

Change lives. **For good.**

act:onaid

Integrating women's rights into wider
social movements in Kathmandu, Nepal:

Challenges, opportunities
and effectiveness



Written by Rachel Noble and Daphne Jayasinghe (ActionAid UK), based on a literature review conducted by Zahara Nesbitt-Ahmed (Institute of Development Studies) (Section 3) and Indu Tuladhar, independent consultant (Sections 4-7). Support and input was also provided by Mona Sherpa (ActionAid Nepal), and Neelanjana Mukhia, Christy Abraham and Sumathi Pathmanaban (ActionAid International).

Produced under ActionAid's Women's Rights and Social Movements Pilot Project, generously funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) Programme Partnership Agreement (PPA).

First published internally in April 2014. Current edition published March 2016.

Cover image: Women from rural women's rights network, Mahila Adikhar Manch, of Makwanpur District, Nepal, come together to reflect on key progress and learnings from an ActionAid-supported capacity building programme, implemented under the DFID PPA Women's Rights and Social Movements Pilot Project.

Photo: ActionAid

Contents

Part 1: Introducing the research

1.2 Introduction	5
1.3 Overview of women's rights and social and economic justice movements.....	6
1.4 The Nepali context.....	10

Part 2: Integrating women's rights into wider social movements: key findings

2.1 Women's rights movements.....	12
2.2 Ethnic minority and indigenous rights movements.....	14
2.3 Student and youth movements.....	15
2.4 Housing rights movements	17
2.5 Labour rights movements	18

Part 3: Donors and INGOs: A help and a hindrance

3.1 Supporting movements to grow.....	20
3.2 Cautions and limitations.....	21

Part 4: Effectiveness of integrating women's rights into wider social movements

4.1 Effectiveness via promoting women's leadership.....	22
4.2 Effectiveness via increased participation and expanding agendas	22
4.3 Effectiveness via increased collaborations.....	23

Part 5: Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions	25
5.2 Recommendations	26

Appendices

Appendix I - Methodology, sample and scope	29
Appendix II - Organisations and networks.....	29
Appendix III - Research recommendations to government	29

References	30
-------------------------	----

PART 1: Introducing the research

1.1 Executive summary

The mobilisation of women's movements is recognised as critical to achieving progressive political, social and economic policy change, and to challenging endemic gender discrimination from the local to the global level.¹ Globally, women's movements, feminist movements and feminist networks are reflecting on their potential to achieve gender equality and the full enjoyment of all women's rights, the progress they have made as well as the challenges and barriers to achieving their goals.² This briefing presents the findings of the first phase of ActionAid's DFID PPA-funded Women's Rights and Social Movements Pilot Project, which aims to contribute to this growing analysis. The research project objective is to evaluate the challenges and opportunities to integrating women's rights in social and economic justice movements that do not have an explicit women's rights focus, and to critically evaluate the effectiveness and value of such approaches.

The research has been designed to inform ActionAid international (AAI) programming, policy and campaigns, and to contribute to federation-wide learning. This includes supporting ActionAid's Safe Cities multi country programme and campaign objective to '...build a strong, local, national, regional and global multi-sectoral movement to demand an end to violence against women and girls in cities',³ as well as ActionAid UK's policy/advocacy initiative to end women's economic inequality, including by demanding greater space and support to women's collective voice and agency. With these parameters in mind, the primary research took place in Kathmandu, Nepal, where more than 20 leaders and representatives from a range of social and economic justice movements active in (but not limited to) the Kathmandu area, as well as a number of independent experts, were consulted.

The briefing presents an overview of key themes in the literature on women's rights and social movements in Latin America and South Asia, followed by a summary of the Nepal research findings. It begins by discussing the emergence of women's movements, including from struggles for basic needs and rights, resistance to violations of women's rights,

and political struggles for independence or against dictatorship. Some of the challenges women's rights activists or movements have sought to overcome in order to integrate women's rights into wider social movements include a lack of women's leadership and limited genuine commitment to gender equality. This neglect of women's rights has led to the emergence of breakaway, dedicated women's rights movements. This finding leads the briefing to question whether integrating a women's rights agenda into social movements without such an agenda is always a desirable objective for the effective promotion of women's rights.

The findings of the research in Nepal reflect the complex, multi layered social and political landscape that women's rights activists, organisations or movements must navigate when promoting women's rights via wider social movements. The agendas of social movements active in Kathmandu are varied and informed by competing priorities. Within the women's movement itself, it was found that the leadership is seen by some as unrepresentative of the interests of all women, particularly those who are further marginalised by intersecting identities of class, caste, ethnicity or religion. The unrepresentative or undemocratically appointed leadership was a criticism of all social movements. Across the movements consulted, it was found that women's leadership was largely neglected and their participation instrumentalised. Prevailing patriarchal social norms prevented women's rights from being adequately addressed, let alone prioritised in recognition that full social justice cannot be achieved without the transformation of gendered power relations. Efforts at collaboration between women's and other social movements are limited.

However, various positive opportunities were also identified. Many social movements have quotas for women's participation and leadership, which have been bolstered by the momentum created by a provision assuring women 33 per cent of the seats in the new Constituent Assembly. Many also have women's wings and committees (such as trade unions federations and student movements). Although respondents drew attention to the risk of these serving to side-line women's rights issues from

core movement agendas (and indeed a number were set up by women frustrated at being marginalised within the movement), many also see such committees and quotas as fuelling an increase in women's participation, thereby offering opportunities to build a critical mass of women to demand equal voice and influence, which is critical to generating a wider commitment to gender equality amongst movement leaders as well as across wider society.

There are also instances of alliance building and an expansion of agendas to include more identity-specific demands, thereby involving new groups of women. The timing of the growing recognition of women's rights is critical as the Constituent Assembly embarks on the development of a new Constitution for the Nepal. This offers an historic opportunity for enshrining the women's rights agenda within a constitutional framework, based on the principles of non-discrimination and substantive equality. The constitution-building process will create a space for the women's movement to seek a major policy shift and to challenge their historic subordination and oppression. It is also an opportunity for the movement to engage and seek alliances with other movements campaigning for cultural, social and religious equality, as well as with mainstream political parties.

Although there are opportunities for social movements to engage with mainstream politics in Nepal, the prevailing influence and control of competing political parties was found to be a consistent theme across social movements consulted. Respondents reported that this could hinder the independence and, in some cases, the effectiveness of social movements. Many women's movements and social justice movements globally and in Nepal can trace their origins to mainstream political activism. However this and other research finds that there can be a risk of lending token support to 'women's issues' as a way of mobilising mass support for party political agendas.

Similarly INGOs and donors have been criticised for co-opting movements and setting the agenda according to international interests rather than based on the diverse realities and structural discriminations experienced by different groups of Nepali women and neglecting the political language of women's rights. ActionAid is mindful of this risk and seeks to mitigate it through its human rights based approach. However, it is a threat to the effectiveness of women's movements that ActionAid, other INGOs and donors must remain vigilant to.

The Women's Rights and Social Movements Pilot Project seeks to critically assess the effectiveness of the integrating women's rights into social movements. The findings of the literature review and primary research in Nepal strongly demonstrate that there is no quick, one-size-fits-all answer to this question. The effectiveness or indeed desirability of integrating women's rights into social movements without a women's rights focus as well as potential alliance building is context specific and needs to be determined by movement activists on a case by case basis. This research project provides an opportunity for reflection by social movements and the briefing presents a case study on the challenges and opportunities facing women's rights activists in Nepal as well as the space and the opportunity for Nepali social movements to reflect on how to address these challenging questions.

