



She Leads Nepal

IFES *She Leads* Nepal Impact Booklet. *She Leads* Nepal is supported by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

Copyright © 2023 International Foundation for Electoral Systems. All rights reserved.

Permission Statement: No part of this work may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system without the written permission of IFES.

Disclaimer: This publication has been funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and by the Swiss Government through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The views expressed in this publication are the author's alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government or the Swiss Government.



Felicity Volk

Australian Ambassador to Nepal

As Australia's Ambassador to Nepal, I am proud to introduce the *She Leads* Impact Booklet. Women's leadership and the equal representation of women at all levels of government is crucial to build equitable and inclusive societies. It is our collective responsibility to empower women, and to ensure that women and girls are actively engaged in the political processes that shape the future directions of their countries.

The Australian Government is pleased to be working with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), together with national partners, to promote women's political participation in Nepal. Together, we are supporting women leaders through skills transfer, mentoring and coalition and confidence building to ensure that girls and women are neither left out nor left behind. As this booklet attests, Nepal's women are increasingly participating in the decision-making processes that impact their lives, livelihoods and well-being. We celebrate these women and commit our ongoing support to them and future generations of women leaders.



Elisabeth von Capeller

Ambassador, Embassy of Switzerland in Nepal

Bimala Tamang, a woman ward member from Morang shared, *"As an elected women representative my first year was challenging, without any training or knowledge on how to implement the tasks – I was confused."* *She Leads* has empowered women like Bimala with skills and knowledge to participate and take on leadership roles in political and electoral processes. The success of elected women representatives at the local level is key to consolidate the fundamentals of the constitution and to continue driving positive, inclusive change in the country. Women's political participation and leadership are fundamental to advance gender equality, social inclusion and drive democracy. Manjita B.K, a woman ward member from Okhaldhunga, who participated in this program shared, *"Now I am 26, and a Dalit ward member – people respect me and invite me inside their homes."* It is incredible to see elected women representatives in Nepal become role models in their communities, strengthening the society with their full potential. I congratulate *She Leads* for implementing this essential program and thereby, providing an alternative discourse to leadership in Nepal.

She Leads Nepal - Laying the foundation



The most resilient democracies are those that promote women's equal and active participation throughout the democratic process. *She Leads*, a flagship program of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), empowers women with the skills and knowledge to take on leadership roles as elected representatives, community leaders and policy advocates¹.

Working with local partners Mandwi and the Centre for Dalit Women Nepal (CDWN), IFES launched the *She Leads* program in Nepal in 2019, two years after the historic 2017 local election – the first local elections held in over 20 years. Due in part to electoral gender quotas, Nepal's 2017 local elections resulted in over 14,000 women being elected to local government positions. But despite their increased representation,

¹ *She Leads* has been carried out with support from DFAT, FCDO, Global Affairs Canada, SDC, and USAID.

women are neither equal decision makers in local government structures nor within their political parties. *She Leads* supports elected women leaders in Nepal as they work to influence policy development and deliver on their commitments to their constituents.

Reversing negative gender norms that inhibit women's role as political decisionmakers requires more than

a focus on women. Recognizing this, *She Leads* also works with male allies, including family members, community leaders, political party leaders and the media, to build an understanding among men about their role in advancing gender equality and encourage them to advance women's rights in their communities and in political leadership.

She Leads Nepal is carried out with support from Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Switzerland's Agency for Development and Cooperation.

In partnership with:



Center for Dalit
Women Nepal



Mandwi



IFES' *She Leads* program has reached more than over 7,000 women globally. In Nepal, the training was locally tailored to support elected women and community leaders as they work to influence policy development and deliver for their constituents. Since the program's launch, 985 *She Leads* alumnae have gone on to successfully advocate for increased budgets for gender-focused community activities, responded to political hate speech against women, and implemented voter education campaigns reaching 7,500+ community members.

Building practical governance skills

Prior to the May 2022 local elections, the *She Leads* program trained 975 local elected women leaders across ten districts in Nepal's Province One and Madhes Province, building technical and leadership skills that enable elected women to engage more effectively with constituents, elected men and other political stakeholders.

