governance, highlighting challenges stemming from a lack of cooperation from the mayor and employees. This lack of support creates additional difficulties and hinders effective decision-making processes. The female deputy mayor emphasizes the importance of a supportive ecosystem that recognizes and values women's abilities in decision-making roles. This observation reflects broader concerns about inclusivity, gender equality, and the need for supportive environments that empower women to contribute meaningfully to leadership and governance. Such insights call for a reevaluation of organizational cultures and practices to foster an environment that promotes collaboration, values diversity, and supports inclusive decision-making processes within local government structures.

Not all deputy mayors reported negative experiences. Some received support from their mayors and employees. Female vice chairperson shared,

The mayor supports me because I avoid arguing or confronting directly with him (Interviewee #R2, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

The support received by the female deputy chairperson often seems conditional, based on non-confrontational behavior. This perception raises questions about power dynamics and the expectation for women to conform to traditional, passive roles. Such expectations highlight an underlying gender bias, where women must avoid assertiveness to gain acceptance. These dynamics perpetuate a patriarchal status quo and limit genuine support for female leaders who assert their authority and challenge existing power structures.

Female deputy mayors also reported positive experiences, stating,

The mayor and employees always involve me in decision-making and planning in our municipality (Interviewee #R11, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

I receive good support from the mayor and employees (Interviewee #R21, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

These experiences reveal a positive relationship characterized by active involvement and support from the mayor and employees in decision-making and planning processes. The consistent inclusion of the deputy mayor in these activities indicates a commitment to

inclusivity and diverse perspectives, fostering a collaborative approach to governance. The recognition of receiving good support highlights a supportive ecosystem that nurtures effective leadership and decision-making. These insights underscore the significance of a cohesive and collaborative work environment in promoting successful governance practices, emphasizing the importance of mutual support, inclusivity, and teamwork within local government structures.

A chief administrative officer also provided a positive perspective, acknowledging the cooperative approach of a female deputy mayor,

I find it easy to collaborate with our female deputy mayor. She actively seeks support and guidance from our administrative team, including me, in decision-making. Her willingness to use our expertise makes our work together effective (Interviewee #R14, Chief Administrative Officer, 2024).

The collaboration described by the chief administrative officer with the female deputy mayor is depicted as smooth and effective. It illustrates the deputy mayor's proactive approach in seeking support and guidance from the administrative team, including the chief administrative officer, highlighting a willingness to utilize collective expertise for informed decision-making. This collaborative effort is seen as beneficial, enhancing the effectiveness of their work together. Such positive experiences emphasize the importance of leveraging diverse skills and perspectives in the local governance framework, ultimately contributing to more informed and impactful decision-making processes.

The responses from female deputy mayors reveal a varied landscape of support for women in leadership roles within local government. While some reported positive experiences, many encountered challenges stemming from a lack of support from mayors, chief administrative officers, and even their own party members. These challenges underscore the necessity for a more supportive environment that values women in decision-making roles and encourages collaborative approaches to inclusive decision-making. Addressing these issues calls for systemic changes in both the structure and culture of political and administrative frameworks to effectively recognize and value women's contributions.

3.11 Employee Support

The field data reveal the concern of employees, especially chief administrative officers, who tend to align with the mayors and prioritize their directives over those of the female deputy mayors. This dynamic reinforces the existing power imbalances and marginalizes the influence of deputy mayors in decision-making processes. Many female deputy mayors expressed concerns about the excessive focus of employees on the chairperson/mayor's agenda and their actions being driven by a desire to align with the chairperson/mayor's decisions. Female deputy mayor shared,

The chief administrative officer's actions align with the mayor's agenda (Interviewee #R8, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Power is in the hands of the chairperson. All employees are chairperson-centric, focusing on and aligning with the chairperson's decisions (Interviewee #R2, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

Recently, when the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration ordered our municipality to return 45% of our budget, the mayor and chief administrative officer attempted to return funds allocated for women, children, and senior citizens without consulting me (Interviewee #R7, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

It reveals a concerning power dynamic where employees, particularly the chief administrative officer, are overly focused on aligning themselves with the chairperson or mayor's agenda and decisions. The employees' actions appear to be driven by a desire to align with the chairperson's agenda, rather than upholding principles of inclusive governance and equal consideration of all leadership perspectives. The female deputy mayor consistently reports that employees prioritize and revolve around the mayor's directives, creating a mayor-centric environment in the local governments. Female deputy mayors' views highlight instances where critical decisions, including budget allocations impacting vulnerable groups like women, children, and senior citizens, were made without consulting or involving the female deputy mayors. This disregard for their input on matters affecting marginalized communities deeply reinforces the marginalization of female deputy mayors' voices in the decision-making processes.

Female deputy mayors also highlight the lack of support and cooperation they receive from employees, particularly the chief administrative officers, who tend to prioritize the mayor's instructions over the female deputy mayor's input and directives. Female vice chairperson shared,

I don't receive support from the employees here. The chief administrative officer and chairperson have a very good relationship, and the chief administrative officer always listens to the chairperson rather than me. Employees tend to be loyal to the chairperson (Interviewee #R1, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

The chief administrative officer does not support or cooperate with me. He explicitly stated that he would only follow the mayor's instructions, not mine. He disregards my directives and suggestions, showing a clear gender bias (Interviewee #R6, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The response reveals a significant power imbalance and gender bias in local government, particularly in the relationships between female deputy mayors and chief administrative officers. The chief administrative officer's loyalty to the mayor, often due to a strong personal

relationship, results in the systematic sidelining of female deputy mayors. This dynamic is compounded by explicit statements from the chief administrative officer, indicating a refusal to follow directives from female deputy mayors, highlighting a clear gender bias. These experiences highlight the challenges female deputy mayors face in asserting their authority and influence in local governance, revealing deep-seated patriarchal attitudes that undermine their legitimate roles and hinder their ability to effectively contribute to decision-making processes. This pervasive bias and lack of support from administrative staff not only marginalize female leaders but also perpetuates a culture of inequity and discrimination within the governance framework.

