

**ETHNIC AND CASTE DIVERSITY:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

**Rajendra Pradhan and Ava Shrestha**

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## PREFACE

This report is the outcome of the study on ethnic and caste diversity undertaken as part of the sectoral/thematic assessments Asian Development Bank (ADB) Nepal Resident Mission (NRM) conducted to prepare a country strategy and program (CSP) for Nepal. ADB prepares the CSP every 5 years to guide its operations in each of its developing member countries. ADB's NRM prepared a CSP for Nepal covering 2005-2009, which was approved by ADB's Board of Directors in October 2004.

The study provides a historical perspective on cultural diversity and includes a review of anthropological studies on ethnicity and caste, and perceptions of different groups on the beneficiaries of development. NRM conducted interviews, and held focus group discussions with staff of line agencies and nongovernment organizations and a diverse range of informants, covering different castes, ethnic groups, and men and women beneficiaries of an ADB-assisted project.

Overall supervision of the study on Ethnic and Caste Diversity: Implications for Development was provided by Sungsup Ra, Senior Country Programs Specialist and Head, Macroeconomics, Finance, Governance, Regional and External Relations, NRM. I thank Rajendra Pradhan, Consultant, and Ava Shrestha, Gender and Development Specialist, NRM for preparing this comprehensive report. The editorial assistance of Arun Rana is appreciated, and thanks are due to Kavita Sherchan, External Relations and Civil Society Liaison Officer, NRM for finalizing the report.

Sultan Hafeez Rahman  
Country Director  
Nepal Resident Mission

## Abbreviations

|      |   |                                   |
|------|---|-----------------------------------|
| ADB  | - | Asian Development Bank            |
| CPNM | - | Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) |
| CSP  | - | Country Strategy Paper            |
| GDI  | - | gender development index          |
| HDI  | - | human development index           |
| HEI  | - | human empowerment index           |
| NGO  | - | nongovernment organization        |
| NRM  | - | Nepal Resident Mission            |
| VDC  | - | village development committee     |

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study establishes a linkage between ethnic and caste diversity, poverty, and development in Nepal. It highlights the need for a longer time frame and a greater social investment to understand the social complexities of communities, and that ultra poor men and women from all ethnic groups and castes do experience multiple disadvantages and need support to enable them to participate effectively in the development process. It argues that the State has to deal firmly with discriminatory practices through legal and educational means.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Despite 50 years of development aid to Nepal, the majority of the people continue to remain poor, with an estimated 38% of the population living below the poverty line at a per capita income of \$240. Acute poverty and the prevailing practice of discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, and caste have led to increased frustration and disillusionment amongst them. With the growing trend for a rights based approach to development, and emphasis on equity and social justice, triggered by the nine years of violent insurgency launched in 1996 by the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPNM), an urgent need is felt to promote policies, programs, and projects that appreciate and recognize issues relating to ethnicity, caste, and gender. The Asian Development Bank's (ADB's) Country Strategy and Program Update, Nepal 2004–2006 states that “poverty in Nepal remains concentrated among the rural poor, women, and various disadvantaged caste-based and ethnic groups.”

ADB undertook this task while preparing a country strategy and program (CSP) for Nepal (2005–2009). The purpose of the study was to contribute to the understanding of ethnic and caste diversity in Nepal, and its correlation with poverty and development, so as to help prepare an inclusive strategy to guide ADB's strategy for Nepal for the next 5 years. An assessment of the conflict undertaken by Mahat (2003), also as part of the CSP preparation process, highlights inequitable poor public service delivery, marginalization of women, disadvantaged ethnic groups, castes, certain geographic areas, and a deepening crisis of governance as major reasons for the current conflict.

Nepal is, in essence, a cultural mosaic comprising different caste and ethnic groups belonging to the Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan linguistic families, which is indicative of the waves of migrations that have occurred for over 2000 years from the north and south respectively. Although intermingling between the various groups has occurred, they differ widely in the details of cultures and adaptations, combining elements of Animism, Buddhism, and Hinduism picked up through cultural contacts over the years. In addition, resettlement of the hill and mountain people into the tarai<sup>1</sup> since the 1960s has added a new dimension to the social landscape resulting in an extremely heterogeneous and complex tarai population. Further, a porous border with the south has facilitated populations to move freely between Nepal and India for centuries. As a result, small distances have created wide differences in social situations—so that while some pockets may have homogenous populations belonging to one or another group, making a local majority but a national minority, in other areas the populations may be totally heterogeneous. Cross cutting this diversity is gender relations, which vary across caste and ethnic groups.

Nepal's poverty and underdevelopment is reflected in the Human Development Index (HDI), which in 2004 was only 0.50, and is lower than that of all the other South Asian countries with the

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<sup>1</sup> The plain region of southern Nepal.



exception of Pakistan. Nepal is characterized not only by sheer poverty and low HDI, but also by extreme disparities in income and wealth. For example, the bottom 20% households receive only 3.7% of the national income whereas the top 10% receive nearly 50%.<sup>2</sup> The crucial issue, however, is not only disparities in poverty and HDI but also social identity based on caste, ethnicity, region of origin (hills or plains), and gender, which to a great extent determines access to and control over economic, political, and cultural resources, and status and interaction between different groups. There is a broad convergence between income, wealth, and HDI on the one hand, and social and cultural identities on the other. These disparities are the consequences of a historical and structured hierarchy, and inequality in power and social status among the diverse social, cultural, linguistic, and religious groups, and of non-inclusive development.

This report is to be used as a basis for discussing issues and formulating new operations and policies for more gender and socially inclusive development. The study is based on a review of literature and reports, interviews, focus group discussions with staff of line agencies and nongovernment organizations (NGOs), as well as a diverse range of informants, covering different castes and ethnic groups, and men and women in two districts: Palpa and Nawalparasi, where the ADB supported Third Livestock Development Project was implemented.<sup>3</sup>

## **II. ETHNIC AND CASTE DIVERSITY**

Nepal is populated by 103 caste and ethnic groups who are largely Hindus, Buddhists, Animists, some Muslims, and in some cases a combination of two or more of these. The 2001 census records 106 languages and dialects, of which the Indo-Aryan language family constituted 79.1% (48.6% Nepali, 12.3% Maithili, 7.5% Bhojpuri, and 5.9% Tharu), and Tibeto-Burman 18.4% (5.2% Tamang, 3.6% Newari, 3.4% Magar, 2.2% Rai-Kiranti, 1.5% Gurung, and 1.4% Limbu). Many languages or dialects are spoken by a small number of people; for instance, 58 languages are spoken by less than 10,000 speakers, and 28 by less than 1,000. Similarly, the 2001 census recorded 80.6% of the population as Hindu, 10.7% Buddhist, 4.2% Muslim, 3.6% Kiranti, and the rest as belonging to other religions (Christian, Jain, and Sikh). There has been a dramatic increase in the number of people claiming to be Buddhists or Kiranti; for example, in 1991 the percentage of the population claiming to be Kiranti was 1.7%; this increased to 3.6% in 2001. According to Dr. Harka Gurung, a noted development expert in Nepal: "Social demographic data of the last decade clearly evidence a strong tendency towards identity assertion based on ethnicity, language and religion." The high percentage of Hindus indicates that members of some ethnic groups professed, or were labeled as adherents of Hinduism instead of their traditional religion. For example, the adherents of Buddhism and Mundhum (Kiranti) are 11.6% and 26.1% less than the respective population of the groups that traditionally follow these religions.