The briefing ends with recommendations drawn by the respondents to women's rights movements, further social and economic justice movements, and INGOs, including ActionAid International. The authors then offer some further recommendations based on these to the wider ActionAid federation.

1.2 Introduction

The challenging of entrenched discriminatory gender norms and widespread violations of women's rights, including by securing progressive policy change, depends upon the effective mobilisation of women's movements, from local to global level.⁴ Globally, women's movements, and feminist movements and networks are reflecting on their potential to achieve women's human rights, gender equality and the full enjoyment of all women's rights, the progress made as well as the challenges and barriers that persist.⁵ ActionAid is conducting research⁶ to contribute to this growing reflection and analysis, while generating learning to inform aspects of its women's rights programming⁷ that are geared towards efforts to build strong national and global movements for women's rights and economic justice. As part of this, we will identify the challenges and opportunities encountered to integrating women's rights in wider social and economic justice movements – whether by expanding agendas, promoting women's leadership and participation, or through collaborations with the women's movement – and critically evaluate the effectiveness and value of such approaches.

The research has been designed to support ActionAid's Safe Cities multi country programme and campaign objective to '...build a strong, local, national, regional

and global multi-sectoral movement to demand an end to violence against women and girls in cities',⁸ as well as ActionAid UK's policy/advocacy initiative to end women's economic inequality, including by demanding greater space and support to women's collective voice and agency. Social movements are highly relevant to ending violence against women and securing women's economic rights including in (but not limited to) urban settings. While diverse, such settings are often characterised by reliance on a cash economy, limited access to income and employment, as well as poor working conditions and little job security, inadequate and insecure living conditions, poor infrastructure and services, discrimination in labour and commodity markets, and lack of appropriate legal and political safeguards and rights. These characteristics can trigger the emergence of social movements based on, for example, a struggle for basic services or formal and informal labour rights,⁹ or against a rise in violence against women in public spaces. It is intended that the findings will support and inform the development of the Safe Cities campaign and programme approaches in the countries analysed, particularly with regard to partnering with social movements and building strong women's rights movements.

This briefing presents the findings of Phase 1 of ActionAid's DFID Programme Partnership Agreement (PPA) supported Women's Rights and Social Movements Pilot Project, conducted in partnership with ActionAid UK (AAUK) and ActionAid International Nepal (AAIN). The recommendations in this briefing were subsequently tested in ActionAid's Nepal's women's rights programme activities. Key learnings from this process, as well as from subsequent research undertaken with ActionAid Cambodia, have been captured in an accompanying Guidance Note in order to support federation-wide learning. The project has included reflection on successes and challenges ActionAid has encountered in integrating women's rights into its programming, as well as an assessment of its role in partnering with women's movements.

Based on the Safe Cities global programme framework, ActionAid Nepal is committed to supporting the empowerment and mobilisation of women and girls to enjoy their full range of rights in urban and peri-urban spaces, including freedom from violence and access to gender-responsive public services. This will be achieved through promoting the active agency of women and girls, including in alliances with other civil society organisations and social movements, as well as awareness-raising and capacity-building.

Following this brief introduction we offer an overview of women's rights and social and economic justice movements, defining key concepts and briefly summarising some major themes in the literature for Latin America and South Asia. It reviews the formation of movements with a women's rights focus, and critically assesses whether women's rights have been integrated in a meaningful way into mainstream social and economic justice movements.ⁱ Feminist movements and women's movements are defined, and the successes and challenges experienced by those which have chosen to retain their autonomy from mainstream movements are described.

Part 2 provides a summary of the findings of primary research in Kathmandu, Nepal. This is followed by a brief consideration the roles and relationships with international donors and INGOs with social movements in Nepal, including ActionAid International, in Part 3. The critical question of the effectiveness of seeking to integrate women's rights into wider social movements (i.e. testing assumptions in this regard) – whether this integration is by expanding agendas, building women's leadership and participation, or seeking inter-movement collaborations – is addressed in Part 4. Part 5 offers conclusions, along with a range of recommendations to ActionAid.

1.3 Overview of women's rights and social and economic justice movements

While there are many definitions of social movements, leading feminist scholar Srilatha Batliwala (see endnote 2) summarises them to define social movements as 'an organised set of constituents pursuing a common political agenda for change through collective action'. She argues that they share characteristics of having a mobilised constituency base that is collectivised in either formal or informal organisations, continue over time with a clear political agenda, and engage in collective activities using a variety of actions and strategies. This research focusses on social and economic justice movements. We borrow from the Feminist Declaration for Post-2015¹⁰ to define economic justice as: *The redressing of structural economic inequalities between peoples, states and international governance institutions from local to global level, based on a transformation of power relations, and resulting in sustained peace,*

ⁱA copy of the full literature review of women's rights and social movements in Latin America and South Asia is available on request.

equality, autonomy of peoples, and preservation of our planet. The attainment of economic justice requires economic models and development approaches that are firmly rooted in principles of human rights and environmental sustainability. Such a transformational shift requires the redistribution of unequal and unfair burdens on women and girls in sustaining societal wellbeing and economies, intensified in times of violence and conflict, as well as during economic and ecological crises.

Social movements which treat the protection, promotion and fulfilment of women's rights as their core political agenda can be described as 'women's movements'. These are movements built and constituted by women that seek to challenge inequalities and injustices between women and men.¹¹ A recent assessment of gender and social movements eliciting input from more than 150 social movement activists, practitioners, scholars and supporters globally defines 'progressive women's movements' as being '...united around a common cause of challenging gender inequalities and injustices in society with a view to ending patriarchal domination'.¹² Women's organisations and movements may focus on a set of gender-specific issues, such as violence against women, their roles as mothers or as working women, gender-based discrimination in the workplace and/or in the informal sector, the gender impacts of social policies, or girls' education, or frame their agendas more broadly as struggles against all forms of oppression on the basis of gender.

It is important to recognise that there is no monolithic 'women's movement' and that not all women's movements identify as feminist. Although women's movements are sometimes represented as a homogenous group with aligned interests or representing a region or issue (such as 'the African women's movement' or 'the reproductive rights movement'), movements are diverse and multi-purpose. Movements have different agendas, approaches and strategies for achieving change, and while a women's movement may have gender equality objectives, members may not always ally themselves with the political identity of 'feminism'. Batliwala defines distinguishing characteristics of feminist movements to include feminist values and ideology, gendered political goals and a commitment to women's leadership. She defines feminist values and ideology as '[g]ender equality, social and economic equality, the full body of human rights, tolerance, peace, non-violence, respectful spaces and roles for all etc even if they don't call themselves feminist or articulate these values in

more culturally specific ways.' For the purpose of this briefing we will use the term 'women's movements' and 'women's rights movements' to describe movements and organisations with a political agenda to defend and promote women's human rights which may or may not identify as feminist, particularly given the finding that few women's movements in Nepal define themselves as feminist.

The origins of women's movements

Women's movements emerge from a variety of starting points in response to a range of triggers, including in urban contexts. A struggle for basic needs, which may appear to be non-gender specific, can unite women in what has been described as a process of 'shared oppression'.¹³ Such struggles may become gendered and adopt the characteristics and values of a women's movement. For example, in Latin America the rise in social movements in the 1990s can in part be explained by a rise in demands of women for the provision of public services, such as water, electricity and transportation, all of which are lacking in the squatter settlements. While potentially influenced by the feminist movements that developed earlier, which were largely middle class in origin, these social movements are distinguished by the widespread participation of poor women, who focus their demands on the state in their struggle for basic survival and against repression.¹⁴

Women's movements can also grow out of struggles for goals with gender equality specific outcomes, such as the eradication of violence against women, or reproductive and sexual rights. Naripokkho is an activist movement in Bangladesh committed to advancing women's rights and building resistance against violence, discrimination and injustice. In 2002, Naripokkho responded to a rise in acid attacks against women by mobilising a march of thousands of people, while helping foster the establishment of organisations like the Acid Survivors Foundation.