The female deputy mayor further highlights the tendency of the chief administrative officer, to prioritize and follow the mayor's instructions, even when those decisions contradict or disregard the deputy mayor's suggestions. This dynamic reinforces the power imbalance and lack of equal consideration given to the female deputy mayor's role in the decision-making processes. Female deputy mayor shared,

I do not face major issues with the chief administrative officer in our local government. He has not created direct obstacles for me so far. However, I have noticed that regardless of my input, the chief administrative officer prioritizes the mayor's instructions. His actions are heavily influenced by the mayor's directives, even if they contradict my views (Interviewee #R3, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

While the deputy mayor reports no direct issues or obstacles from the chief administrative officers, there is a clear pattern where chief administrative officers prioritize and follow the instructions of the mayors over the female deputy mayors. This tendency undermines the intended balance of power and equal consideration in the decision-making processes. Even when the mayors' decisions contradict those of female deputy mayors, the chief administrative officers tend to align themselves with the mayors' instructions highlighting the existing power imbalance in the local governments, where the female deputy mayors' roles and contributions are not given equal weight or consideration. The predominant deference shown by chief administrative officers towards the mayor's authority limits the influence of female deputy mayors in decision-making.

The female vice chairperson raised concerns about the excessive power held by employees in the local government, suggesting that the chief administrative officers' role should focus on facilitating a good relationship between the chairperson and vice chairperson instead of contributing to existing power imbalances. She shared,

The chief administrative officer should act as a bridge to facilitate a good relationship between the chairperson and the deputy chairperson. However, his behavior does not reflect that role. In our local government, the employees hold significant power. Our

local government is employee-centric (Interviewee #R1, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

The role of the chief administrative officer in local governance is critical, serving as a bridge to foster positive relationships between key leadership positions like the chairperson and vice chairperson. However, observations indicate disconnect between this expected role and the actual behavior observed, signaling a lack of effective bridging within the local government structure. The acknowledgement of employees holding significant power further underscores an employee-centric governance approach. These insights call for a reevaluation and alignment of administrative roles to ensure effective leadership coordination and balanced power distribution, promoting inclusive decision-making and collaborative governance practices within the local government framework.

Female deputy mayor highlights an interesting issue the perception among employees that deputy mayors lack knowledge or expertise, contributing to a bias against involving them in important matters. Female deputy mayor shared,

Employees within our local government often perceive deputy mayors as lacking knowledge or expertise and devalue the deputy mayor's role. This mindset creates a bias against involving us in important matters (Interviewee #R15, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This mindset reflects a deeply ingrained bias that devalues the deputy mayors' contributions and expertise. Consequently, this biased perception creates a barrier to involving deputy mayors in important matters and decision-making processes in local government. Such a mindset not only undermines the legitimacy of the deputy mayor's position but also hinders the potential for diverse perspectives and collaborative decision-making.

Female deputy mayors also blamed the chief administrative officers for failing to properly inform and consult the female deputy mayors regarding decisions and documents that require their signatures. They highlight the mayor and chief administrative officer bypassing them and requesting her signature without providing full details, context and involvement in the decision-making process. Female deputy mayor shared,

I often find that the mayor and chief administrative officer ask for my signature on documents or decisions without properly informing me about the full details and context. The chief administrative officer does not readily consider my views and input (Interviewee #R8, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

It reveals a concerning practice where the deputy mayor is expected to provide their signature on decisions and documents without being fully informed about the details or context. This practice reflects a deliberate attempt to bypass the female deputy mayor and undermine her role and authority. The chief administrative officer's reluctance to consider the female deputy

mayor's views and input further exacerbates this issue, highlighting a systemic disregard for her contributions to the decision-making process. This dynamic underscores a broader issue of power imbalance and lack of transparency in the local government, where the deputy mayor's involvement is minimized, and her authority is routinely circumvented.

While many female deputy mayors report a lack of support from the chief administrative officer, there are instances where positive experiences are reported. Some female deputy mayors attribute their ability to actively participate and influence decision-making processes to their prior experience and knowledge in the local government system. Their familiarity with administrative processes and insights gained from working as employees prevent the chief administrative officers from easily ignoring or overlooking their perspectives and suggestions. Female deputy mayors also highlight cooperative and supportive relationships with the chief administrative officers, facilitating effective collaboration and shared responsibilities in the decision-making processes. Female deputy mayors shared,

Having previously worked as an employee in our local government, I have an advantage in understanding administrative processes. Due to this experience, the chief administrative officer cannot easily ignore my insights and knowledge. This background enables me to actively participate and influence decision-making processes effectively (Interviewee #R11, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The chief administrative officer is cooperative and supportive, assisting us in effectively carrying out our responsibilities (Interviewee #R16, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

It highlights that the female deputy mayor's previous role as an employee within the same local government significantly enhanced her understanding of administrative processes, thereby fortifying her position and making it difficult for chief administrative officers to disregard her insights. This prior experience empowers her to actively engage in and impact decision-making processes. Additionally, the cooperative and supportive stance of some chief administrative officers further facilitates the effective participation of female deputy mayors in governance. This dynamic underscores the crucial role of individual experience and institutional support in influencing decision-making. It emphasizes the importance of fostering environments that leverage the administrative acumen and collaborative potential of female leaders.

The chief administrative officer acknowledges the female deputy mayor's perception of the chief administrative officers prioritizing their collaboration with the mayor over seeking her input or keeping her informed. The chief administrative officer shared,

The female deputy mayor often blames us for working too closely with the mayor and not involving her enough in the decision-making processes. She perceives a focus on the mayor over seeking her input or keeping her informed. However, this perception is not true (Interviewee #R14, Chief Administrative Officer, 2024).