While many scholars doubt the veracity of the precise percentages of the different castes, and ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups as reported in the census,<sup>4</sup> the figures cited give an approximate picture of the extent of ethnic diversity in Nepal. According to the 2001 census,

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<sup>2</sup> NESAC (1998)

<sup>3</sup> Loan 1461-NEP: Third Livestock Development Project, approved September 1996 for \$18.3 million.

<sup>4</sup> Gurung, H. (2003a)

*Pahadis*<sup>5</sup> constitute 66.2% of the population, *Madhesis*<sup>6</sup> 28.4%, and 'others' (including religious groups such as Muslims and Sikhs) 5.4%.<sup>7</sup> The caste groups (9 in the hills and 43 in the tarai) comprise 58.6% of the population, the ethnic groups (25 in the hills and 19 in the tarai) 36.4%, and 'others' 6.2%. No single caste or ethnic group forms a majority in Nepal. The largest group, Chhetri, who number 3.5 million, constitutes only 15.8% of the population, followed by the hill Brahmins (*Bahun*), with 12.7%. The other major groups are Magar (7.1%), Tharu (6.7%), Tamang (5.6%), Newar (5.5%), Kami (3.9%), Yadav (3.9%), Rai (2.8%), Gurung (2.4%), and Limbu (1.6%). The other smaller groups have a population below 100,000, and 23 groups have less than 10,000 members. The exact number of the *Dalit*<sup>8</sup> population is not certain but one estimate is that they constitute 12.9% of the population, of which 55% live in the hills. There is no agreement concerning the exact number or *Dalit* castes making it difficult to estimate the exact population of *Dalits*. For example, the National Dalit Commission lists 28 *Dalit* castes, whereas the 2001 Census lists only 16 *Dalit* castes. Such anomalies arise due to the fact that some Newar *Dalit* castes refuse to be called *Dalit* (footnote 7). The largest *Dalit* caste is *Kami* (blacksmiths) with 30% of the *Dalit* population, followed by *Damai* (tailor cum musicians) 13%, *Sarki* (cobblers) 11%, and *Chamar* (sweepers) 9%.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most common ways of classifying these groups is to cluster them in three major overlapping divisions: (i) the hierarchical caste structured groups (*jats*) and the egalitarian ethnic groups (*Janjatis*); (ii) the high caste or the ritually 'pure' castes and the low, ritually 'impure untouchable' castes (*Dalits*); and (iii) *Pahadis* and *Madhesis*. There are significant cultural differences between caste and ethnic groups as there are between *Pahadis* and *Madhesis*. The caste groups, known as *jats*, are Caucasoid Hindus speaking various Indo-European languages, such as Nepali, Maithili, and Bhojpuri. The ethnic groups, currently known as *Janjatis*, comprise mainly of Mongoloid stock, speak various Tibeto-Burman languages, such as Tamang, Gurung, Newari, and Magar, and profess religions such as Buddhism, Animism, and Kirant, besides Hinduism. While the castes are hierarchically structured in terms of ritual purity, the ethnic groups are more egalitarian in their social structure—the Newars, an ethnic group, who are internally structured by castes, are an exception. Among the caste-structured groups, there is a fundamental division between the ritually 'pure' castes, such as Brahmin, Chhetri, Kayastha, and the 'untouchable' castes, such as *Kami*, *Sarki*, *Chyame/Chamars*, and *Damai*. The 'untouchable castes' are now known as *Dalits* and many ethnic groups influenced by the Hindu caste ideology, consider the *Dalits* 'untouchables'. In other words, the division between *Dalits* and all other groups ('upper' castes and ethnic) is as fundamental as the division between caste-structured Hindus and ethnic groups. The *Pahadis* comprise diverse groups such as the Nepali-speaking *Parbatiya* castes as well as ethnic groups such as Tamang, Magar, and Rai, each with its own language, culture, and

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<sup>5</sup> People of hill origin, including the people of the high mountains with close cultural and social affinity to the people of the Tibet Autonomous Region of China.

<sup>6</sup> People of tarai origin.

<sup>7</sup> Gurung, H. (2003b)

<sup>8</sup> The National Dalit Commission defines *Dalit* as those communities who, by virtue of caste based discrimination and so called untouchability, are most backward in the social, economic, educational, political, and religious spheres, and are deprived of human dignity and social justice.

<sup>9</sup> Gurung, H. (2003b)

religion. Similarly, the *Madhesis* are composed of various castes such as Brahmin and *Dalit*, linguistic groups such as the Maithilis and Bhojpuris, ethnic groups such as Tharu and Danuwar, and religious groups such as Hindus and Muslims. The *Pahadis* consider themselves culturally distinct from the *Madhesis* even though there are many similarities among the caste groups who are Hindus and speak Indo-European languages. Thus, the *Pahadi* Brahmins and *Dalits*, as well as the ethnic groups, consider themselves culturally distinct, especially from the *Madhesi* caste and ethnic groups.<sup>10</sup> Finer distinctions could be made between hill ethnic groups who live in the mountains, such as Sherpa, Byansi, and Thakali, and others who live in the hills, such as Limbu, Magar, and Tamang; as well as between ethnic groups who live in the inner tarai, such as Bote, Danuwar, and Majhi, and others who live in the tarai proper, such as Tharu, Dhimal, and Satar.

## **A Historical Perspectives on Ethnic Diversity**

Three main reasons have been identified for the country's ethnic diversity, structured hierarchy, and inequality. They include: (i) migration of different groups into Nepal, (ii) political unification of these groups into the nation-state by the Nepali-speaking groups formerly known as *Khas* and now as *Parbatiyas*,<sup>11</sup> and (iii) state laws and policies.

Modern day Nepal has been formed by the migration of diverse groups for over 2000 years. Ethnic groups, such as the Gurung, Limbu, and Sherpa, speaking Tibeto-Burman languages migrated at different times from regions across the Himalayas; the Newars, a Tibeto-Burman language speaking ethnic group, with adherents of both Hinduism and Buddhism, have lived in the Kathmandu Valley for over two millennia; and the Nepali-speaking *Parbatiya* migrated into Nepal from the west and south over several centuries. In the tarai plains, groups, such as the Tharu, have lived there for over two millennia, whereas others, such as the Maithili speakers of the eastern tarai, arrived later. These different groups, each with its own language, religion, and culture, settled in different parts of Nepal, establishing separate but fluid political units: mainly small chiefdoms and principalities, although there were also larger political units, such as the Lichhavi, and later the Malla kingdoms based in Kathmandu Valley, the *Khas* kingdom in the west, and the various confederations of ethnic groups such as the Magars and Gurungs in central, and the Limbus in eastern Nepal.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Prithivi Narayan Shah, ruler of the small principality of Gorkha, and his immediate descendants, supported by Brahmins and Chhetris, as well as by Magars and Gurungs, conquered and politically amalgamated these different political units into the Gorkha kingdom, now known as Nepal. The political unification of the numerous principalities and the subsequent process of nation-building had profound consequences for the diverse groups, including "*Parbatization*" of Nepal, changes in social relations, and in access to and control over economic and political resources, especially land and administration. These changes can be located in three major periods of Nepalese history, each period characterized by

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Gurung, H. (2001)

<sup>11</sup> Pradhan, R. (2002); Pradhan, R. (2003) Pfaff-Czarnecka, J. (1997)

a different model of society as articulated in state laws and policies:<sup>12</sup> (i) a hierarchical, plural society from the establishment of the Gorkha kingdom to the end of the Rana regime (1768-1950), (ii) a non-hierarchical, mono-cultural society during the Panchayat period (1960-1990), and (iii) a non-hierarchical, plural society in the post 1990 period.<sup>13</sup> All three periods are characterized by political, economic and cultural dominance of the 'upper' caste *Parbatiyas*.