Political struggles for independence, for example from British colonialism in India,¹⁵ or against dictatorships, can also motivate the growth of women's movements. Observers of women's movements in Latin America found they were more diverse during the 1980s, united across class, ethnic and racial lines in pursuit of democracy, human rights and equal citizenship; and that they were successful in prioritising feminist issues and achieving women's rights goals precisely because of their hybrid nature.¹⁶ Interestingly, commentators argue that the transition to democracy has affected the political nature, leadership and

diversity of feminist movements in Latin America. Here there has been a trend towards the institutionalisation of feminist movements as leaders are drawn into research bodies that work closely with the state, and as feminist organisations become NGOs, constrained by legislation and donors demands.

Feminist scholars have drawn attention to this threat to feminist movements and the fragmentation of once unified activists fighting for common goals. Batliwala describes this phenomenon as the 'NGO-isation' of feminist movements and highlights the risk of a shift of '...power away from the constituency that movements organised and into the hands of organisations and organisational leadership that is increasingly less connected and accountable to the constituencies they claim to serve'.¹⁷ As an international NGO, this is a threat ActionAid needs to be alert to and will be critically assessed against as part of this research.

Women's movements have played a vital role in promoting economic justice by, for example, defending labour rights, demanding equal inheritance rights or pursuing rights to land or other assets. There are many of examples of women's movements growing out of a labour struggle. For instance, one landmark movement to recognise the rights of women's informal labour across India is the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA). SEWA grew out of the Women's Wing of the Textile Labour Association (TLA), India's oldest and largest union of textile workers founded by a woman, Anasuya Sarabhai, in the 1920s.¹⁸ The Women's Wing was established in 1954 to support women in textile worker households with vocational training and welfare activities. The scope of its activities expanded in the early 1970s, when groups of informal women workers approached the union for protection. In December 1971, to meet the demand by these women workers for an independent structure, the TLA and its Women's Wing established the SEWA.¹⁹

Challenges to integrating women's rights in social and economic justice movements

This research aims to identify the challenges and opportunities that women's rights activists, organisations or movements seeking to integrate women's rights into social movements without a women's rights focus may face. It also aims to assess the effectiveness and value of such approaches, as opposed to women led movements retaining their autonomy.

Examples of challenges identified in the literature range from limited leadership opportunities for women, a lack of commitment to achieving gender equality, to active hostility to women activists. For example, in the Dominican Republic, the Committee for the Defence of Neighbourhood Rights (Comite para la Defensa de los Derechos Barriales - COPADEBA) organises in support of strikes and street demonstrations demanding better living conditions and public services, and denouncing institutional violence and corruption in service delivery within slum communities of Santo Domingo. Since the 1990s, they have been working to influence public policy with a proposal known as 'Alternative City', in which they promote a more equal urban setting.²⁰ As part of their work they have condemned the increase of domestic violence and highlighted the relevance to women activists who themselves were survivors of domestic violence. Notwithstanding these efforts, cultural 'machismo' has apparently limited the progress of COPADEBA by negatively affecting the participation of women activists in the public and political spheres.²¹

As stated earlier, women's movements are far from homogeneous: movements are fragmented and contested spaces, in which differences and discrimination based on class, caste, ethnicity, sexuality or other forms of oppression play out. The Asociación de Mujeres Meretrices de Argentina (AMMAR) is a sex workers' union established in Argentina in 2002 with 1,700 members. It provides legal, health and social services and is affiliated to the Argentinian Workers' Central Union (Central de los Trabajadores Argentinos - CTA). However, AMMAR has met with hostility from other women's movements in Argentina due to the stigma associated with sex work. An abolitionist viewpoint prevails towards sex work, and it is felt that some activists in the Argentinian women's movement do not recognise the basic principles upon which AMMAR members organise and identify as sex workers, as 'protagonists of our own decisions and not simply as victims of sexual exploitation'.

Although there are examples of the rise of women's movements from labour movements,²² the integration of a genuine gender perspective which moves beyond expanding membership can be challenging. In many contexts, in spite of a growth in female trade union membership - described as a 'global trade union feminisation' - obstacles to women's leadership, and, by extension, the opportunity to set and lead movements' agendas, remain.²³ Even in situations where women represent the majority of the membership and are active participants, they don't necessarily form part of the leadership, nor are they able to ensure that the leadership has a

genuine commitment to transforming gender roles and realising women's rights. For example, an estimated 80 per cent the Unemployed Workers Movement (MTD) (or 'Piqueteros') in Argentina are women.²⁴ Their demands reflected the priorities of the poorest neighbourhood women, such as '...gardens tended by others, neighbourhood nursery schools...healthcare improvements, and tax exemptions for unemployed families'.²⁵ Despite their frontline activism, female leadership roles were limited and MTD attention to women's needs were confined to issues that were extensions of what was considered their domestic role, such as food preparation and kitchen' gardens. However, in spite of the barriers to equal participation, women have used the movement to create awareness of women's rights issues through, for example, initiatives to eliminate domestic violence.

Notwithstanding such challenges, there is a growing recognition and promotion of women's rights and gender equality by trade unions. For example the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) of Nicaragua is an has taken a lead role in the global campaign to end violence against women, as well as campaigning for women's right to decent work.²⁶ However, globally union responsiveness to gender equality is varied. Researchers have found that many factors influence the level of attention to women's rights, including female membership, the leaderships' commitment to gender equality, the power of women's caucuses, and political ideology. The local, national and global political landscape, as well as the attention given to women's rights at the moment at which a union's institutions take shape, can also be critical.²⁷

Whilst important, a large female membership is not in itself sufficient to ensure that movements address gender inequality. Women's rights consultant and writer, Jessica Horn, argues that a gendered approach needs to be "...built or... instigated when it becomes unavoidable not to address gendered axes of power, either in the face of external challenges (such as targeting of women) or internal challenges (such as sexist statements or acts of violence against women by members)".²⁸ In settings where women are mobilised to challenge the underlying causes and structures that intensify their marginalisation or experience of injustice, they can push for movement objectives that prioritise fighting gender injustice. This can particularly be the case when women in mainstream movements are exposed to feminist politics via activists or representatives of women's movements, or where women have been central actors and leaders in founding movements and setting the agenda and priorities.²⁹ This is the case

with the international movement of slum and shack dwellers (SDI). Women have played a central role from the onset of the movement, as active members of local groups organising for land, housing and greater economic autonomy through savings schemes, as well as in the federation's leadership at local, national and international levels.³⁰ Similarly the Domestic Workers Association (Asociación de Trabajadoras del Hogar - ATH) in the Dominican Republic recognises partnerships with women's rights organisations³¹ as pivotal to their success.³²

New models of organising and struggles for autonomy for women's movements

The neglect of women's leadership and a gender perspective in many mainstream trade unions has given rise to new models of labour organising by women's movements that have intentionally sought to maintain their autonomy. For example, the Working and Unemployed Women's Movement (Movimiento de Mujeres Trabajadoras y Desempleadas 'María Elena Cuadra' - MEC) is an 'autonomous women-only organisation' which represents 'a group of women from poor backgrounds ... who have taken up the struggle to improve women's lives under global capitalism'.³³ MEC defines itself as primarily a women's movement rather than a worker's movement, and puts women's interests first.