The statement from the chief administrative officer provides insight into the perspective of employees regarding their relationship with the female deputy mayor. The chief administrative officer's view validates the concerns expressed by the deputy mayors regarding the lack of support, cooperation, and equal involvement in governance processes. It highlights the need for measures to ensure that chief administrative officers and administrative staff maintain an impartial and inclusive approach, facilitating effective collaboration and equal consideration of both the mayor's and deputy mayor's roles in the decision-making processes of the local governments. Fostering an environment of equal consideration, inclusive governance, and empowering female leaders is crucial for achieving equitable and representative decision-making in these local governance structures.

3.12 Role Capacity and Competency

The perceived lack of competence and capability associated with female deputy mayors is a prevailing concern. Female deputy mayors expressed that they are often viewed as lacking the necessary capacity to handle responsibilities effectively or grasp complex matters independently. This perception appears to stem from their male counterparts, including mayors and chief administrative officers. Such perceptions not only undermine the confidence and self-assurance of women leaders but also create structural barriers that hinder their access to opportunities for skill-building and professional development. Both the female deputy mayors and chief administrative officers shared this perspective, highlighting the need for addressing these biases and fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in leadership roles.

The mayor and the chief administrative officer have a mindset that women do not have the required capacity to handle complex matters independently (Interviewee #R8, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

I think the deputy mayor does an excellent job on the judiciary committee, but I feel that the deputy mayor lacks strong executive leadership skills (Interviewee #R5, Chief Administrative Officer, 2024).

The insights reveal prevailing biases and perceptions concerning women's leadership capabilities in local government. Some officials doubt the capacity of female deputy mayors to handle complex matters independently, reflecting a barrier to recognizing and valuing their leadership abilities. This bias may impact their autonomy and decision-making roles. While acknowledging strengths, concerns arise about perceived executive leadership shortcomings. These challenges highlight broader issues in promoting gender equality and overcoming biases in leadership. Addressing these biases and fostering environments that recognize diverse talents are crucial for effective governance.

Female deputy mayors view their roles as opportunities to empower and represent women in governance. They expressed a desire to challenge stereotypes, overcome obstacles, and aspire to higher positions, like the mayor's role. Their determination to challenge norms and pursue leadership roles is evident. Female deputy mayors shared,

I do not consider myself any less capable than my male counterparts here. For the next term, I aspire to contest for the position of mayor (Interviewee #R3, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

I am well competent, just like the mayor (Interviewee #R11, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Capable women should be encouraged to enter in the politics. Only by having qualified and skilled women in these positions can we truly make a difference and influence decision-making processes that impact our society (Interviewee #R15, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The shared perspectives of female deputy mayors highlight a strong sense of confidence and advocacy for capable women in political leadership roles. Their aim to attain the mayoral position in the upcoming term signifies a dedication to gender equality and fair opportunities based on merit. This aligns with their acknowledgement of competence, emphasizing equality with their male counterparts. These collective affirmations promote the idea that women, when equally skilled and qualified, should be encouraged to participate in politics to influence decision-making processes positively. Advocacy further emphasizes the transformative potential of competent women in shaping societal outcomes through their governance roles. These insights advocate for inclusive and merit-based selection processes, empowering women in political leadership for a more diverse and impactful representation within political spheres.

Despite facing perceptions of incompetence, some female deputy mayors remain committed to continuous learning and self-improvement. They recognize the value of acquiring knowledge and skills to contribute effectively to their roles. Female deputy mayor shared,

I am committed to moving forward and improving myself through continuous learning and self-development (Interviewee #R16, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

We should not limit ourselves; instead, we should seek every opportunity to learn and study as much as we can (Interviewee #R11, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The commitment to personal growth and continuous improvement among female deputy mayors is evident in their dedication to learning and self-development. They prioritize seizing every opportunity for education and skill enhancement, advocating for a proactive approach to self-improvement. This collective view reflects a culture of lifelong learning and stresses the value of ongoing education in enhancing their effectiveness in political leadership roles.

Some chief administrative officers and mayors have recognized the capabilities and competencies of female deputy mayors. They appreciate the valuable perspectives and contributions these leaders bring to decision-making processes and express a willingness to provide training and development opportunities. This acknowledgement signifies a positive step towards creating an inclusive and supportive environment within political leadership. Chief administrative officer and female vice chairperson shared,

Our deputy mayor is competent in her role. She possesses the necessary skills and knowledge to actively contribute to decision-making processes (Interviewee #R14, Chief Administrative Officer, 2024).

Skill development training is necessary for the female deputy mayor. We need to understand the basics of budget formulation and relevant laws and regulations (Interviewee #R18, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

The insights from the chief administrative officer and vice chairperson underscore the competence of the female deputy mayor in her role. The chief administrative officer acknowledges her competency, noting her essential skills and knowledge that contribute effectively to decision-making. However, the female vice chairperson points out the need for skill development, particularly in budget formulation and understanding laws and regulations. These perspectives offer a balanced view, recognizing strengths while identifying areas for targeted improvement and professional growth to enhance her effectiveness in political leadership.

Additionally, there are concerns regarding the lack of institutional support and proactive efforts from local governments to provide capacity development and empowerment opportunities for female deputy mayors. This sentiment is echoed by female deputy mayors, who feel that institutional support is lacking, as expressed by stating,

The local government has not been proactive or supportive in providing opportunities for capacity development and empowerment (Interviewee #R10, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

I do not receive proper training or capacity-building opportunities related to legal aspects, which hinders my ability to influence decision-making (Interviewee #R13, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

The capacity development opportunities provided to me are not sufficient (Interviewee #R16, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The experiences shared by female deputy mayors illuminate systemic deficiencies in the local government's approach to capacity development and empowerment. There's a consensus on the lack of proactive support and sufficient training opportunities, particularly concerning

essential legal aspects crucial for effective decision-making. This absence of targeted capacity-building programs, mentorship initiatives, and avenues for knowledge transfer has resulted in a noticeable skills gap, hindering their active participation in decision-making and ability to shape policies and priorities. Prioritizing tailored capacity-building programs, mentorship initiatives, and continuous professional development opportunities is crucial in empowering female deputy mayors to navigate their roles effectively and assert their influence. Addressing the capacity gap among female deputy mayors in local governments is fundamental for achieving inclusive and representative governance.