#### i. Hierarchical Plural Society: 1768-1950

During this period the primary concern of the ruling *Parbatiya* elite was to exercise political control over and extract revenue and income for themselves from the newly conquered territories.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, they felt the need to integrate the diverse social groups into an overarching legal and social framework. King Prithivi Narayan Shah defined his new kingdom as 'a garden of four *varnas* and thirty-six '*jats*'<sup>15</sup> to include all his subjects: Hindus, non-Hindus, and members of the various caste and ethnic groups. In doing so, he acknowledged the ethnic diversities, languages, and values. For example, he granted rights to the Limbus of east Nepal to practice their traditional customs, gave them control over their communal land (*kipat*), and allowed internal rule by their traditional chiefs. Over time, however, as the kingdom became more centralized both politically and administratively, the ruling elites not only gained more control over economic resources, especially land, but also imposed a more homogeneous (*Parbatiya*) cultural matrix on the diverse social, cultural, and religious groups. This policy was articulated in the famous Civil Code (*Muluki Ain*) promulgated in 1854 by the Rana Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Kunwar.

The Civil Code of 1854, based primarily on Hindu religious and legal texts, dealt with many subjects including land tenure and inheritance. The most important sections dealt with inter-caste and inter-community relations relating to commensality, sexual relations, and contact. It classified and structured all social groups into five broad, ranked categories within an overarching caste hierarchy, each with differential rights, privileges, and duties according to their position in the caste system, irrespective of the fact that many ethnic groups were Buddhists and Animists and not part of the caste system.<sup>16</sup>

The first category, *tagadhari*, wearers of the holy thread, comprised the ruling elite, mainly upper caste *Parbatiya* Brahmin and Chhetris.<sup>17</sup> They were deemed the purest, and had the most access to and control over political, economic, and cultural resources. The bulk of the ethnic groups, now known as *Janjatis*, were classified as *matwalis* (liquor drinkers). These were

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<sup>12</sup> Pradhan, R. (2003)

<sup>13</sup> Pfaff-Czarnecka, J. (1997); Pfaff-Czarnecka, J. (1999); Burghart, R.(1996)

<sup>14</sup> Burghart, R.(1996)

<sup>15</sup> Varna is interpreted to refer to people of all the castes, and *jats*, in its more general meaning refers to communities, including castes as well as ethnic and religious communities.

<sup>16</sup> Hofer, A. (1979)

<sup>17</sup> The Newars have their own priestly Brahmin caste. While adherents of Hinduism wear the sacred thread, the Buddhist priestly castes do not. In the *Parbatiya* worldview all Newars are ranked lower than the *Parbatiya* Brahmin and Chhetri castes, and classified as *matwali*.

subdivided into non-enslavable groups, such as Gurung, Magar, and some Newar castes, and enslavable groups, such as Tamang and other groups with close cultural affiliation to Tibetans (*Bhote*). Below them were the Newar service castes such as butchers and tanners, foreigners, and Muslims, from whom water could not be accepted. Ranked lowest in the hierarchy were the 'impure and untouchable' service castes, belonging to the *Parbatiya*, Newar, and Madhesi groups.

Almost all service castes belong to an occupational or artisan group, and each caste name denotes the type of work a person with that name does; for instance, the *Damai* are tailors and play musical instruments, and the *Sarki* make shoes and removes dead carcasses. In the traditional inter-caste relations these groups owe a certain amount of labor to an 'upper' caste household with which his/her ancestors have been working for generations, making a certain number of ploughing tools and clothes per year. In return, these occupational caste groups are provided with a fixed amount of food after each harvest, clothing etc. on an annual basis. These occupational groups, in present times, are known as *Dalits*.

During this period Nepalese society was based on legally sanctioned hierarchical structures and the 'lower' castes, women, ethnic communities, and non-Nepali speaking linguistic communities were socially excluded from state administration and land rights. Hindu religious law and, increasingly, customary law also supported such inequities and exclusion.

Most of the fertile land and other economic resources were controlled by the upper castes *Parbatiyas*, with some notable exceptions such as the communal land (*kipat*) controlled by the Limbus in eastern Nepal, and trans-Himalayan trade by the Thakalis. The ethnic groups and lower castes provided the bulk of the labor and services, often forced, as tenants and cultivators, artisans, porters and general laborers.<sup>18</sup> The 'upper' castes, as rulers, also controlled the political and administrative structures, with some exceptions at the local level among the ethnic groups, e.g. the *subbas* amongst the Limbus.

At this time the pressure to assimilate was also strong, as evidenced by the fact that several ethnic groups, especially the elites in close contact with the dominant *Parbatiyas*, emulated Hindu values; for instance, in their interactions with the castes considered 'untouchables', celebration of Hindu festivals, and in the case of the Gurungs, internal differentiation of their lineage based-community into caste-like status groups.<sup>19</sup>

## **ii. Non-hierarchical Mono-cultural Society: 1961- 1990**

At the start of the Panchayat regime (1961-1990) the state abolished legally sanctioned hierarchy and discrimination based on caste, ethnicity, and religion (and gender in some areas). The relevant legal category in the Constitution of 1962 and the new Civil Code of 1963 was no longer caste but citizen, and as citizens all Nepalese, irrespective of their social identity, could claim equality before the law. However, legally sanctioned discrimination continued in terms of ethnicity and caste, and gender discrimination too continued to be sanctioned by the new Civil

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<sup>18</sup> See the writings of Regmi, M.C. (1971); Regmi, M.C. (1976) and Regmi, M.C. (1978)

<sup>19</sup> See Gellner, D. et al. (1997) and Pradhan, R. (2002) for details.

Code. Further, caste and ethnicity as well as regional identity (*Pahadi* or *Madhesi*) remained socially valid categories and were the basis of everyday interaction and access to political and economic resources. And *Dalits*, even as they aspired to be treated on an equal footing by other castes and ethnic groups, practiced caste based discrimination amongst themselves. For instance, some *Dalit* castes consider themselves superior to other *Dalit* castes and refuse to eat with them, while at the same time feeling uncomfortable to dine with the 'upper' castes.

During this period, the ruling elite along with many development experts, foreign as well as Nepalese, viewed cultural and linguistic diversity as an impediment not only to nation-building but also to modernization and development of the country.<sup>20</sup> The best approach to diversity, in this view, was assimilation around a national standard. Consequently, there was a concerted effort at homogenization of cultural diversity into a single national *Parbatiya* culture and language.<sup>21</sup> This model put groups who were not well versed in the Nepali language at a considerable disadvantage; for example, in applying for the coveted civil service positions, as the Public Service Commission examinations are held only in the Nepali language.