MEC's work has revolved around organising women workers in Nicaragua's free trade zones (FTZs) and working to improve conditions in maquiladora factories. MEC also provides legal advice, job-training and income-generating opportunities to unemployed women, and sensitises women to issues such as domestic violence and reproductive health. MEC's commitment to its autonomy arises from its evolution as a breakaway group from the Sandinista Workers' Central (CST), the largest trade union confederation in Nicaragua. CST had women representatives across the movement but a striking absence of women in the leadership. Maintaining this autonomy has been a struggle in the face of competing demands of a largely middle and upper class independent feminist movement, foreign NGOs which finance MEC's work, and the organised union movement still dominated by the CST. Nevertheless MEC has engaged in political strategies and activities, including through its membership in the Central American Women's Network in Solidarity with Maquila Workers. This is a transnational association of women's organisations that addresses issues facing women in maquila

factories, and is coordinated with other women's organisations to lobby state officials and negotiate with factory owners in Nicaragua.

The integration of a gendered perspective in mainstream social movements is therefore not always deemed a priority, or even desirable, by women's movements. Indeed, in their comparative analysis of social movements and policies around violence against women in 70 countries across four decades, Htun and Weldon find that the *autonomous* mobilisation of feminists in domestic and transnational contexts is the critical factor accounting for policy change. An autonomous feminist movement is defined as: 'a form of women's mobilisation that is devoted to promoting women's status and wellbeing independently of political parties and other associations that do not have the status of women as their main concern'.³⁴ Furthermore, their research demonstrates that the impact of global norms on domestic policy is conditional on the presence of feminist movements, and that they foster an enduring impact through 'the institutionalisation of feminist ideas in international norms'.³⁵

Indeed, some movements actively seek to retain their autonomy and independence from mainstream movements because they persist in diluting and deprioritising a women's rights agenda. On the other hand, there are examples of social and economic justice movements that have prioritised women's rights. This has occurred particularly where women are active as founders or have strong leadership roles in the movement. Batliwala describes this process as 'feminist movement building', whereby 'feminists change and influence the building of movements with other agendas to ensure that gender equality outcomes are not marginalised or forgotten'.³⁶ There are also many examples of new forms of women's movements which break away from established movement agendas that inadequately address the multiple and intersecting forms of oppression women may experience on the grounds of gender and, for example, class, caste or ethnicity. International movements are emerging that are using novel forms of creative activism, social media and coalition building to promote women's rights, such as the One Billion Rising global movement to end violence against women, and models of youth organising in Brazil.³⁷ Such movements are applying new forms of organising and advocacy which can be local, national, regional or global, and claiming independence from social movements which neglect the struggle for gender inequality, thereby failing to meaningfully achieve social justice goals.

1.4 The Nepali context

Nepal is amongst the poorest countries in the world ranking 157 out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index.³⁸ According to a national living standards survey conducted in 2010–2011, 30 per cent of Nepali people live on less than US\$14 a month.³⁹ While the overall poverty rate for Nepal is 25 per cent, this figure increases to 45 per cent in the Mid-Western region and 46 per cent in the Far-Western region.⁴⁰ Nepal's population was 26.6 million as of 2011, of which 50 per cent are women.⁴¹ Agriculture is the major occupation, with 76 per cent of households involved in such activities. Currently, 4.5 million people (17 per cent) reside in urban areas, while the average urbanisation rate of Nepal is 6.4 per cent. Kathmandu Valley is the urban centre of Nepal and includes five major cities: Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Kirtipur, and Thimi. Kathmandu Metropolitan City is the largest in Nepal. It is densely populated (4,416 persons per square kilometre), with a population of over 1.5 million (220,000 households).⁴²

Migration levels are high, with almost half migrants moving within the country. Kathmandu has the highest migration rates from rural areas.⁴³ Men migrate mostly for work (72 per cent), while women primarily migrate due to marriage (54 per cent). Another common reason for migrating is educational pursuits, with 17 per cent of men and 14 per cent of women citing this as a reason. Women also tend to migrate due to family reasons, such as accompanying their spouse or children who move to urban areas for education.⁴⁴ People move to the cities for better facilities; however, overpopulated urban settlements have created their own problems of waste management, air pollution, vehicle congestion, security, conflicting land uses, and unplanned and haphazard construction.

Gender discrimination is deeply embedded in social, cultural, religious and political values in Nepal. This inhibits women's participation and constrains the fulfilment of their human rights. Gender based violence is widespread and harmful traditional practices are still common in some regions. This includes early marriage, dowry related violence, *chhaupadi* (the social and spatial ostracising of menstruating women), *deuki* (the offering of a girl to a Hindu temple in order to gain religious merit), and *jhuma* (the separation of a daughter from her family by placing her in the service of a Buddhist monastery).

Nepali people have a recent history defined by violent struggles for democracy. There have been four major democratic movements rallying for changes in the

system: the struggle against autocratic rule in 1951; agitation against the undemocratic 'panchayat' system in 1979; violent unrest and security service attacks on protestors against the monarchy in 1990 (the First People's Movement); and weeks of strikes and protests against the rule of King Gyanendra in 2006 (the Second People's Movement). 1995 saw the start of the Maoist insurgency which ran for more than a decade and led to the death of some 13,000 people.⁴⁵ The Maoists specifically sought to appeal to women and demands included a call for an end to "patriarchal discrimination against women" and for the rights of daughters to access paternal property. Women were highly visible in the Maoist movement, including as soldiers. However, traditional gender roles were reinforced, with limited leadership opportunities for women and a tendency for women's liberation struggles to be subsumed by class struggle.

Violence against women and rape occurred, with perpetrators from all sides of the conflict.⁴⁶ Nepal's movements for democracy have had both victories and setbacks. Nepal is currently at a crucial moment following the second election in November 2013 of a Constituent Assembly which is mandated to produce Nepal's new constitution. However, what remains unclear is whether democracy in Nepal has been institutionalised and defined in terms of ensuring rights and justice for women.⁴⁷

Although Nepal has a long history of social movements, the respondent interviews revealed that there is no widely accepted definition: it was reported that the term 'social movements' is not well recognised even amongst activists at the forefront of such movements.

PART 2: Integrating women's rights into wider social movements: key findings

Below we present a summary of the reflections of the respondents on the challenges and opportunities for integrating women's rights into their respective movements. Such a multiplicity of voices inevitably gives rise to contradictions and contestations, which reflect the differing opinions, values, priorities, and positions of power of the individuals and their respective movements. Each section is preceded by a brief overview of the social movement in question.

2.1 The Women's rights movement

Overview

Women's rights movements evolved within the wider struggle for democracy in Nepal, dating back to the late 1940s-1950, and their role has been instrumental in all major political changes since.⁴⁸ As a result of this wider process of social conscientisation, women began to recognise and challenge gender-based discrimination. Thus, women's movements in Nepal emerged in response to the deeply embedded historical inequality, discrimination and subordination of women from all strata of society. Over the last six decades, women have marched against this oppression, protested against violence against women, taken cases to the Supreme Court, and lobbied for women's equal legal and constitutional rights.⁴⁹

Despite this history, there was no visible space for discussion of human rights and women's empowerment until the pro-democracy agitations against the oppressive Panchayat System in 1990.⁵⁰ The instilment of multi-party democracy enabled women's groups to mobilise around their political, civil, economic and social rights. The Second People's Movement, which saw King Gyanendra stripped of his powers and the democratic constitution-making process commence, created further, vibrant space for women to articulate their agenda.⁵¹

Today, movements for women's rights in Nepal, including those operating in Kathmandu, encompass a plurality of actors and organisations representing a diversity of issues, identities and values. These are allied variously within networks or coalitions and

are often linked to political parties. Hence, there is no single, homogenous 'women's rights movement' incorporating all the problems facing the women of the country.