She Leads participants also engaged in a Campaign Skills Bootcamp,

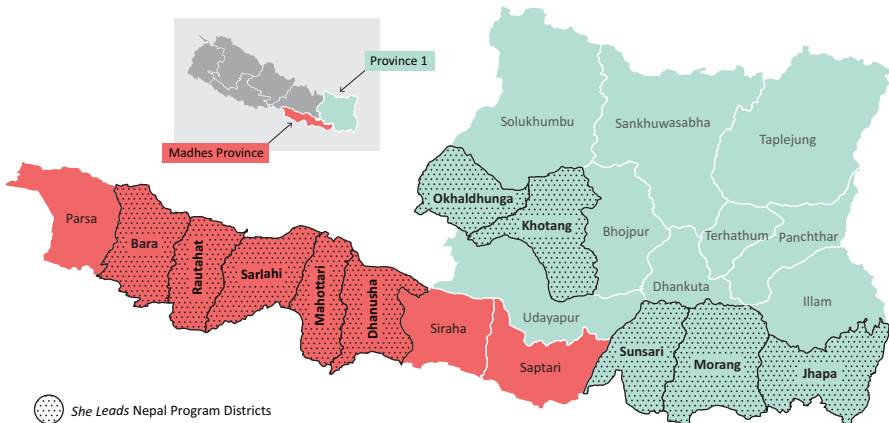
focusing on how to run a successful re-election campaign. For the 2022 local elections, **over half of the 975** *She Leads* alumnae were nominated for re-election. After the 2022 local elections, IFES and its local partners began training a new cohort of **1,365** newly elected women and deepening their engagement with the hundreds of *She Leads* participants who were re-elected in the local elections.



The *She Leads* program **trained 975** local elected women leaders across ten districts in Province 1 and Madhes Province before the 2022 local election

Over half of the 975 *She Leads* alumnae were nominated in 2022 for re-election

She Leads Nepal Program Area Map



She Leads Nepal Program Districts

“ After the 2022 local elections, IFES and its local partners began training a new cohort of **1,365 newly elected women**



She Leads participants joined hands during a post-2022 local election orientation with re-elected and newly elected women representatives in Okhaldhunga district, Province 1

Delivering for constituents through targeted assignments

A core focus of the *She Leads* program is the post-training assignments after each training module – a practice that both provides alumnae with an opportunity to apply newly-gained skills and to have tangible impact in their communities through engagement with their constituents. Participants report that these community-based assignments allow them to work across gender, ethnic and caste lines to promote gender equality, and build their confidence as elected leaders. Through their assignments, elected women leaders:

- Delivered community awareness sessions on gender equality
- Encouraged constituents to vote in the 2022 elections
- Advocated against gender-based hate speech
- Obtained resources for their communities, such as budget allocations for gender and inclusion- related activities.

Through these assignments and other outreach activities, *She Leads* alumnae have collectively reached over **37,000 community members** to date.

She Leads participants in Madhes Province practice public speaking skills by sharing information on the importance of gender equality in decision-making with community members in Bara district



Alumnae's reflections on their assignments underscore the impact that elected women leaders have on strengthening inclusive participation in the governance process. Tulasa, an elected woman leader from

Jhapa district in Province 1, noted that through the voter education assignment, she convinced young people to vote and helped them understand their role in the broader electoral process:



She Leads participants present their images of what being a "good leader" means in Sunsari district, Madhes Province

She Leads participants in Madhes Province practice public speaking skills by sharing information on the importance of gender equality in decision-making with community members in Rautahat district