This disadvantage was compounded by developmental efforts of the government and donor agencies that targeted as beneficiaries, the poor, ignoring disparities based on caste, ethnicity, region of origin, or gender (See footnote 20). If, as one World Bank report<sup>22</sup> stated, almost everyone in Nepal is poor, then the local elites in the rural areas, who quite often were Brahmins and Chhetris, too could claim to be poor and become beneficiaries of developmental projects in their localities. They had the political, economic, and cultural resources to ensure that they benefited the most. Moreover, most of the developmental activities were concentrated in urban, peri-urban, and easily accessible areas, which enabled groups living in the towns and along the national highways to benefit from developmental activities such as education, health, construction, and trade. Therefore, nation-building, modernization, and developmental interventions may have in fact, exacerbated existing disparities between the various ethnic groups and castes, and between men and women.<sup>23</sup>

### iii. Non-hierarchical Plural Society: Post 1990

With the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990, ethnic groups and *Dalits* aspired to an egalitarian and plural society in which they would be treated on an equal footing. The Constitution of 1990 declared Nepal a multi ethnic and multilingual Hindu constitutional monarchical kingdom, granted equal rights to all citizens before the law, and prohibited any form of discrimination based on religion, sex, race, caste, or ethnicity. It also recognized the languages spoken by the different communities as national languages. But discourses in democratic participation stand in stark contrast to the disparities that exist in reality.

Although the diverse groups are considered equal by state law, in practice, and sanctioned to some extent by customary laws, the structural hierarchy of groups and genders remains.

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<sup>20</sup> See Pigg, S.L. (1992); Escobar, A. (1995)

<sup>21</sup> Pfaff-Czarnecka, J. (1997)

<sup>22</sup> World Bank (1979)

<sup>23</sup> NESAC (1998) and Panday, D.R. (2000)

For example, *Dalits*, especially in rural areas, are still considered ritually polluting, and face numerous discriminations even from the *Janjatis*. These range from bans on entry into temples and homes, having to wash their dishes in restaurants, refusal by the 'upper' castes to eat or drink with them, and exclusionary practices faced while using common property resources such as springs and water taps, attending schools, selling milk to other castes, or even in several instances, being included in user groups or cooperatives.<sup>24</sup> Ulrik H. Johnsen (2002) writes that 46.6% of his respondents reported that they had been prevented from selling milk due to their untouchable status. Nearly two thirds of the respondents in the Far Western and Central Development Regions as compared to only one fifth of the respondents in the Eastern Development Region reported discrimination while trying to sell milk. A majority of the respondents (60.7%) said that they faced obstacles in selling milk to hotels/tea shops while 46.1% of the respondents faced obstacles in villages.<sup>25</sup>

*Dalits* in western Nepal face more discrimination than in the east, which has a large ethnic population. The *Madhesis*, whose nationality and nationalism are questioned by the *Pahadis*, face difficulties in getting their citizenship certificates, without which they are unable to buy land, get loans from banks, apply for civil service jobs, study in universities, or vote during elections. While the *Janjatis*, in general, do not face such discriminations, they, like the *Dalits* and *Madhesis*, experience political and cultural exclusion, which in many cases translates into economic exclusion.

All the major political parties, dominated as they were by the 'upper' caste *Parbatiyas*, responded only partially to the demands of the various ethnic and linguistic groups regarding respect for diversity and the promotion of more inclusive development. However, though the Constitution legalized ethnic diversity based, to some degree, on the notion of equality, it circumscribed cultural pluralism and equality by two important qualifications: First, by its definition of Nepal as a 'Hindu kingdom', and second, by its declaration of Nepali as the language of the nation (*rastra bhasa*). Thus, behind the official model of cultural pluralism and equality, attempts towards creating a national culture and the continued dominance of the *Parbatiya* culture (religion and language) over other groups are discernible.

Consequently post 1990 saw a rise in new forms of political claims by ethnic groups and disadvantaged castes. Feeling discriminated and marginalized from social, economic, and political opportunities, these groups mobilized around past grievances along ethnic and caste lines and demanded changes in state policies and laws in two areas: state protection and development of their cultures and languages, and affirmative action to ensure a more equitable share of economic and political resources.

Language became the most visible issue around which the ethnic groups mobilized. They objected to the use of Nepali language for entry into the government service, arguing that it naturally favored the 'upper' caste *Parbatiyas*, most notably the *Brahmins* and demanded that the Constitution declare Nepal to be a secular state. In extreme cases some activists have also demanded separate states based along the traditional homelands of the major ethnic groups. While the majority of the

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<sup>24</sup> Bhattachan et al. (2003); Dahal et al. (2002); Team Consult (1999); Gurung, J. (2001) and DEVA (2003)

<sup>25</sup> A Survey Report (Report submitted to DANIDA/HUGO, Kathmandu 2002)

ethnic leadership does not support such action, fears have been expressed that such demands for autonomy may lead to ethnic tensions and weaken development efforts.

## **B. Current Geographical Distribution of Ethnic Groups and Castes**

There is a discernible pattern to the geographical spread of the various caste and ethnic groups. The hill areas are occupied by the *Pahadis*, whereas the plains are populated by *Madhesis* (70%) as well as the recently migrated *Pahadis* (30%). In general, the western hills are populated mainly by *Parbatiyas* (Brahmins, Chhetris, and *Dalits*), whereas *Janjatis* inhabit the central and eastern parts of the country. The *Janjatis* populate the far eastern and the western districts of the tarai, whereas caste groups are settled in the rest of the plains. Many *Parbatiyas* (Brahmins, Chhetris, as well as *Dalits*) have migrated to the traditional homelands of the *Janjatis*, 52% of whom live outside their native areas. In the country's 75 districts, Chhetris form the largest single group in 22 districts, hill Brahmins in nine, Tamangs in seven, Tharus, Magars, and Rais each in six, Gurungs in four, and Limbus and Newars in three each. The Chhetris are concentrated in the far and mid western districts as well as several central and eastern districts, whereas the Brahmins are concentrated in several western and eastern districts. The Gurungs and Magars are dominant in the western districts, while the Tamangs and the Newars are concentrated in the central districts, and the Rais and Limbus in the eastern districts. In the plains, the Tharus are the major group in several western districts.<sup>26</sup>

Although *Dalits* are found all over Nepal, including in areas settled in by ethnic groups, they are usually found in the periphery of settlements populated by caste groups. Most districts, therefore, have a mixed population, though either a single caste or an ethnic group may solely populate some pockets. These pockets are easy to identify because, in general, caste and ethnic groups tend to congregate in separate settlements or hamlets. The number and variety of *Dalit* groups vary from area to area, with fewer number and types found in the high mountains than in the tarai.

## **C. Differences in Human Development among the Ethnic Groups and Castes**

Historical and hierarchical structures, along with archaic exclusionary practices, have resulted in the minority populations being severely disadvantaged, while the dominant groups, because of their proficiency in Nepali, and their ease of access to and influence upon those who dominate governance structures, continue to enjoy greater access to civil service employment and the benefits thereof. For example, those competent in the Nepali language do far better in schools and in the examinations for the civil service than populations whose first language is not Nepali.