International actors, such as donors, UN agencies and INGOs, including ActionAid Nepal, can also be seen as key actors because of the technical and financial support they have provided to the movements since the 1990s. However, as discussed on page 20, such actors have also been criticised for co-opting the movement and setting the agenda according to international interests, rather than the agendas of diverse Nepali women based on their particular lived realities.

Nepal's women's rights movements have pushed successfully for more laws on gender equality and women's rights, leading to some notable progress. This includes the introduction of gender responsive budgeting by the government in 2007,⁵² a 2013 provision guaranteeing 33 per cent representation of women within Nepal's Constituent Assembly, as well as laws within Nepal's national criminal code (*Muluki Ein II*) that recognises inheritance and property rights of daughters, widows and married women; sets a minimum age for marriage (20 years); and (conditionally) legalises abortion.⁵³ However, many discriminatory constitutional and legal provisions remain, while enforcement of existing provisions is weak.

According to the respondents, few of the organisations and networks making up the women's rights movements label themselves 'feminist', although there are notable exceptions, such as the Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO).⁵⁴ Rather, most tend to assert the fundamental principle of equality and non-discrimination, drawing on the key UN human rights and women rights conventions and treaties as guiding frameworks.

Challenges to integrating women's rights

Respondents identified numerous challenges facing women's movements in Nepal, which have implications for attempts to integrate women's rights in wider social and economic justice movements:

- **Diverse agendas and a focus on symptoms:** Actors within the women's movement tend to mobilise around particular issues, leading to diverse agendas that often address symptoms rather than root causes of gender discrimination. Such a focus, as well as fragmentation along the lines of identity (see below), has limited the development of strategies that challenge the systemic causes of women's oppression and support the renegotiation of power relations, including at policy level. One respondent commented that women's movement activities are at times like "mere *shraddha*" (ceremonial events), such as the 16 Days of Activism Against VAWG, and fail to make lasting changes to policy or public attitudes, or to benefit the 'target' group of women.
- **Identity and power:** The more 'mainstream' women's movements have been criticised by indigenous and ethnic minority, Muslim and Dalit scholars and advocates for ignoring the diversity of Nepali women's identities, interests and problems. One leader of FEDO, Durga Shob, points out that many women's movements have not addressed the problems of untouchability, poverty and violence against Dalit women, and are driven by an upper class and caste group. She writes: 'Economically, educationally and socially capable women from a particular class are leading the women's movement and it has been clear that they have not been able to represent voices of all [Nepali] women and their problems. Dalit women have been voiceless in the women's movement'.⁵⁵
- **Insufficient academic backstopping:** A lack of dialogue between feminist scholars and movement activists and leaders is seen as contributing to the loss of a critical, structural analysis and approach. This has caused movements to struggle to come up with coherent solutions for policy makers. Platforms for in-depth discussion that connect theoretical knowledge and practical experiences in national and international contexts, and which create space for such analysis and solutions to be forged, are lacking both within and outside the movements.
- **Movement leadership:** Negative public perceptions informed by patriarchal social norms regarding women's leadership abilities mean that most women's movement leaders struggle to gain social and political recognition. However, leadership selection processes were also identified as problematic. Many networks are formed from within known, like-minded activists

and organisations, with leadership assigned on the basis of rotation and false consensus, rather than democratic process. As a consequence, women leaders are often denied the opportunity to develop a mature leadership capacity. On the other hand, it can mean that the same person dominates leadership positions in several networks, blocking new faces, particularly from the younger generation. Both scenarios can lead to a loss of respect and perceived legitimacy of women leaders from within and outside the movement.

- **Tactics and tokenism:** Nepal's women's rights movements are historically linked with the wider political parties. According to one prominent female minister, Bidhya Bhandari, most women's movements function as a shadow of political parties, rather than for the benefit of women's rights.⁵⁶ Movement leaders have framed their issues within party political programmes, while politicians 'adopt' women's issues as a tool for mobilising women en masse. This relationship limits the space for women's movements to determine their own agendas and activism, and causes fragmentation within the movement along party lines. Conversely, despite this longstanding relationship, women's participation in political parties remains tokenistic.

Opportunities for integrating women's rights

Despite the challenges, respondents identified a range of opportunities for strengthening the movement and for potentially integrating women's rights into wider social movements.

- **Increasing feminist consciousness:** Women's rights movements have undoubtedly helped to build the capacity of women to claim their rights and hold duty bearers to account. Although this process has been stymied by fragmentation and a lack of a systemic understanding and approach, the movement can be seen as having reached a critical point in the process of conscientisation. Movement actors are becoming increasingly aware of the gendered power imbalance, of the oppression and injustice affecting women. Organisations and networks are beginning to organise themselves more effectively, to articulate grievances, and influence and claim women's rights through popular movements, creative forms of expression and empowerment. This constitutes a vital step in the process towards renegotiating and transforming gendered power relations.

- More inclusive agendas and alliance building:** The network of women's organisations has expanded greatly in the last decade. Many new organisations have emerged focussing on issues affecting Janajatiⁱⁱⁱ, Dalit, Madhesi^{iv} and Muslim women, as well as women from particular regions. While seen as critical that identity-specific issues are made visible and addressed directly, and do not become submerged by the interests of more powerful interest groups, a number of respondents reported a growing recognition among some Janajati and women of the historically dominant group of a need for a more joint women's rights agenda. Furthermore, NGOs addressing cross-cutting issues (e.g. rights of the landless, disabled, LGBTI, and HIV positive women) have expanded their agendas to include more identity-specific demands, thereby involving new groups of women. Inter-party women's alliances have also been formed by women from the political parties. Such agenda broadening and alliance-building has resulted in the significant expansion in the base of the women's movement, with increased opportunities for political gains.
- Constitution building process:** The development of a new constitution offers an historic opportunity for enshrining the women's rights agenda within a constitutional framework, based on the principles of non-discrimination and substantive equality. The constitution-building process will create a space for the women's movement to seek a major policy shift and to challenge the historic subordination and oppression endured by women. It is also an opportunity for the movement to engage and seek alliances with other movements campaigning for cultural, social and religious equality, as well as with mainstream political parties.
- Awareness-raising through mass media:** Some respondents reflected the positive impact of the media as a means for sensitising women to their rights. For instance, women within the Muslim community have reportedly become more vocal following media coverage of gender inequality issues. While the media has not always played a supportive role, mass mobilisations, such as the 16 Days of Activism, are gaining coverage and making the issues more visible. Furthermore, young feminists have started using new media platforms, such as social media, to highlight issues.