3.13 Navigation of Opportunities

The role of female deputy mayors presents a unique opportunity for direct community engagement and grassroots connection, allowing them to interact with diverse community members, listen to their concerns, and gain firsthand insights into local problems and challenges. For example, female deputy mayors shared,

The deputy mayor role presents a valuable opportunity for me to connect directly with our citizens and strive to address their concerns at the grassroots level (Interviewee #R9, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

I have the chance to directly reach out to and interact with people from all walks of life within our community. This allows me to listen to their grievances and understand their concerns (Interviewee #R10, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This direct connection with the grassroots level is seen as a valuable platform for understanding and addressing the concerns of the people. Female vice chairpersons shared,

I have more opportunities to directly engage with and reach the people in our community compared to the mayor. This close interaction allows me to better understand the local problems and challenges faced by our residents (Interviewee #R2, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

My role as deputy mayor provides me with opportunities to work closely with people in our community (Interviewee #R1, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

It highlights the valuable opportunities they have to connect with citizens from diverse backgrounds, listen to their concerns, and gain a deeper understanding of local challenges. This shared perspective emphasizes the significance of hands-on interaction in local governance, suggesting that being close to the community is essential for effective leadership and decision-making. By prioritizing direct outreach and active engagement with residents, these statements challenge conventional views of leadership hierarchy and advocate for a more personal and empathetic approach to governance, rooted in grassroots connection and community-centered solutions.

The female deputy mayors conveyed a strong sense of purpose and privilege in serving their communities and contributing to positive change. They expressed a desire to serve marginalized and underprivileged sections of society, as well as a commitment to empowering women and raising awareness on various issues. Female deputy mayors noted,

I get to serve the helpless and marginalized people (Interviewee #R11, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

I feel privileged to serve as the deputy mayor. It allows me to work directly for the betterment of the people in our community (Interviewee #R16, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

However, despite these opportunities for community engagement and serving marginalized groups, some deputy mayors acknowledged facing obstacles in effectively translating their grassroots insights into tangible outcomes through decision-making processes. This seems to be hindered by the perceived limitations of their role. Female deputy mayor expressed,

I often face obstacles in effectively addressing issues of local communities through decision-making processes due to the limitations of my role (Interviewee #R10, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This perception of limited influence in decision-making structures raises critical questions about the underlying power dynamics and potential constraints imposed by their role. The female deputy mayor role is also perceived as an opportunity to step into leadership positions, showcase their abilities beyond traditional household duties, and prepare for future leadership roles. Female deputy mayors shared,

I used to be a housewife earlier, but now I have the opportunity to serve as the deputy mayor. This is a great opportunity for me to step into a leadership role. I am grateful for this chance to showcase my abilities beyond the confines of my household duties (Interviewee #R8, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The opportunity to work as deputy mayor is great. It prepares me for the future and teaches me how to lead the municipality (Interviewee #R12, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The narratives shared by female deputy mayors reveal the transformative impact of the deputy mayor's role on personal and professional development. The transition from being a housewife to a deputy mayor highlights the role's ability to provide opportunities for individuals to step into leadership positions and expand their capabilities beyond traditional roles. This shift is seen as a significant chance to demonstrate skills and contribute actively to community leadership. Similarly, the deputy mayor role is viewed as a valuable learning experience, preparing them for future leadership roles within the municipality.

While the role of female deputy mayors provides a valuable platform, there is a need to further empower and enable them to effectively influence decision-making processes based on their insights and understanding of local issues. Addressing these potential barriers and limitations could unlock the full potential of female deputy mayors in contributing to inclusive and responsive decision-making processes for the betterment of their communities.

3.14 Future Aspirations

The aspirations of female deputy mayors to advance to higher leadership positions, particularly the role of mayor, are clearly evident in the data. These aspirations reflect a desire to break existing barriers and wield greater decision-making power in local governance. The explicit intentions expressed by female deputy mayors to contest for the mayor's position in upcoming elections highlight their ambition to ascend to roles that confer increased authority and influence. This aspiration reflects a broader push towards gender equality in political representation and leadership. The deputy mayors are motivated by the need to challenge the status quo and assert their capabilities in roles traditionally dominated by men. Female deputy mayors stated,

I aspire to become mayor in the next election (Interviewee #21, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

I plan to run for mayor in the next election (Interviewee #R1, Female Vice Chairperson, 2024).

These statements underscore the determination to take on higher leadership roles. Additionally, the data highlights the significance of political support and party dynamics in shaping these aspirations. Another female deputy mayor emphasized the importance of political support in her decision, saying,

If my political party permits, I am open to running for mayor in future elections (Interviewee #9, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

Female deputy mayors' willingness to contest for higher leadership roles is contingent upon the approval and endorsement of their respective political parties, highlighting the potential limitations imposed by party structures and hierarchies. The data also reveals that not all female deputy mayors share the same level of certainty regarding their candidacy for the mayor's position. One female deputy mayor noted,

I have not decided yet whether I will run for the position of mayor (Interviewee #11, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This uncertainty could stem from various factors, such as personal considerations, political dynamics, or perceived challenges in transitioning to a more prominent leadership role. Current roles as deputy mayors are also viewed as critical stepping stones for future leadership. The

experiences and skills acquired in these positions are seen as essential preparation for more significant responsibilities. This perspective stresses the importance of experiential learning and capacity building in political careers.

Female deputy mayors recognized that the challenges and lessons learned in their current roles will equip them with the competencies needed for higher leadership positions. Female deputy mayor expressed,

I believe that the experience and skills I am gaining in this role can pave the way for me to become a successful mayor in the future (Interviewee #15, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The aspiration to become mayor is often fueled by a sense of limitation and constraint inherent in the deputy mayor's role.