The disadvantages of minority groups is reflected in the human development index. In fact, the level of human development is found to correlate directly with investments in the country's development regions. Thus, populations living in regions far removed from the center of power have low human development, except for the central mountains, which benefit from their relative proximity to the capital city of Kathmandu. Differences in HDI between the country's three ecological

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<sup>26</sup> For details, see Gurung, H. (2001); Gurung, H. (2003a); and Gurung, H. (2003 b)



regions mirror differences between ethnic groups and castes; for instance, the hills at 0.512 have the highest HDI, followed by the tarai (0.478) and the mountains (0.386) respectively. Similarly, hill castes, such as the Brahmins and Chhetris, and ethnic groups, such as the Newars, Thakalis, and Byasis, have a higher HDI than most other ethnic groups and *Dalits*.

Participation in the state bureaucracy of ethnic groups with HDI comparable to the hill Brahmin and Chhetri groups have actually taken a sharp decline post 1990.<sup>27</sup> For instance, in the recruitment of gazetted officers, the Newar ethnic group, which had 18.5% representation in 1990/91, had only 8.7% in 2001/2002; similarly, there was no improvement in the recruitment of gazetted officers from amongst the *Dalits*, other ethnic groups, tarai castes, and Muslims during the decade post 1990, while that of the Brahmin/Chhetri group increased from 67.3% to 87.0% for the same period. Overall, the share of ethnic groups in the judiciary and the civil service is a low 2.4% and 2.3% respectively. One of the reasons why the latter groups are under-represented in these institutions is that their representation in political parties is nominal. Only 15.15% of the top party leaders are *Janjatis*, and only 15.76% are *Madhesis*. There are no *Dalits* among the party leaders. Consequently, they have little influence in selecting candidates for elections, who once in power to appoint ministers, influence the appointment of civil servants. Women make up 9% of the civil service, with only 2% at a decision making level.

While national averages highlight disparities between castes and ethnic groups, differences in disparities between castes and ethnic groups are less sharp at the local level. Ethnic groups and *Dalits* fare better at local levels of the governance structures than at the national level. This is especially so in areas where ethnic groups predominate, and the local ethnic elites are able to muster sufficient votes for themselves. For instance, the Gurungs in Pokhara have a higher HDI and more representation in the local governance structures. Nonetheless, Brahmins and Chhetris continue to dominate even at the local level by virtue of being the traditional land-based elites, although their influence here is less than at the national level, where, because of their connections to the central party leaders, they are able to influence the selection of field candidates for elections. In a sample of 735 Village Development Committees (VDCs), 54.42%, 39.86%, and 1.63% of the VDC Chairpersons, and 52.11%, 37.82%, and 3.95% of the VDC Vice-chairpersons were Brahmin/Chhetris, *Janjatis*, and *Dalits*, respectively.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, several ethnic groups are better off economically, have higher literacy rates, or lower incidence of poverty than Brahmins and especially Chhetris, but these vary across regions. For instance, although the Newars as a group are considered to have the highest per capita income, a 1999 study concluded that the Newars residing in the Lalitpur sub-metropolitan city had higher levels of poverty compared to Brahmins and Chhetris, and other hill ethnic groups residing in the same area.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the eastern development region, with a large ethnic population, has

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<sup>27</sup> UNDP (2004)

<sup>28</sup> Gurung, J. (2001)

<sup>29</sup> Lalitpur Sub-Metropolitan City Office (1999). The study does not list which specific ethnic groups were studied, but they are most likely to be Gurungs and Magars, and to some extent Tamangs. It should be noted that the Tamangs, unlike the Gurungs and the Magars, are considered one of the disadvantaged ethnic groups.

a higher HDI than the mid-western and far western development regions populated mainly by Chhetris and *Dalits*.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, the Byansi, traders by profession, are reported to be the most affluent group in the Darchula district, with higher incomes, literacy, and expenditure than Brahmins and Chhetris.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the relative incidence of poverty among Chhetris is higher (1.10) than either of the tarai caste or ethnic groups, such as Yadavs (0.89) and Tharus (1.06), respectively.<sup>32</sup>

Ethnic groups such as the Thakali, Manangi, and Sherpa, who were previously involved in Trans-Himalayan trade, and are currently involved in various businesses in the tourism sector, or those with a long history of employment in the Indian and British armies, such as the Gurung and the Magar, are better off economically than many Brahmins and Chhetris. These groups have been able to use their income to improve their HDI. For example, the Thakali, Gurung and Magar have literacy rates of 79.9%, 66.3%, and 62.5% respectively, compared to 53.7%, 42.5% and 36.1% of the Tharu, Majhi, and Chepang respectively, demonstrating that hill ethnic groups are more well to do and have a higher HDI than ethnic groups from the tarai.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, *Madhesi Dalits* are far worse off in terms of landholding and HDI indicators such as literacy than hill *Dalits*.<sup>34</sup> In some areas, e.g. education, almost all sections of society have benefited; for example, from 1991 to 2001, the literacy rate increased from 39.0% to 59.6% with all listed groups showing an increase, albeit in varying degrees. However, disparities between groups persist: only 30 groups have literacy rates higher than the national average, whereas the rest, overwhelmingly ethnic groups and *Dalits*, have literacy rates below the national average, with *Dalit* castes, such as the Dom and the Musahar, with a mere 13.8% and 11.1% respectively.<sup>35</sup>

Differences in the human empowerment index (HEI) which combines social, economic, and political indicators into a composite index of empowerment, highlight marked disparities in HEI across the five development regions. For instance, the central (0.497) and eastern (0.486) development regions have an HEI higher than the national average of 0.463, while the mid western and the far western development regions at 0.393 and 0.399 are 15% below the national average. Populations from the mid-western development region have the lowest per capita income and experience the greatest deprivation in health and social capabilities, while having the highest political empowerment. This mismatch has been interpreted to be the source of disillusionment leading to violent conflict in these areas. Conversely, Manang and Mustang districts of the western hills with the highest per capita income and HEI rank are 'conflict-free districts. These disparities in HEI highlight the importance of the regional dimension as a variable in any analysis of social exclusion.

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<sup>30</sup> NESAC (1998)

<sup>31</sup> Dahal (2000)

<sup>32</sup> NESAC (1998)

<sup>33</sup> However, currently Brahmins have about the same literacy rate (80%) as the Thakalis (79.9%) (H. Gurung, *Social Demography of Nepal: Census 2001* (Himal Books, Kathmandu 2003).

<sup>34</sup> Gurung, H. (2003)

<sup>35</sup> Gurung H. (2003)

### III. GENDER

Crosscutting categories of ethnicity, caste, region of origin, poverty level, and religious beliefs is gender, which varies by ethnicity and caste. Broadly speaking gender relations in Tibeto-Burman speaking groups are more flexible compared to the Indo-Aryan speaking populations which mirror inequality and subordination. Nonetheless, across all ethnic groups and castes, the patrimonial nature of the social system, inheritance rules, and the traditional gender-based division of labor severely restrict women's access to education, skill development, employment opportunities outside the home, and decision-making processes.