2.2 Ethnic minority and indigenous minority movements

Overview

There are some 59 ethnic groups and 123 languages spoken in Nepal. The country's indigenous and ethnic minorities, *Adivasi Janajati*, are defined as peoples who have distinct geographic, social, cultural, economic and political identities.⁵⁷ In 1769, Janajatis were forced to relinquish their identities by the state.⁵⁸ This suppression continued for two centuries and even today, Janajatis face widespread discrimination. Many in government and wider society accuse the ethnic and indigenous minority movements of trying to break national harmony in Nepal – a particularly grave accusation given that the country only recently emerged from violent civil conflict in which ethnic (as well as caste, class, linguistic and geographical-based) grievances were brought to the fore.⁵⁹

The Janajati movement took shape on the eve of the 1990 People's Movement, when questions of how to reflect Nepal's ethnic and linguistic diversity in a new constitution were fiercely contested.⁶⁰ Many ethnic minority organisations emerged, along with an umbrella organisation, the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN).

Today, NEFIN is comprised of 56 ethnic organisations and works with 71 networks, including indigenous women, journalists, youths, students and lawyers. NEFIN has village, district, and city-level coordination councils, encompassing 35,000 members across the country.

According to movement representatives, the principal aim of the Janajati movement is for the establishment of a secular republic, where diverse ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, territorial and indigenous peoples are treated equally. This includes having their rights enshrined in the new constitution, including the right to self-determination within self-governing, identity-based federal states.

Challenges to integrating women's rights

- Multiple and intersecting discrimination:** In addition to the wider patriarchal norms that discriminate against women in Nepal from community to national level, Janajati women are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnic / indigenous minority identity. They thus

ⁱⁱⁱ Janajati refers to Nepal's indigenous and ethnic minorities

^{iv} People of the Madhes community, heralding from the Terai Planes region in Southern Nepal

find themselves even further from the state in terms of being able to access public services and government programmes,⁶¹ participate in decision-making and claim their rights, including in urban contexts. Janajati women say they face a 'triple layer of discrimination': as women; as Adivasi Janajati; and as Adivasi Janajati women.⁶² As such, concerns have been raised by a small number of external analysts that granting ethnic and indigenous minorities' autonomy with civic rights in the interests of cultural preservation may inadvertently sanction the continued exploitation and oppression of Janajati women.

- **Women's leadership and agendas stifled:** While NEFIN claims to promote women's leadership, the organisation has been led by men since its formation. Janajati women activists have long voiced dissatisfaction over the lack of leadership opportunities and their exclusion from determining the organisation's agenda. This prompted them to establish a separate National Indigenous Women's Federation (NIWF) in 1999. NIWF's objectives are: "to ensure constitutional, legal, political, social, cultural, religious, educational, economic and customary rights of indigenous women"; and: "to ensure indigenous women's rights in ethnic, linguistic and regional autonomous regions through the organisations of indigenous women and capacity development of its organisations".⁶³

NIWF presented a memorandum to the Prime Minister and Constituent Assembly speaker in 2007 and again to the speaker and chairpersons of three major political parties in 2013. However, their actions have reportedly made no change to either government policy or to male Janajati leaders' attitude towards women. Sony Lama, NIWF former general secretary, said: "We could enjoy no change for Janajati women... we were invited to some tea parties, our names were nominated in some committees, like the National Development Council, but the issues we demanded were not addressed."

- **Limited ties and lack of trust:** Women leaders from the Janajati movement state that their specific issues and concerns remain largely unaddressed by mainstream women's movements. More broadly, being a marginalised minority, respondents reflected that there is a lack of trust and sense of reservation towards other movements - particularly as most are led by Upper-Caste Hindus, whose dominance they have been challenging.

- **Hampered by party politics:** The movement is still largely in the clutches of the political parties, which is also seen as a key way for the Janajati to bring about change. Many movement leaders are affiliated to parties and their activities and decisions are shaped accordingly, leading to fragmentation within the movement itself. Respondents stated that the parties use them in the name of inclusion and proportional representation, while seeking to shape the movement's agenda according to their own interests.

Opportunities for integrating women's rights

- **Quotas for female participation and leadership:** In all its bodies, at all levels, NEFIN seeks to observe a 33 per cent female participation rate. At the top, the Federal Council has one male and one female member from each ethnic community. Four of the 13 members of NEFIN's Secretariat Committee are women (two vice-chairpersons and two secretaries).
- **Alliance building within the women's rights movement:** There is growing coordination between some Janajati and wider women's rights movements in recognition of the increased strength that can be drawn from such collaboration. This has helped to empower some Janajati women's groups, while giving them a broader platform to work on a national agenda, including in the constitution-building process.
- **International solidarity:** Nepal's ethnic and indigenous minorities' movement have won support and solidarity from international indigenous peoples' organisations, thereby helping to build its strength. It has collaborated with different ethnic communities within and outside Nepal, and has gained funding and technical support from major donors, such as DFID and the International Labour Organization.

2.3 Student and youth movements

Overview

The involvement of students in movements for political change in Nepal dates back to 1937,⁶⁴ when they participated in the overthrow of the Rana regime. Their role has been instrumental in all major political changes

⁶¹ See: <http://www.niwf.org.np/>

of the country since. In every case, the mobilisation of youth and students has been largely orchestrated by political parties seeking mass support for their agendas. The student and youth movements can be categorised into three broad sets: student unions; youth organisations; and youth organisations structured as, or led by, NGOs with the support of INGOs, UN and other bilateral and multilateral organisations.

Major issues for the student and youth movements were reported as unemployment, quality and commercialisation of education, social security and environmental issues.

Challenges to integrating women's rights

Although the challenges to the student and youth movements highlighted by respondents may not specifically relate to the integration of women's rights, they can be seen as having a knock-on effect.

- **Prevailing influence and control of competing political parties:** Student unions are split along party lines with their agendas shaped accordingly. Politicians dictate when union elections are held and who should run, even visiting universities in a bid to determine outcomes. Respondents felt that this lack of independence means their role in bringing about real social change is nominal, and means leadership tends to be dominated by those seeking political careers. Conversely, students and youth are not formally represented within official government bodies, nor do the parties actively support students' rights, or better education and employment opportunities.
- **Gender neutral / blind agendas:** Youth and student movements' agendas are predominantly framed in gender-neutral or gender-blind terms, with no recognition of how issues have particular implications for women. Although keen to mobilise women and girls for their aims, the student and youth movement lacks an analysis or understanding of gendered social norms and unequal power relations affecting female students and youth.
- **Exclusionary attitudes and structures:** Most student unions have a provision for including women at various levels, including minimal representation on leadership committees. However, this voluntary system is seen as largely tokenistic and is not complemented by programmes or strategies to support women's leadership. Respondents noted that, despite being

equally capable, devoted and qualified, women are fewer in number, while movement leadership has always been in the hands of men. One female student union central committee member said women's leadership is also curtailed by a lack of support by the party leadership, while male youth doesn't consider women to be capable.

- **Hindered by wider gender norms:** Young women's participation is also undermined by wider social norms and roles that confine women to social reproduction roles within the private sphere, particularly after marriage. Child rearing and other care responsibilities mean that women leave the movement and may find it difficult to return. Even noted women leaders reported that their husbands have been reluctant to allow them to work freely in their organisations.