Female deputy mayors perceived the lack of decision-making authority they face as a driving force behind their determination to seek a more powerful mayoral position. They seek roles that provide them with more decision-making power, enabling them to better serve their communities and address local needs effectively. This quest for greater authority highlights the need for structural changes in governance that allow women to hold more influential positions. Female deputy mayor shared,

Facing challenges as a female deputy mayor, I'm determined to run for mayor in the next election. It offers the decision-making authority and executive power I currently lack (Interviewee #10, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

This sentiment raises critical questions about the extent to which the female deputy mayor's role truly empowers and facilitates meaningful participation in local governance decision-making processes. Interestingly, one female deputy mayor shared a perspective that reflects a level of disillusionment with the deputy mayor's role, stating,

I advise my female friends not to run for deputy mayor. Instead, I suggest aiming for mayor or ward chairperson roles for a more direct and influential role in decision-making processes. In the next election, I aim to run for mayor or ward chairperson (Interviewee #7, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The advice given to female friends not to pursue deputy mayor positions but to target mayor or ward chairperson roles indicates a nuanced perception of power and influence in political hierarchies. This perspective suggests recognition of the limitations or challenges faced by female deputy mayors in impacting decision-making processes compared to higher-ranking positions. It highlights broader questions about the structural barriers and biases that may hinder meaningful participation and leadership for women in local government settings. This viewpoint also prompts considerations about the strategies and pathways individuals navigate

within political landscapes to achieve their objectives, highlighting the complexity of gendered experiences and ambitions in governance roles.

Some female deputy mayors defend the deputy mayor's position, highlighting its crucial supporting and advisory function in local government decision-making, despite the lack of direct executive authority. One female deputy mayor asserted,

I disagree that the deputy mayor's position is 'unlucky.' While it's not an executive post like mayor or ward chairperson, I don't see my role as insignificant. Deputy Mayors play a crucial supporting and advisory role in local government decision-making, despite the lack of direct executive authority (Interviewee #11, Female Deputy Mayor, 2024).

The disagreement with labeling the position as 'unlucky' challenges prevailing notions that often diminish the importance of deputy mayors. This stance emphasizes an acknowledgement of the substantive contributions and responsibilities inherent in the deputy mayor's role, emphasizing its supportive and advisory functions in decision-making processes. By highlighting the essential role played by deputy mayors despite not holding direct executive authority akin to mayors or ward chairpersons, this perspective prompts a reevaluation of how such roles are conceptualized and valued within the broader political landscape. It invites critical reflections on the complexities of power dynamics, influence, and meaningful participation in local government contexts, challenging simplistic narratives that overlook the nuanced contributions of deputy mayors in governance processes.

This divergence of perspectives raises critical questions about the perceived value and significance of the deputy mayor's role in local government. Despite these varied perspectives, deputy female mayors show strong determination to overcome current limitations and aspire to roles with greater influence, reflecting their commitment to improving local governance and challenging gender stereotypes that have historically hindered their participation in decision-making processes. Their aspirations to advance to higher leadership positions are intrinsically linked to a desire for increased agency, decision-making power, and the ability to shape local governance in a more direct and influential manner. However, the perceived limitations of the deputy mayor's role, coupled with the potential constraints imposed by political dynamics and deeply entrenched gender norms, pose significant challenges to the realization of these aspirations.

Chapter-4: Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the multifaceted challenges and opportunities faced by female deputy mayors in their quest to influence decision-making processes in the local governments of Koshi Province. Despite legal frameworks and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and inclusive governance, the reality on the ground reveals a complex interplay of systemic, gender, and institutional barriers that impede the meaningful participation and influence of female deputy mayors. A pervasive patriarchal orientation and reluctance to accept female leadership roles manifest in various ways, including marginalization, dismissal of contributions, and exclusion from crucial decision-making arenas. Traditional viewpoints questioning women's leadership capabilities and a reluctance to trust their competence create significant obstacles.

Furthermore, the centralization of power in the hands of mayors and the systematic exclusion of female deputy mayors from budgetary affairs and agenda-setting processes limit their influence and undermine their statutory roles. Political affiliations and party dynamics further shape the experiences of female deputy mayors, with differing party allegiances often leading to the marginalization and silencing of minority voices. The lack of delegation of authority and decision-making powers by mayors reinforces the perception of their roles as mere formalities, devoid of substantial influence. Conflicts and power dynamics within local governments also contribute to the challenges faced by female deputy mayors. While some adopt a conciliatory approach to maintain harmony, others assert themselves and advocate for their priorities, particularly in budgetary matters. However, the lack of support and cooperation from mayors and chief administrative officers, as well as the tendency of employees to prioritize the mayor's agenda, further exacerbate the marginalization of female deputy mayors. Perceptions of competence and capability also play a role, with female deputy mayors often viewed as lacking the necessary skills and knowledge to handle complex matters independently.

Nevertheless, many female deputy mayors express determination to challenge stereotypes, overcome obstacles, and aspire to higher leadership positions, such as the mayor's role. Despite these challenges, the role of female deputy mayors presents opportunities for direct community engagement and grassroots connection. This allows them to interact with diverse communities, listen to their concerns, and gain firsthand insights into local issues. However, translating these insights into tangible outcomes through decision-making processes remains a challenge due to the perceived limitations of their roles.

Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a comprehensive approach that involves legal reforms, institutional changes, and a fundamental shift in societal attitudes and

organizational cultures. Creating an enabling environment that values and empowers women in leadership roles and ensures their equal representation and influence in decision-making processes is crucial for achieving true gender equality and inclusive governance. Only through such efforts can the potential of female deputy mayors be fully realized, and their voices and perspectives are integrated into the decision-making processes. This will advance gender justice, promote inclusive governance, and uphold the principles of equal participation and representation in shaping the developmental priorities and policies that impact the lives of all citizens, regardless of gender.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the insights derived from the study on the influence of female deputy mayors in decision-making processes within local governments in Koshi Province, several key recommendations have been formulated. These recommendations aim to address the identified challenges and enhance the effectiveness of female deputy mayors in their governance roles. It is imperative that federal, provincial, and local agencies, including the National Women Commission, the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens, the Ministry of Social Development (province), and local governments, among others, adopt and implement these recommendations to foster gender-friendly local governance. The recommendations are as follows:

A. Policy and legal recommendations

Develop and implement gender-sensitive policies and practices: Undertake a comprehensive review of existing policies, procedures, and practices in local governments to identify and address gender-based biases and barriers that impede the meaningful participation of female deputy mayors in decision-making processes.

Clearly define and codify the roles, responsibilities, and authority of female deputy mayors: Undertake a comprehensive review and reform of existing legal frameworks and policies to explicitly define and codify the roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority of female deputy mayors in local governments. This could involve revising legal and policy frameworks to grant deputy mayors greater executive powers, dedicated portfolios, and legal rights in critical decision-making processes. Additionally, implementing measures to ensure their active involvement and equal consideration in all stages of policy formulation, budgeting, and implementation can help mitigate the marginalization often faced by deputy mayors. This will help address the gap between statutory provisions and practical implementation, ensuring that female deputy mayors have a clear mandate and enforceable powers to contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes. Established clarity on their functions and authority will minimize ambiguity and potential conflicts with other local government officials.

Review and reform legal frameworks to enhance budgetary roles of female deputy mayors:

Undertake a comprehensive review and reform of existing legal and regulatory frameworks governing local governance to explicitly define and enhance the budgetary roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority of female deputy mayors. This could involve amending relevant acts and bylaws to mandate their meaningful participation in budget formulation committees, resource allocation decisions, and oversight mechanisms. Strengthening their formal authority in financial matters can counterbalance the excessive concentration of budgetary powers with mayors.

Mandate clear delegation protocols within local government frameworks: Amend existing legal and institutional frameworks to explicitly mandate protocols for the delegation of authority and responsibilities from mayors to deputy mayors during periods of absence. These protocols should clearly outline the specific powers, decision-making authorities, and operational responsibilities. Implementing such measures can help overcome the reluctance to delegate and address potential gender biases that hinder the empowerment of female deputy mayors.

Develop a comprehensive conflict resolution framework for local governments: Implement a structured conflict resolution framework that outlines clear protocols and mechanisms for addressing conflicts and facilitating constructive dialogue between mayors, deputy mayors, and other key stakeholders within local governments. This framework should include provisions for mediation, negotiation, and consensus-building processes, aimed at fostering collaborative decision-making while respecting diverse perspectives. Additionally, providing training on conflict resolution strategies, effective communication, and collaborative leadership can equip elected officials with the necessary skills to navigate conflicts productively.

Ensure Transparent Agenda Sharing and Information Dissemination: Establish clear protocols and mechanisms to ensure the timely sharing of meeting agendas, relevant documents, and crucial information with all executive council members including female deputy mayors in advance. This could involve setting mandatory deadlines for disseminating agendas and materials, utilizing digital platforms for efficient information exchange, and implementing accountability measures for officials who fail to comply with transparency requirements. Ensuring equitable access to information is crucial for enabling meaningful participation and contribution from female deputy mayors.

B. Structural recommendations

Establish robust mechanisms for accountability and gender mainstreaming: Implement robust mechanisms to ensure accountability and gender mainstreaming in the local government structures and processes. This could involve establishing gender equality committees or units responsible for monitoring and evaluating gender-related issues, ensuring compliance with

gender-inclusive policies, and addressing instances of gender inequality. Additionally, gender mainstreaming should be integrated into all aspects of local government operations, including decision-making processes, resource allocation, and policy formulation, to promote equal representation.

Promote inclusive decision-making cultures through institutional reforms: Initiate institutional reforms in local governments to promote inclusive decision-making cultures that value diverse perspectives and encourage active participation from all stakeholders, including female deputy mayors. This could involve establishing inclusive decision-making bodies or committees with equal representation, implementing structured deliberation processes that ensure all voices are heard, and creating feedback mechanisms to incorporate input from diverse stakeholders. Furthermore, developing clear guidelines and protocols for consensus-building can help foster collaborative decision-making practices that align with the needs and priorities of the wider community. These measures would counterbalance the excessive centralization of power and promote more collaborative and inclusive governance practices.

Strengthen accountability and oversight measures: Implement robust accountability and oversight measures to ensure transparency and fairness in decision-making processes in the local governments. This could involve establishing independent monitoring bodies or committees to review decision-making procedures, ensure adherence to principles of inclusivity and gender equality, and address instances of marginalization or dismissal of female deputy mayors' proposals. Regular audits and performance evaluations could also be conducted to assess the extent of meaningful participation and influence of female deputy mayors in governance processes.

Establish mechanisms to promote cross-party collaboration and consensus-building: Implement structured platforms and processes that facilitate dialogue, negotiation, and consensus-building among political parties represented in local governments. This could involve creating multi-party committees or task forces responsible for key decision-making areas, where members from different parties can engage in constructive discussions, find common ground, and arrive at decisions that reflect diverse perspectives. Additionally, providing training on conflict resolution, negotiation skills, and consensus-building techniques can equip elected officials with the necessary tools to navigate political differences more effectively.

Establish dedicated support structures for female deputy mayors: Establish dedicated support structures in the local governments specifically designed to empower and assist female deputy mayors in their roles and decision-making processes. These support structures could take the form of mentorship programs, peer support networks, or advisory councils comprising experienced leaders, gender experts, and subject matter specialists. These structures can help female deputy mayors navigate challenges, build confidence, and assert their influence more effectively.