The situation of women belonging to disadvantaged ethnic groups and castes is even worse, as their social indicators fall far below the country average for women in general. For example, the literacy rate of *Dalit* women is only 12.0%. Hill *Dalit* women have three times the literacy rate (14.7%) as compared to Tarai *Dalit* women (4%).<sup>36</sup> According to another study, the adult female literacy rates of upper caste Hindus (*tagadhari*), ethnic groups (*matwalis*), and *Dalits* were 45.4%, 41.7%, and 23.6% respectively.<sup>37</sup> The gender gap in adult literacy rate among these three groups was similar, around 30%. The education of girls and disadvantaged ethnic groups and castes is constrained by a lack of an enabling environment and in-school factors such as inappropriate curriculum, unbalanced gender composition of teachers, poor teacher training and motivation, inadequate physical facilities, and teacher's insensitivity to issues of gender and cultural diversity. Gender inequality is greater in the rural areas as evidenced by a low gender development index (GDI) of 0.430 compared to urban areas (0.562). As with HDI, the GDI is highest in the central (0.476), followed by the eastern (0.465), western (0.463), midwestern (0.376), and far western (0.356) development regions respectively.

A low gender empowerment index (0.191) highlights the invisibility of women in the economic, political, and professional spheres, and women from the mountains and tarai, especially those of the western and midwestern regions, are less empowered than those in other regions. Reservation for women in local bodies has increased women's profile, but the experience demonstrates that it is insufficient on its own to ensure effective participation of women, or to bring about deep rooted changes in society.

### IV. DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE

While the incidence of poverty has decreased, disparity between the various castes, ethnic groups, and gender still has not been reduced<sup>38</sup>. Relations between ethnic groups and *Dalits* replicate, perhaps less sharply, the relations between Brahmin/Chhetris and other castes and ethnic groups, especially *Dalits*. Ethnic groups have more land, higher literacy rates and are more socially and politically active than *Dalits*, whom they view as ignorant and socially inferior. The *Dalits* face social discrimination from all the other castes, including ethnic groups, especially

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<sup>36</sup> Dahal, et al. (2002)

<sup>37</sup> Gurung, J. (1999)

<sup>38</sup> Nepal Living Standard Survey, 2003–2004

regarding contact, sharing water, or dining together. In some cases, where ethnic groups and *Dalits* share the same water source, it is under the condition that the *Dalits* draw water only after the ethnic groups have finished their turn.

With the advent of a cash economy, members of other castes and ethnic groups have begun to work as hairstylists and tailors, sidestepping the low status accorded to such traditionally *Dalit* profession. With the arrival of new fashions, the 'upper' castes have preferred to switch over to buying services on a needs basis, paying cash rather than kind, and the traditional inter-caste relations have begun to crumble in many areas, leaving the *Dalits* without their traditional social net in the community. While many ethnic groups do not face social discrimination to the extent the *Dalits* do, they face other constraints such as that of poverty and language.

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has taken advantage of this and has worked to recruit ethnic groups and disadvantaged castes into their ranks. The present insurgency, which started from the mid western development region—a region which has received the least priority in resource allocation, is reported to have a large following of ethnic groups and *Dalits*, partly as a result of these resentments, and partly as a result of Maoists promises of various degrees of autonomy and economic and political opportunities for these groups<sup>1</sup>. Women represent about one-third of the followers, and the reason for this increased involvement of women is their perception that conflict is the only means to change their situation in society for increased self-esteem and confidence.

From the mid-1990s, after the start of the Maoist movement, development programs began to concurrently focus on poverty alleviation and on issues of social justice and equity. The new development paradigm entailed a shift in focus from the poor in general, to disadvantaged groups, and more recently, to socially excluded groups. The shift has also involved a change from the earlier emphasis on poverty alone to addressing the social, political, and cultural causes of poverty and disparities in HDI. In recent years, realizing that developmental programs have not benefited the neediest, donor agencies and the state have felt an urgency to address social and economic marginality of disadvantaged groups. While most donor agencies have targeted the poor and women as beneficiaries in their programs and projects, several have now expanded the objective of their programs from poverty alleviation to include issues such as equity and rights, and governance. Similarly, the experience of international NGOs demonstrates that while their programs had benefited the rural poor, the socially excluded and the poorest of the poor had been bypassed.

ADB experience shows that where women are specifically mentioned as project beneficiaries there is a strong incentive to increase their access to project benefits. For instance, women's participation in a livestock project increased from 15% at the start of the project to 51% at completion as a result of a conscious effort to address gender issues. However, the disaggregating of livestock project beneficiaries by ethnicity and caste for one district (Palpa) shows that the Brahmins and Chhetris accounted for 48% of the project beneficiaries while comprising only 28.7% of the district population, followed by Magars (31%) with 45.5% of the population, and *Dalits* (16%)

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<sup>39</sup> It has been reported of the CPNM that, while they profess to be more egalitarian and willing to share power, their leadership is still dominated by Brahmins.

with 12% of the population. Beneficiaries across all ethnic groups and castes tended to be those living close to the road heads rather than those residing in more remote and inaccessible areas. As a result, groups living in remote areas benefited less in proportion to their population size. The implementation modality was also found to contribute to perpetuating disparities. Most implementers, whether of line agencies, local bodies, or NGOs, are members of the dominant groups, as are the local elites in project sites through whom programs and projects are actually implemented. Line agencies and NGOs often work through the local elites, partly because they are powerful, educated, and easier to work with, for reasons of caste, ethnicity, and communication, and partly because their cooperation is required to ensure smooth implementation.

Experiences of bilateral development partners and NGOs show increased participation of ethnic groups and *Dalits* in programs that target the underprivileged in areas populated largely by ethnic groups and *Dalits*. However, despite an increase in the number and percentages of *Dalit* beneficiaries, there are disparities in the quality of their participation in the projects and the extent of benefits as compared to other groups. *Dalits* have little decision-making powers, attend fewer trainings and meetings, and are not able to use credit or savings to the same extent as others. The *Dalits* are discriminated against because of their ritually 'impure' status and hence, are reported to be unable to use the group activities to the same extent and with the same benefit as more privileged group members<sup>1</sup>. A review of the community forestry projects of the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation and DANIDA conclude that while the *Dalits* and other disadvantaged groups have benefited from community forestry, the elites control decision-making.<sup>2</sup>

## **V. PERCEPTIONS OF ETHNIC GROUPS AND CASTES ON DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS**

Promoting social inclusion involves understanding how project participants define patterns of exclusion. Discussions with project beneficiaries of the ADB-assisted Third Livestock Development Project yield important insights on beneficiary perception.<sup>42</sup> All three, the 'upper' castes, the ethnic groups, and the *Dalits* believe that the Brahmin/Chhetri group benefit the most from development projects as they live close to the highways, have wider political and social connections, fluency in the Nepali language, and competence in dealing with external service providers. However, in the later years of project implementation, more *Dalits* have accessed project benefits as a result of specific targeting by the project. Interviews with group members show that meetings, training, and increased interaction between members of different castes and ethnic groups help members "to learn from each other". For instance, *Dalits* and ethnic men and women have gained confidence to speak in meetings and have acquired a 'voice'. Such interactions

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<sup>40</sup> DEVA (2003)

<sup>41</sup> Gronow, J. et al. (2003)

<sup>42</sup> The research team had discussions with 9 focus groups (average of 8 persons each) in the two districts, Palpa and Nawalparasi: one each of male and female Brahmin and Chhetri groups, a Magar women group, a Dalit women group, and a Kumal women group in Palpa; and one each of Tharu male and female groups, Dalit male and female groups, and a mixed male and female Brahmin and Chhetri group in Nawalparasi. Several key informants (knowledgeable villagers as well as staff of line agencies and NGOs) were also interviewed.

have helped to reduce prejudice and social discrimination to some extent, especially in the public sphere, and provide the context for eliminating discrimination and exclusionary practices. Discussions reveal that social behavior considered inappropriate by the dominant group also contribute to increasing exclusion from groups and social networks, and that participation in a group is related to levels of self-confidence, trust in individuals, and likelihood of cooperation.