Opportunities for integrating women's rights

- **Increasing women's leadership and participation:** The movements' structures now include women's units and divisions. Although distinct units pose a risk of keeping women's interests marginalised, respondents felt they have created a valuable platform for women to articulate their agendas more vocally and claim stronger positions, including in decision-making. Respondents suggested that the leadership quota system could also be strengthened to offer meaningful opportunities for women to develop their capacities and dispel misconceptions in this regard.
- **Size and strength:** The youth and student movements are the biggest mass-based organisation in Nepal. As such, it is seen as having a significant potential impact upon national politics. This is why political leaders take such an interest in student and youth leaders, many of whom eventually become politicians themselves. Despite the party factions, respondents saw potential for more meaningful agendas to be shaped based on the genuine priorities of constituents, notably those of women if their genuine leadership and participation is built.
- **Building alliances with the women's rights movement:** Opportunities for expressions of solidarity and alliance-building with wider women's movements are beginning to be identified and realised at an informal level. One female youth leader stated: "Now, issue of women's

participation is rising. The mainstream women's right[s] movement has shown interest in building solidarity with the student and youth movements, in order to build our strength. Although they haven't formally invited us to show solidarity, we are morally obliged".

- **Constitution-building process:** As above, Nepal's constitution-building process offers scope to articulate the agenda of women youth and students. As well as seeking collaborations with the wider women's rights movement, this could entail developing strategic interventions within their respective student unions.

2.4 Housing rights movement

Overview

Land ownership in Nepal is a key indicator of identity, power, wealth and political access. Yet up to 25 per cent of the population is estimated to be landless or near-landless.⁶⁵ While there have been landless people in Nepal for time immemorial, migration from rural areas to Kathmandu has been significant since 1990, when families fleeing fighting in remote districts began squatting on public land along the city's riverbanks. A 2008 survey by Lumanti Support Group for Shelter (an NGO supporting Kathmandu's landless and urban poor and a former ActionAid Nepal Local Rights Programme (LRP) partner) estimated that 25,000 people inhabit shacks along the banks of the Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers in the districts of Lalitpur and Bhaktapur alone.

Nepal's 2007 Interim Constitution 2007 lays out the government's responsibility "to pursue a policy of establishing the rights of all citizens to education, health, housing, employment and food sovereignty". However, the state provides services on the basis of land ownership, which leaves squatters ineligible, with access to water and electricity often denied. Given that women are primarily responsible for caring for families and committees, including providing water and preparing meals, such limited services have particular implications for their rights.

The government and political parties neither attempt to 'resolve' the issue of squatting by evicting the communities, nor by supporting improvements to living standards. Rather, the landless communities are used as vote banks by the parties, which encourage them to enrol on the electoral lists – possibly in 'exchange' for non-eviction.⁶⁶ Four political parties have even set up their own wings of landless people.

However, they are discouraged from being visibly active under the party identity, nor do the parties develop programmes to support the fulfilment of their rights.

A key organisation emerging from Kathmandu's urban landless communities demanding basic rights is Nepal Basobas Basti Samrachhyan Samaj (NBBSS), which has a presence in 40 districts, although is presently only active in 22. Another is Nepal Mahila Ekata Samaj (NMES), a women's committee that complements the work of NBBSS. NMES, now an ActionAid Nepal LRP partner, was established with the support of Lumanti.

The major demands of the housing rights movement to the government include: joint ownership of land between husband and wife; health and sanitation; children's education; income generation; and protection from forceful eviction on the basis of the need for security of tenure but also to preserve proximity to places of/opportunities for work.

Challenges to integrating women's rights

- **Women's issues side-lined:** Within housing rights movements, women are generally marginalised and there is little recognition of the ways in which access to housing, water, sanitation and electricity disproportionately impact upon them as primary care-givers. Frustrations at being excluded from committee meetings prompted the women to set up NMES. Although a provision for female participation in the NBBSS remains, it is seen as perfunctory, while just 4 of the 25 seats of its central committee are reserved for women.
- **Limited external recognition and support:** Kathmandu's squatter communities face negative attitudes from all sides, with many people believing they are simply out to acquire valuable land free of cost. Furthermore, housing rights movements in Nepal are relatively new and thus not widely recognised by other social movements (including land rights movements), academics or wider society. Besides Lumanti, ActionAid Nepal, through LRP partners such as HomeNet Nepal, provides rare support to the women of Kathmandu's informal settlements.
- **Limited collaboration:** Given the limited recognition of their issues and demands, particularly by those from elite groups, Kathmandu's housing rights movements, together

with the women's organisations, remain isolated from other social movements and networks, including wider women's movements. Rather, respondents felt that activists from other movements seek the participation of landless people in their activities, but are unwilling to reciprocate the solidarity in support of their people's demands.

Opportunities for integrating women's rights

- **Unified under shared landless status:** Although diverse – encompassing Dalits, Muslims, and ethnic and indigenous minorities, and challenges regarding the marginalisation of women notwithstanding, Kathmandu's squatters seem relatively united under the principal demand for housing rights. This has created opportunities and space for bringing women from different communities together, which has already served as a basis for women to build their voice and agency in pursuit of their rights.
- **Women's increasing empowerment:** Collective organising, initiatives and action by the women of informal settlements is increasing their confidence, ability and mobilisation for claiming their rights, addressing needs, and securing greater influence and leadership roles within the movement. Literacy rates, access to education and training is growing. For instance, NMES, with support of Lumanti, has 30 saving cooperatives countrywide, with 40,000 members. The regular meetings of the cooperatives also provide a space for the women to discuss their collective problems and identify ways to jointly address them.
- **Growing external interest:** There is rising interest among international organisations in building the capacity of squatter communities – particularly through the collective empowerment of women – to realise and claim their rights. Respondents believed there is potential for women to further utilise such platforms to enhance their knowledge and organising, and for NGOs and INGOs to mobilise technical and financial resources in support.
- **Constitution building process:** Again, there is an historic opportunity for the issues affecting Kathmandu's landless, particularly women, to be raised within the constitution making process.

2.5 Labour rights movement

Overview

Nepal is predominantly an agricultural country and industrialisation came relatively recently. The first major industries were established in the 1940s, including rice, cotton and sugar. The 'formal' (i.e. unionised) labour rights movement emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when restrictions on private companies were lifted,⁶⁷ although the first official strike dates back to 1947.

Just as with other social movements in Nepal, labour rights movements have been inextricably linked with wider movements for political change, in which they have played an important role. And similarly, women have been a key part of labour movements since their beginning.

Of 3.5 million wage earners, around 621,000 are united through trade unions.⁶⁸ There is a lack of data on women's membership of individual trade unions, while figures from 2000 show the male-female ratio in the central committees ranging from 2:1 to 10:1 (DECONT and GEFONT respectively).

There are four major trade union federations in Nepal: the General Federation of Trade Unions of Nepal (GEFONT); the Trade Union Congress (NTUC); the Democratic Confederation of Trade Unions of Nepal (DECONT); and the All Nepal Federation of Trade Unions (Revolutionary) (ANTUF).

Each has a chapter or branch in all factories, semi-government and government offices. The number of trade unions associated with the federations alters over time because the Labour Department can annul them if they fail to meet government standards. Official records dating from 2002 show the number of unions to be in the region of 760–1,491.⁶⁹ However, many major industries have collapsed or been privatised in Nepal in recent years,⁷⁰ leading to rising unemployment and growing numbers of women and men seeking work abroad. This has caused union membership to decline.

Challenges to integrating women's rights

- **Political influence and fragmentation:** Labour movements are historically linked with the political parties, and therefore reflect and reinforce the institutionalised gender discrimination of these parties and wider society. Respondents stated that

these links also negatively impact the effectiveness of the movement itself, while falling union membership and bargaining power has increased their dependency on party cadres. Unions are divided by political doctrine and ethnicity, and thus there is little collaboration. Nor do unions or union activists, including the women's wings, tend to collaborate with other movements.