Establish structured pathways for leadership advancement and political empowerment:

Implement targeted initiatives and programs that facilitate the transition of female deputy mayors into higher leadership roles, such as mayors. These pathways should include structured support systems to help female deputy mayors navigate the complexities of political landscapes effectively. Additionally, engaging with political parties to promote gender-inclusive candidate selection processes and ensure equal opportunities for women to contest for influential positions can help address structural barriers hindering their advancement. By creating structured pathways and support mechanisms, these initiatives can empower female deputy mayors to transcend perceived limitations and realize their leadership aspirations, ultimately fostering a more diverse and representative political landscape.

C. Behavioral recommendations

Foster collaboration and shared responsibility between mayors and female deputy mayors:

Mayors should take proactive steps to address any dissatisfaction experienced by female deputy mayors by fostering an environment that emphasizes collaboration and shared responsibility in local governance. This can be achieved by establishing regular meetings and open communication channels between mayors and deputy mayors to ensure transparent and continuous dialogue, facilitating the sharing of ideas, concerns, and feedback.

Foster organizational culture transformation in local governments: Initiate a sustained effort to transform the organizational culture in local governments to embrace gender inclusivity and promote women's leadership. This could involve implementing gender mainstreaming policies, conducting gender audits, and implementing accountability measures to address instances of gender bias or discrimination. Furthermore, providing gender sensitivity training to all elected officials and staff can contribute to fostering an inclusive organizational culture that values and respects the perspectives and contributions of female leaders.

Foster an environment that values diverse perspectives: Initiate targeted efforts to cultivate an organizational culture within local governments that actively encourages and values diverse viewpoints, particularly those of female deputy mayors. This could involve training programs for elected officials and staff on inclusive decision-making, facilitated dialogues to promote open exchange of ideas, and establishing mechanisms to ensure that dissenting or opposing views are given due consideration during deliberations. Creating an enabling environment that embraces diverse perspectives can foster more balanced and informed decision-making processes.

Promote a culture of impartiality and equal support within administrative staff: Implement measures to ensure that administrative staff, especially chief administrative officers, maintain a stance of impartiality and provide equal support to both mayors and female deputy mayors. This may involve developing clear guidelines and accountability measures that prohibit

preferential treatment or biased allegiance towards any specific elected official. Additionally, fostering an organizational culture that values diversity and gender equality can help mitigate the influence of gender biases and personal relationships on administrative decision-making. Regular training and sensitization programs for administrative staff on gender equity, inclusive governance, and ethical conduct can reinforce these principles and promote a professional and equitable work environment in local governments.

Develop leadership development programs for female deputy mayors: Implement comprehensive leadership development programs specifically tailored for female deputy mayors. These programs should focus on enhancing their decision-making abilities, negotiation skills, and leadership capacities, empowering them to navigate the complexities of local governance effectively. Additionally, providing mentorship opportunities, exposure to successful female deputy mayors, pairing experienced female leaders with deputy mayors to facilitate knowledge transfer, guidance, and personalized support, and offering training on gender-inclusive policymaking can help build their confidence and prepare them for future leadership roles in local government. This approach not only benefits the individuals but also contributes to building a more diverse and female leadership landscape in local governments.

Implement comprehensive capacity-building initiatives for female deputy mayors: To enhance the skills, knowledge, and competencies of female deputy mayors, develop and institutionalize comprehensive capacity-building programs. These initiatives should adopt a multifaceted approach, incorporating structured training modules in essential areas such as legal frameworks, governance processes, decision-making mechanisms, budgeting, implementation and monitoring processes, policymaking, and soft skills like presentation, anchoring, articulation, problem-solving, and teamwork. Additionally, creating dedicated platforms for continuous learning, such as workshops, seminars, and peer-learning networks, will foster an environment of ongoing professional development and skill enhancement. Such initiatives will empower female deputy mayors with the necessary competencies to assert their roles effectively, navigate challenges, and actively participate in decision-making.

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Annex 1: Checklist

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR FEMALE DEPUTY MAYOR

Namaste!

I am from the Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC) in Lalitpur, Nepal. NASC, in collaboration with the Women Commission, is conducting research titled 'Influence of Female Deputy Mayors in Decision-Making at the Local Governments of Koshi Province: Unraveling Roles, Participation, and Challenges.' The objective of this research is to investigate the influence of female deputy mayors in decision-making processes at the local government level.

Your participation in this research is crucial for understanding the influence of female deputy mayors in local-level decision-making. Your views are valuable. The findings from this research are expected to be useful for governments and other stakeholders engaged in promoting gender-friendly local governance.

If you agree to participate, I assure you that:

-All personal information collected will be kept confidential as per the Statistical Act, 2015. Your personal information will not be accessible to anyone, ensuring complete confidentiality.

-The information you provide will be used solely for research purposes and will remain confidential. Your participation will be anonymous.

-Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You have the right to discontinue the interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and you may choose not to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable.

Do you agree to participate in this research?

Yes, I agree to participate in this research.

No, I do not wish to participate in this research.

If you agree to participate, I will proceed for interview.

A. Participants' Information

Interviewee:

Organization and Location:

Position:

Age:

Gender:

Caste/ethnicity

Educational Attainment:

Training Attainment:

Political Profile:

Economic Profile:

Kinship:

Previous Work History:

Date of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

- How long have you been serving as the deputy mayor in your local government?
- What motivated you to pursue this role, and what were your initial expectations?
- How does the local government support the participation and leadership of women?
- How do you see your role as deputy mayor contributing to the broader goals of the local government?
- How do your responsibilities differ from the mayor's?