### **A. Perceptions of the ‘Upper’ Castes**

Many respondents claimed more effort is needed to reach out to the poorest of the poor. ‘Upper’ caste participants were of the view that they benefit more compared to the other ethnic groups and castes, because: (i) projects are not designed to reach the most excluded groups, and (ii) projects work through local leaders or locally based NGOs who are not necessarily the most effective interface between the poor and the project. Brahmin participants of a male focus group discussion stated most projects are organized and implemented through them because they are literate, dynamic, and are leaders in their locality. They perceived that ethnic groups such as Magars and *Dalits* benefit less than them from projects because they lack the ability to take initiatives, are nonchalant, have limited or low literacy skills, are unable to deal with outsiders, and are unable to voice their concerns in meetings where decisions are made. In their view, the personal attributes such as addiction to gambling, alcohol usage, and keenness on making ‘quick money’ by clandestinely selling timber, are factors contributing to the low participation rates of ethnic groups and *Dalits*. Participants held the view that such groups should either be trained in leadership skills to increase their understanding and participation in development projects, or be helped by the local elites to enable them to benefit from development projects.

### **B. Perceptions of Poor Ethnic Groups and Disadvantaged Castes**

Many ethnic groups and *Dalits* perceive they are unenlightened and humdrum compared to the Brahmins and Chhetris. They view their inferior status as having been thrust upon them as a ~~result of their~~ *karma* (fate), and are resigned to it.<sup>43</sup> Similar perceptions were reported by the women from disadvantaged ethnic groups and castes in the Third Livestock Development Project areas. They perceived themselves to be ignorant, untutored, gullible, and uninformed compared to the Brahmins, whom they considered cunning, literate, and able to keep records and accounts.

Perceptions of trust between groups varied and depended on experience. The ethnic groups accept that they benefit from the presence of the literate Brahmins, who are well versed in keeping records and accounts and in dealing with government officials, donor agencies, and NGO staff. However, at the same time, they are uncomfortable with the Brahmins for looking down upon the Magar for raising pigs and treating them as unequal. For instance, when group members were supposed to clean a pond, only Magar women cleaned it; the Brahmins thought it was dirty work. On another occasion, a Brahmin woman member refused to pay the fine for not attending their monthly meeting even though Magar women had paid fines when they were absent. When given a choice, ethnic groups and *Dalits* stated that they wished to include Brahmins in their groups only if

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<sup>43</sup> Bista (1992); Team Consult (1999) and Gurung, J. (2001)

necessary (e.g., to keep records), and provided they were in a minority, i.e. less than one-third. Similarly, the women interviewed stated that in mixed male-female groups, men should be a minority to prevent them from dominating the decision-making process.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Topographical contours and historical and contemporary factors have perpetuated the disparities that exist today. The very poor are found across a wide variety of socioeconomic groups irrespective of ethnicity, caste, sex, religious beliefs, or geographic region. Nepalese society is both vertically (income, education, professional skills) and horizontally (linguistic, caste, ethnicity) stratified, such that each ethnic group or caste, while possessing its own cultural identity, is ultimately indexed on the basis of class. Not all 'upper' castes are wealthy, nor are all 'lower' castes poor. However, for groups whose first language is not Nepali, language constraints pose additional impediments to participate in mainstream development.

The disparities in HEI, which combines social, economic, and political indicators, highlight the importance of the regional dimension in any analysis of social exclusion. However, the lack of regionally disaggregated data on ethnic groups and castes impedes analysis of disparities between the different ethnic groups and castes. The Tenth Plan for the first time included gender as a cross cutting issue, and also recognized the need to address the demands of the socially excluded groups while committing itself to socially inclusive development as a strategy to reduce poverty. However, it does not yet have a clear vision and strategy to address this issue. Efforts have been ad hoc and include welfare programs for *Dalits* and some *Janjati* groups such as the Chepang. The Eighth Plan (1992–1997) included policies and programs for the *Dalits* and other disadvantaged groups, and the Ninth Plan (1998–2002) had separate chapters outlining the objectives, strategies, and programs for *Dalits* and other disadvantaged groups such as women and *Janjatis*, but implementation posed a major obstacle.<sup>44</sup> National commissions such as the National Women's Commission, Dalit Commission, and the National Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities have neither the budget nor the mandate to make significant changes in the status of women and socially excluded groups.

A new development paradigm that is focused in managing the country's immense sociocultural diversity will lead to more equitable development outcomes. Historical deprivation has to be negotiated through the provision of measures that improve the conditions of disadvantaged ethnic groups and castes. As a first step, new economic and social policies are needed that promote the redistribution of physical (e.g. land ownership and income generating schemes) and human assets, redress biases in public spending, and target provision of basic services such as education, health, and water supply, to populations facing poverty and social exclusion.

Similarly, there must be broad representation of ethnic groups, castes, and men and women in the policymaking bodies and state institutions. The state must ensure that no one group is able to monopolize power.

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<sup>44</sup> Gurung, J. (2001)

Discriminatory practices must be dealt with firmly: (i) with legal provisions, (ii) revision of school curricula and textbooks, so that these are free from gender, social, and regional biases; and (iii) strict enforcement of regulations in the spirit of the Constitution of 1990.

A longer time frame and greater social investment is needed to understand the social complexities of communities, and to recognize that ultra poor men and women from all ethnic groups and castes experience multiple disadvantages and need support to enable them to participate effectively in the development process. Because of their limited social relationships they remain invisible within community structures. Poor men and women have limited social capital and hence, are unable to interact with other critical organizations with access to livelihood opportunities and information on development projects. Disaggregating within the poor, the most excluded groups will assist in monitoring participation rates and development outcomes for men and women, and for different ethnic groups and castes.

Given that the poorest of the poor do not have the time, resources, or confidence to join community groups, new ways of engaging disadvantaged groups and castes are needed. Targeted participation strategies which facilitate engagement of hard to reach groups has the potential to bring people together for building trust and breaking down inter-ethnic and inter-caste distrust and suspicion. To facilitate this process, training in culture and gender sensitivity and interpersonal skills among others, must be provided to implementing organizations to ensure that issues of ethnicity, caste, and gender are properly identified and addressed.