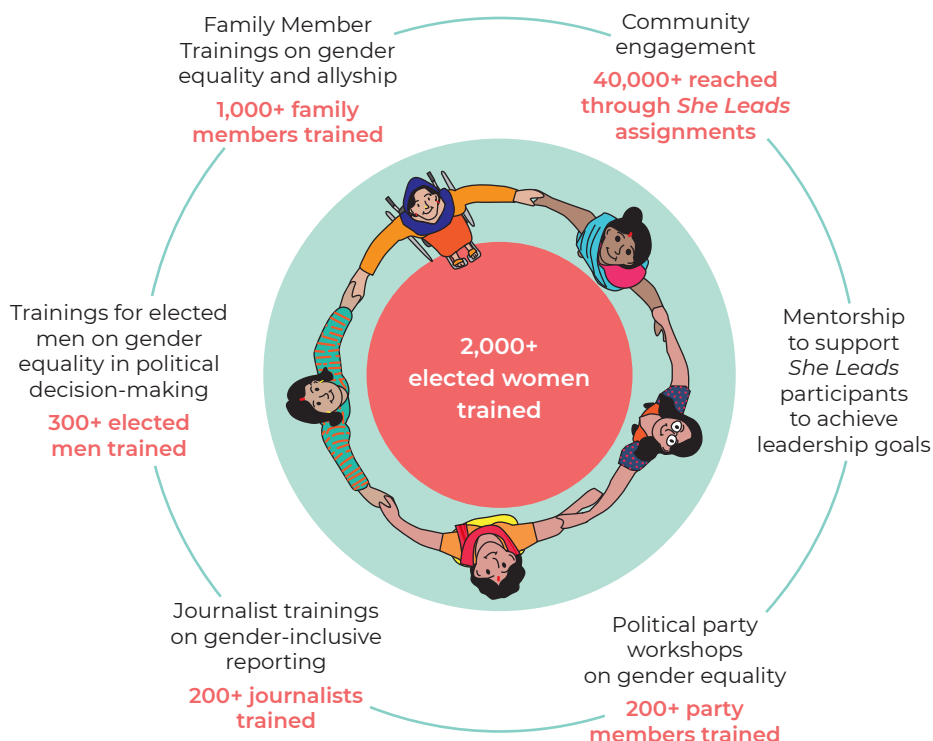
"Some young people believed that voting is not important, as it does them no good. But after the assignment on inclusive voter education, they understood why it is important for young people to vote as well. We are very happy that through this assignment we could change community members' minds on the importance of voting"



Fostering male allyship

Partnerships with male stakeholders – including elected male counterparts, family members, political party leaders and journalists – are essential to fostering a more gender inclusive election environment. At the family level, the *She Leads* program has engaged **over 1,000** people, orienting them on gender equality principles to enhance understanding of and support for the work of their elected women family members. As a *She Leads* participant's husband noted,


"Today, this event made me more aware of the challenges [my wife] faces to succeed a male-dominated field such as politics. Looking at these issues through a gender perspective made so much sense and revealed the disparities that exist in our society and the privileges we enjoy just because we are men. I commit to better myself in the future and will support my wife to fulfill her responsibilities as an elected official"





A She Leads participant from Jhapa district, Province 1 delivers a speech during a She Leads Beginner's training

IFES and its local partners also trained male journalists on the challenges women candidates and politicians face, such as lack of access to media, gender-based harassment and disinformation and hate speech directed at women politicians. One journalist underscored that he is using local level media outlets to address media-based harassment following the training, noting:

“One of the (She Leads alumna) encountered disinformation related to her work as an elected representative, and I organized a press conference on her behalf to inform people that she was not involved in any kind of misconduct. I am committed to supporting elected women representatives, by highlighting their work in my own reporting and supporting them to fulfill their responsibilities as elected officials.” 

Advocating for gender equality measures

Throughout the program, Nepali women in politics have repeatedly highlighted that a lack of respect from male leaders and the fact that women do not feel confident approaching senior political party leaders – the majority of whom are men – remain barriers to their full, meaningful political participation. Through the *She Leads* trainings, elected women practiced public speaking, managing meetings

and negotiation, and committed to organizing meetings with male political party decision makers to advocate for their and their constituents' priorities. Putting these commitments into practice, alumnae met with 243 provincial-level political party leaders in the months before the 2022 local and general elections, calling for greater gender equality in the parties' constitutions, policies and decision-making bodies.