B. Interview Themes

- How do you perceive your role in decision-making processes in the local government?
- Are there specific areas where you have formal decision-making authority?
- How would you describe your influence on decision-making?
- Can you describe a recent decision-making process that you were involved in at the local government level? How did you contribute to this process?
- Do you feel that your voice is heard and valued in discussions?
- Can you provide examples of decisions where you had a substantial influence?
- Are you satisfied with the efforts you've made to garner support from both senior and junior authorities within your organization?
- Are you satisfied with the capacity development initiatives you've received during your tenure, particularly those aimed at enhancing your job, especially in decision-making?
- Were there any challenges you faced in the decision-making process? If so, can you share them?
- How do gender norms affect your ability to assert influence in decision-making?
- How do you perceive the power dynamics within the local government, and how does it impact your decisions? Can you share your experience?
- How do you collaborate with other stakeholders to achieve consensus in decisions?
- Have you encountered any resistance or pushback from colleagues or superiors? If so, how have you handled it?
- Have you employed any innovative methods or initiatives to ensure your voice is heard during discussions and to enhance your impact on decision-making processes? If yes, please share.
- Do you collaborate with individuals or groups to amplify your influence?
- What factors do you believe contribute to your ability to influence decisions?

- How do you assess your decision-making compared to other officials, such as the Mayor, in the local government?
- Based on your experience, what suggestions would you provide for meaningful decision-making in local governments?
- Do you have any additional thoughts or experiences you'd like to share regarding your role and decision-making influence?
- Is there anything else you would like us to share about the opportunities and challenges for female deputy mayors?

Thank You

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR MAYOR

Namaste!

I am from the Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC) in Lalitpur, Nepal. NASC, in collaboration with the Women Commission, is conducting research titled 'Influence of Female Deputy Mayors in Decision-Making at the Local Governments of Koshi Province: Unraveling Roles, Participation, and Challenges.' The objective of this research is to investigate the influence of female deputy mayors in decision-making processes at the local government level.

Your participation in this research is crucial for understanding the influence of female deputy mayors in local-level decision-making. Your views are valuable. The findings from this research are expected to be useful for governments and other stakeholders engaged in promoting gender-friendly local governance.

If you agree to participate, I assure you that:

-All personal information collected will be kept confidential as per the Statistical Act, 2015. Your personal information will not be accessible to anyone, ensuring complete confidentiality.

-The information you provide will be used solely for research purposes and will remain confidential. Your participation will be anonymous.

-Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You have the right to discontinue the interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and you may choose not to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable.

Do you agree to participate in this research?

Yes, I agree to participate in this research.

No, I do not wish to participate in this research.

If you agree to participate, I will proceed for interview.

A. Participants' Information

Interviewee:

Organization and Location:

Position:

Age:

Gender:

Caste/ethnicity

Educational Attainment:

Training Attainment:

Political Profile:

Economic Profile:

Kinship:

Previous Work History:

Date of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

B. Interview Themes

- How long have you been serving as the mayor, and what is your experience working with the female deputy mayor (hereafter referred to as the deputy mayor)?
- How do you perceive the importance of gender equality and women's representation in local government decision-making?
- Can you share your working relationship with the deputy mayor?
- How do you perceive the involvement of the deputy mayor in the decision-making processes?
- How does your deputy mayor typically contribute to the local government's decision-making processes?
- Can you provide examples of decisions where the deputy mayor had a substantial influence or contribution?
- How does the deputy mayor collaborate with you and other stakeholders in decision-making?
- Have you witnessed situations where the deputy mayor's gender might have impacted interactions or decision-making?
- How satisfied are you with your efforts in providing opportunities and enhancing the capacity of the deputy mayor in the decision-making process?
- In your observations, how do you perceive the deputy mayor's ability to influence decisions? Do you feel she effectively communicates her ideas and perspectives?
- From your perspective, what factors have hindered or challenged the ability of the deputy mayor to influence decisions effectively?
- Can you share examples of initiatives employed by the deputy mayor to contribute effectively to decision-making?
- Based on your experience, what suggestions would you provide to improve the decision-making influence of the deputy mayor in local governments?
- Do you have any additional thoughts or observations regarding the deputy mayor's role, influence, and decision-making capability?

Thank You

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Namaste!

I am from the Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC) in Lalitpur, Nepal. NASC, in collaboration with the Women Commission, is conducting research titled 'Influence of Female Deputy Mayors in Decision-Making at the Local Governments of Koshi Province: Unravelling Roles, Participation, and Challenges.' The objective of this research is to investigate the influence of female deputy mayors in decision-making processes at the local government level.

Your participation in this research is crucial for understanding the influence of female deputy mayors in local-level decision-making. Your views are valuable. The findings from this research are expected to be useful for governments and other stakeholders engaged in promoting gender-friendly local governance.

If you agree to participate, I assure you that:

-All personal information collected will be kept confidential as per the Statistical Act, 2015. Your personal information will not be accessible to anyone, ensuring complete confidentiality.

-The information you provide will be used solely for research purposes and will remain confidential. Your participation will be anonymous.

-Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You have the right to discontinue the interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and you may choose not to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable.

Do you agree to participate in this research?

Yes, I agree to participate in this research.

No, I do not wish to participate in this research.

If you agree to participate, I will proceed for interview.

A. Participants' Information

Interviewee:

Organization and Location:

Position:

Age:

Gender:

Caste/ethnicity

Educational Attainment:

Training Attainment:

Previous Work History:

Date of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

B. Interview Themes

- How long have you been serving as the chief administrative officer in this position, and what has been your experience working with the female deputy mayor (hereafter referred to as the deputy mayor)?
- Can you share your experience regarding the decision-making processes in local government in terms of the roles, involvement, and influence of various officials, such as the mayor and deputy mayor?
- In your opinion, how do you perceive the role, participation, and influence of the deputy mayor in decision-making processes?
- Can you share examples of decisions where the deputy mayor had a substantial influence or contribution? Are there gender norms or stereotypes that either facilitate or hinder their ability to contribute effectively?
- What challenges do they face in asserting their influence, and how do they overcome these obstacles?
- How does the deputy mayor collaborate with administrative officials like you in decision-making processes?
- Can you share examples of methods or initiatives employed by the deputy mayor to contribute effectively to decision-making?
- Based on your experience, what suggestions would you give to the deputy mayor to enhance their influence and effectiveness in decision-making from an administrative point of view?
- What initiatives do you believe should be implemented to enhance the capacity of deputy mayors in the decision-making process?

Thank You