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**ETHNIC, CASTE, LINGUISTIC, AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS**


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| Major classifications   |  | Major caste/ethnic groups                    | Language family   | Religion   |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| People from the hills and mountains<br>( <i>Pahadi</i> )<br>(66.2%) | Ethnic groups ( <i>janajati</i> )<br>(27.4%)                     | Magar, Tamang, Newar, Rai, Gurung,           | Tibeto-Burman (18%)<br>Tamang, Newari, Magar,                                 | Buddhism (10.7%)<br>Animism, Kirant (3.6%)       |
|   | <i>Parbatiya</i> castes ( <i>jat</i> )<br>(38.4%)                | Brahmin, Chhetri, Dalit castes               | Indo-Aryan (80.6%):<br>Nepali (48.6%),<br>Maithili, Bojpuri,<br>Awadhi, Tharu | Hinduism (80.6%)                                 |
| People of the plains<br>( <i>Madhesi</i> )<br>(28.5%)               | Castes ( <i>jat</i> )<br>(19.5%)                                 | Brahmin, Yadav, Kalawar, <i>Dalit</i> castes |   |  |
|   | <i>Janajati</i><br>(9%)  | Tharu, Majhi, Danuwar                        |   |  |
| Others<br>(5.3%)  | Others, including unspecified <i>janajatis</i> and <i>Dalits</i> | Muslims, Sikhs, Marwaris                     | Other languages (Munda, Dravidian, etc.)                                      | Other religions (Islam (4.4%), Jain, Sikh, etc.) |

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Source: Harka Gurung, *Nepal: Social Demography and Expressions* (New Era, Kathmandu 2000), *Trident and Thunderbolt: Cultural Dynamics in Nepalese Politics* (Social Science Baha, Kathmandu 2003a), *Social Demography of Nepal: Census 2001* (Himal Books, Kathmandu 2003 b).

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**HUMAN DEVELOPMENT BY CASTE/ ETHNICITY**


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| Human Development Indicators  | Nepal  | Brahmin | Chhetri | Newar  | Hill ethnic groups | Madhesi | Dalit |
|-------------------------------|--------|---------|---------|--------|--------------------|---------|-------|
| Life expectancy,              | 55.0   | 60.8    | 56.3    | 62.2   | 53.0               | 58.4    | 50.3  |
| Adult Literacy (%)            | 36.72  | 58.00   | 42.00   | 54.80  | 35.20              | 27.50   | 23.80 |
| Mean years of schooling, 1996 | 2.254  | 4.647   | 2.786   | 4.370  | 2.021              | 1.700   | 1.228 |
| Per capita income (NRs), 1996 | 7,673  | 9,921   | 7,744   | 11,953 | 6,607              | 6,911   | 4,940 |
| Per capita PPP (US\$), 1996   | 1,186  | 1,533   | 1,197   | 1,848  | 1,021              | 1,068   | 764   |
| Life Expectancy Index         | 0.500  | 0.597   | 0.522   | 0.620  | 0.467              | 0.557   | 0.422 |
| Educational Attainment Index  | 0.295  | 0.490   | 0.342   | 0.462  | 0.280              | 0.221   | 0.186 |
| Income Index                  | 0.179  | 0.237   | 0.181   | 0.289  | 0.152              | 0.160   | 0.110 |
| HDI                           | 0.325  | 0.441   | 0.348   | 0.457  | 0.299              | 0.313   | 0.239 |
| Ratio to national HDI         | 100.00 | 135.87  | 107.31  | 140.73 | 92.21              | 96.28   | 73.62 |

*Source:* Adapted from NESAC, *Nepal Human Development Report* (Nepal South Asian Centre (NESAC), Kathmandu 1998) and J. Gurung, Promotion of Sociocultural, Economic and Political Participation of *Dalits* and Other Disadvantaged Groups: A Strategic Approach (Draft). (Submitted to the Enabling State Programme (ESP), Kathmandu, 2002).

Note: Hill ethnic groups include only, Sherpa, Gurung, Magar, Rai and Limbu;  
The *Madhise* category includes Rajbanshi, Yadhv, Ahir and Tharu (an ethnic group);  
The *Dalit* category includes *Dalits* from the hills and tarai.

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**INTEGRATED NATIONAL CASTE/ ETHNIC INDEX OF GOVERNANCE, 1999**


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| High level officials in:                            | <i>Bahun<br/>/ Chhetri</i> | Newar        | Hill<br>Ethnic<br>groups | <i>Madhise</i> | <i>Dalit</i>            | Others     | Total       |
|---|----------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Judiciary   | 190<br>80.85%              | 33<br>14.04% | 3<br>1.28%               | 9<br>3.30%     | 0<br>0                  | 0<br>0     | 235         |
| Constitutional Body and<br>Commission               | 181<br>77.02%              | 32<br>13.62% | 4<br>1.70%               | 18<br>7.66%    | 0<br>0                  | 0<br>0     | 235         |
| Council of Ministers                                | 14<br>56%                  | 6<br>24%     | 2<br>8%                  | 3<br>12%       | 0<br>0                  | 0<br>0     | 25          |
| Public Administration                               | 20<br>62.50%               | 3<br>9.38%   | 4<br>12.50%              | 5<br>15.63%    | 0<br>0                  | 0<br>0     | 32          |
| Legislature   | 159<br>60%                 | 20<br>7.55%  | 36<br>13.58%             | 46<br>17.36%   | 4 <sup>a</sup><br>1.51% | 0<br>0     | 265         |
| Political Parties                                   | 97<br>58.79%               | 18<br>10.91% | 25<br>15.15%             | 26<br>15.76%   | 0<br>0                  | 0<br>0     | 165         |
| DDC President,<br>Municipality Mayor,<br>Vice-Mayor | 106<br>55.50%              | 30<br>15.71% | 23<br>12.04%             | 31<br>16.23%   | 0<br>0                  | 0<br>0     | 191         |
| Industry and Trade<br>Sector                        | 7<br>16.67%                | 20<br>47.62  | 0<br>0                   | 15<br>35.71%   | 0<br>0                  | 0<br>0     | 42          |
| Education Sector                                    | 75<br>77.32%               | 11<br>11.34% | 2<br>2.06%               | 7<br>7.22%     | 1<br>1.03%              | 1<br>1.03% | 97          |
| Cultural Sector                                     | 85<br>75.22%               | 22<br>19.47% | 6<br>5.31%               | 0<br>0         | 0<br>0                  | 0<br>0     | 113         |
| Science and Technology                              | 36<br>58.06%               | 18<br>29.03% | 2<br>3.23%               | 6<br>18.75%    | 0<br>0                  | 0<br>0     | 62          |
| Civil Society Sector                                | 41<br>66.13%               | 18<br>29.03% | 1<br>1.61%               | 4<br>6.45%     | 0<br>0                  | 0<br>0     | 62          |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>1011</b>                | <b>231</b>   | <b>108</b>               | <b>170</b>     | <b>5</b>                | <b>0</b>   | <b>1520</b> |
| %   | 66.5                       | 15.2         | 7.1                      | 11.2           | 0.3                     | 0          | 100         |
| % of Nepal's Population                             | 31.6                       | 5.6          | 22.2 <sup>b</sup>        | 30.9           | 8.7 <sup>c</sup>        | 0.1        | 100         |
| Difference (%)                                      | +34.9                      | +9.6         | -15.1                    | -19.7          | -8.4                    | -1.0       |             |

Source: G. Neupane, *Nepalko Jatiya Samasya. Samajik Banot ra sajhedariko sambhavana*. (Caste/ethnic problems in Nepal. Social Structure and the possibility of Cooperation) (Centre for Development Studies, Kathmandu 2000) cited in J. Gurung, Promotion of Sociocultural, Economic and Political Participation of *Dalits* and Other Disadvantaged Groups: A Strategic Approach (Draft). (Submitted to the Enabling State Programme (ESP), Kathmandu, 2002).

Note: <sup>a</sup>Nominated members of the Upper House;

<sup>b</sup>Not inclusive of all *Janjatis* <sup>c</sup>Includes hill *Dalits* only;

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