She Leads participants in Okhaldhunga district, Province 1 discuss ways to build self-confidence as leaders

Prioritizing intersectional leadership

While the election quotas ensure that more women are elected to office, women facing multiple forms of marginalization – such as Dalit women or women with disabilities – confront additional barriers to seeking elected office. In both the 2017 and 2022 local elections, for example, there were no Dalit women candidates across over 100 *palikas*. Yet women with these nuanced perspectives and representing diverse communities are essential to strengthening representation of all marginalized groups in Nepal's democracy.

She Leads uses multiple strategies to ensure that women from different caste groups, ethnic groups, religious groups, and varied socio-economic backgrounds are core beneficiaries of the training. IFES and its local partners proactively recruit elected Dalit women and women from other marginalized groups. *She Leads* training content has also been made accessible to

low literacy audiences and persons with disabilities, among other adaptations. One Dalit elected woman leader noted that while she used to be too shy to speak up in her role,

“Now whenever I go to any meetings or community events, if I have an opinion, I make sure that I am heard. I feel like my voice matters and as the people's representative, one should be able to establish themselves as a people's person.”



She Leads in Nepal will continue to expand in the years ahead, providing beginner's and intermediate trainings to newly elected women leaders; engaging existing *She Leads* alumnae as mentors and through delivery of advanced trainings; and further strengthening allyship among male political leaders and family members who can support women decision makers.

Elected Women submit advocacy memorandum calling for women representation in political party committees and in 2022 local election nominations



What's next for *She Leads* Nepal?

Following the 2022 local government election, the *She Leads* program is expanding to cover three areas of focus. First, *She Leads* alumnae who have been re-elected are receiving advanced leadership training to further hone governance skills and emphasize the role they can play in encouraging newly elected women. Second, a new cohort of women elected for the first time in 2022 will be trained through the *She Leads* Beginner's curriculum, providing critical knowledge and skills on how to fulfill their roles and be supported via mentors to advance their leadership and community engagement skills. Finally, *She Leads* alumnae who were not

reelected but remain interested in serving their communities will be mobilized as community leaders able to leverage their experience to advocate for issues most critical to women in their communities. Through these three channels of intervention, IFES will continue to build and strengthen a network of elected and community leaders working together to advance women's rights and gender equality in Nepal. Nepali *She Leads* alumnae will further be linked to other *She Leads* alumnae from across IFES' Asia program countries, to network and exchange successes and challenges in advocated for women's rights across the region.



She Leads feature profiles



Ms. Binita Bajracharya, *She Leads* participant

📍 Sunsari district, Province 1

Ms. Binita Bajracharya was elected to an open ward committee seat from Dharan sub-metropolitan city in the 2017 local election. After the 2022 local election, she was appointed coordinator of the sub-metropolitan economic development sectoral committee. She is the first woman to serve on a sectoral committee in her ward – a position that, before participating in the *She Leads* training sessions on the functions and roles of local government committees, she did not know she could hold. Bajracharya said, *"No one told us that we could also serve as coordinator of sectoral committees. After attending the She Leads training, we realized we had been treated unfairly and raised this as an agenda item in the executive meeting and within my political party."* After Bajracharya's advocacy, the political party leaders affirmed their dedication to ensuring elected women were aware of these and other leadership roles they may pursue.



Khadga Maya Parajuli, *She Leads* participant

📍 Jhapa district, Province 1

"I never thought that from being first elected as a ward committee member, I could run for deputy mayor someday, but here I am."

Khadka Maya Parajuli participated in the *She Leads* program after being elected as a ward committee member in 2017. Before the *She Leads* trainings, Parajuli said she was unaware of her roles and responsibilities as an elected leader, but that she gradually increased in confidence, *"As I participated in She Leads, I became more aware about my inner potential and started raising voices for the inclusion of Dalits and marginalized communities in meetings."* After the trainings, Parajuli strategically advocated for the betterment of her community, identifying needs and representing her community in the ward committee meetings. Due to her hard work and dedication, she was nominated for the position of Deputy Mayor in the 2022 local election in Arjundhara Municipality, 02.

In her new role as Deputy Mayor, Parajuli continues to work for marginalized communities within her ward. Within a few months of being elected to Deputy Mayor, she supported development of a gender equality bill that will be endorsed in the next municipal assembly and successfully advocated for more money to be allocated to buying food for pregnant women workers, as well as grants to offset undergraduate education expenses for girls from low-income households.



Rita Nepali, *She Leads* participant

📍 Jhapa district, Province 1

Rita Nepali, a re-elected women ward member from Jhapa district, recalls how the *She Leads* assignments encouraged her to successfully advocate for funds from the Member of Parliaments Development Fund to build 10 homes for landless families in her ward. She also recalls how *She Leads* helped increase her confidence to re-contest for election in 2022: *"The sessions on negotiation, networking and working with stakeholders helped me reach out to political leaders, negotiate and network with them, due to which I was again nominated in the 2022 local elections."* Nepali is determined to work for the development of her community and advance the rights of women and marginalized groups in her community, saying, *"I am confident that I can work smoothly and effectively in this tenure as well."*



Maina Rai, *She Leads* participant

📍 Sunsari district, Province 1

As a *She Leads* alumna and local elected leader, Maina Rai has advocated for infrastructure improvement projects in her community, including allocating funds to build much needed roads and bridges. She has also championed rights-based responses to domestic violence in her community, saying, *"As an elected woman representative, I mediated over 300 cases related to domestic violence. I was also able to rescue many homeless and missing girl children. I saved an eight year old girl child from a gruesome act of domestic violence. I feel very proud of all the work I was able to accomplish as a ward member."* Rai first described herself as a shy and quiet person, but says she has now become a strong advocate and voice for her community. Ahead of the 2022 elections, Rai's accomplishments spoke for themselves, and she was re-nominated for the position of ward committee member. In her new elected tenure, Rai is determined to work for the betterment of Dalit community members by building additional housing. She is also prioritizing infrastructure development work in her community and introduce income-generating programs for women.



Dilip Agrawal, Mayor

📍 Morang district, Province 1

In Rangeli Municipality, Mayor Dilip Agrawal is a strong ally for *She Leads* participants and elected women representatives' participation in political decision-making and constituency relationship-building. Initially, Agrawal was skeptical of the efficacy of the *She Leads* program and was reluctant to provide his permission to implement the program. After permission was received, and trainings began, *She Leads* participants told Agrawal about the skills they learned through the program, including public speaking, local government planning, and networking, as well as the confidence they now feel in their ability to lead. Agrawal began providing additional funding to *She Leads* participants for their post-training assignments, allowing elected women to engage with more community members, and organized an exchange opportunity for the elected women serving in his municipality to network with elected women from Pokhara in Gandaki Province. In the May 2022 local election, Agrawal was re-elected as mayor and continues to be a strong *She Leads* ally, supporting elected women to build leadership capacity, and advocating for gender equality in political decision-making.



Sunil Chaudhary, Journalist

📍 Sunsari district, Province 1

Sunil Chaudhary attended a *She Leads* training for gender-inclusive media reporting in Province 1 in October 2020. Chaudhary is Editor and Publisher of Ramdhunu Khabar Patrika, a local daily newspaper from Sunsari district. After attending the gender-inclusive media training, Chaudhary has featured the work and accomplishments of elected women in articles, focusing on elected women's mandates and the achievements of *She Leads* participants. Chaudhary has also been supporting elected women to draft proposals for gender and inclusion projects in their communities and has provided them with public speaking opportunities. During 2022 local level elections, Chaudhary featured profiles of women candidates and reported news on elected women's contributions, and supported a woman candidate to rebut defamatory remarks an opponent had made in the media. Chaudhary is committed to support women leaders, saying, "*I commit to highlighting the work of elected women and will advocate for women to serve in higher leadership positions in the future.*"

Notes



***She Leads* Nepal**

शी लिड्स
महिला नेतृत्व कार्यक्रम



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC
स्वीस सरकार विकास सहयोग एसडीसी