- **Negative public opinion:** Certain trade unions were reported as having a reputation for extortion from employers and industries. Negative public opinion also stems from the amount of human resources and space allocated for union activities, which is seen by many as wasteful. Respondents felt that such challenges and perceptions could discourage women's rights and other movements from seeking collaboration.
- **Limited female labour force participation:** Traditionally women are not encouraged to work in the public sphere in Nepal, so while the country has a relatively high female labour force participation rate (80 per cent)⁷¹ in comparison to other South Asian countries, it remains lower than men's.⁷² Women's domestic and community care responsibilities also infringe on both their rights to access work, as well as their rights to participate in union activities.
- **Discrimination at work:** Women's under-representation within unions itself constitutes a major form of workplace discrimination that limits the fulfilment of their collective bargaining rights. Women face various additional forms of discrimination, such as unequal pay, sexual harassment, and poor working conditions, especially during pregnancy and in the post-natal period. While trade unions have included some women's rights issues on their agendas, such as equal wages, social protection and working conditions, gender discrimination within the workforce and work place remains largely unrecognised unrecognised and unchallenged by them.
- **Women's leadership and participation:** Despite the establishment of women's committees and programmes, and an agreement to include women leaders in principle, few women have acquired such roles. Women represent just 12.6 per cent of top leadership positions within the trade union federations, and 11.95 per cent in national trade unions.⁷³ Part of this stems from the fact that political parties select the union leaders, and tend not to support women.

Opportunities for integrating women's rights

- **Increasing women's space and voice:** GEFONT established a women's wing, Mahila Majdoor Bibhag, in 1993, which went on to set up a separate programme addressing women's concerns, Mahila Majdoor Abhiyan. The NTUC has separate committees for women at both central and local level. Furthermore, the women's departments of GEFONT, NTUC and DECONT have joined to form the Trade Union Committee to for Gender Equality and Promotion (TUCGEP). The trade union federations also have policies to promote women's union leadership and membership, albeit with a view to expanding their potential for influence rather than specifically seeking to address women's rights to and at work.
- **Female-dominated sectors:** The main federations include unions representing workers of industries where women make up a significant, even dominant, proportion of the workforce. This includes textile and garment workers, street vendors, health workers, teachers, and factory workers, as well as newer industries and unions, such as beauty, hotels, restaurants and catering, domestic workers, and home-based workers.⁷⁴ This suggests there could be good scope – and an intensifying need - to increase women's voice, agency and leadership in the unions concerned.
- **Alliance building:** One respondent suggested there could be opportunities for women from the labour movement to build alliances with women of other social movements, with a view to increasing their voice, influence and leadership within and across their respective organisations.
- **Institutionalising women's labour rights:** As with other social movements, there is scope for trade unions to work to ensure women's labour rights are enshrined in the new constitution. This would require the meaningful participation of women union members, whose growing numbers can lend weight to the policy-influencing process.

PART 3. Donors and INGOs: A help and a hindrance

This section provides a brief analysis of the role of INGOs and donors (bi- and multilateral, including UN agencies), notably ActionAid Nepal, in relation to women's rights and other social movements in Kathmandu.

The rapid influx of development agencies into Nepal since the 1950s led it be characterised as a "development laboratory" for testing approaches to social reform and aid delivery.⁷⁵ Their presence continued during the conflict, in which the Maoist insurgents derided externally-led projects as exploitative and imperialist (a sentiment exacerbated by the military assistance provided by some donors, including the UK), as well as during the on-going peacebuilding process.⁷⁶ It is important to keep this context in mind when evaluating INGO/donor relations with social movements in Nepal today, particularly given the latter's links with political parties, which includes the formerly insurgent Maoists.⁷⁷

3.1 Supporting movements to grow

Many respondents reflected that women's rights movements in Nepal, particularly in Kathmandu, have benefitted from international support, including INGOs, donors, and UN agencies. Whether it is women demonstrating in the streets, devising strategies, lobbying the state, or undertaking research, external funding and technical advice have played a key role, and were said to be widely appreciated.

ActionAid has a strong commitment to and record of supporting women to collectively claim their rights at a grassroots level through REFLECT.^{viii} This is an ongoing participative process by which participants gain a critical consciousness of normalised (thereby invisible) forms of oppression and discrimination. REFLECT is an integral component of the human rights based approach (HRBA) that ActionAid pursues in all its work. This is based on the principles of empowerment, solidarity and campaigning.

In Nepal, REFLECT participants have said that the process has helped build their confidence and commitment to participate in the transformation of relationships, communities and society.

"We are freed from the constraints of our own values and tradition, which we imposed on ourselves although they worked against us. We now need to go ahead as we learned about our life..."

A REFLECT participant⁷⁸

Women REFLECT participants have also become more organised. Since 2007, around 600 women's groups have been formed, involving 49,000 women in 31 (largely rural) districts, which are unified at national level under the umbrella network, Mahila Adhikar Manch (MAM). In addition, women's participation in local decision-making bodies increased as a result of efforts by the women's groups and other likeminded stakeholders and allies in the community. Other examples of women's collective action supported by ActionAid and other INGOs are Paidal Yatra (Women's Social Forum), as well as Mahila Ekata Samaj, Lumanti and NMES, all of which support the rights of urban women living in informal settlements. These organisations have adopted multiple approaches in seeking to put women's rights issues onto the national agenda, from mass mobilisation to research and advocacy.⁷⁹

ActionAid Nepal Safe Cities partners include HomenNet Nepal (campaigning for the rights and entitlements of informal economy workers, especially in urban areas), NMES (a network of squatter women, as above), and MAM. Other LRP-level partners include Chitwan Sakriya Samuha and Makwanpur Mahila Samhua (organisations of women living with HIV/AIDS), and Dibya Yuwa Club (empowers marginalised communities to participate in development processes). ActionAid Nepal is seeking to build a 'safe cities' alliance of civil society organisations that exists independently of ActionAid, in which all members participate on an equal basis. This is to promote its sustainability – financially and otherwise – and to ensure its agendas and activities are determined and owned by the rightsholders and women's movements involved. ActionAid International's global programme to engage,

^{viii} Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Techniques

empower and mobilise youth in developmental decision-making, Activista, is also active in Kathmandu and wider Nepal, including under the Safe Cities programme. Activista members have been engaged in blogging, social media and protest to draw attention to violence against women in urban spaces, such as during Anti-Street Harassment Week 2014.

ActionAid Nepal also works with wider social movements. It collaborated with Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (CPN-UML) – part of the GEFONT trade union federation – on the issue of allowing citizenship to be granted in the name of the mother. It also worked with CPN-UML and the NTUC on sensitising drivers and bus conductors on issues around violence against women as part of the Safe Cities programme.

One independent analyst reflects on the pros of ActionAid Nepal's involvement, from grassroots to policy-level:

"Some positive results can be seen in the social movements supported by international organisations. For instance, the Kamaiya [bonded labour] movement was supported by ActionAid Nepal to facilitate, organise and sensitise them to the exploitation and injustice committed against them for centuries. As a result they have organised and are able to put forward their agenda collectively... Now there is [a] special legal framework that deals with Kamaiya issues. If ActionAid had not engaged at a local level to organise those Kamaiya, it would not be possible to have achieved [this]..."

3.2 Cautions and limitations

However, concern was also expressed by some respondents that both activities and the players involved are disproportionately influenced by donor preferences. It was felt that, at this point in Nepal's political development, it may be more appropriate for donors to play an awareness-raising or "amplifying role", rather than directly intervening at grassroots level or in dialogue with government.

Women's rights movements have criticised INGOs and other external agencies for co-opting the movements and setting the agenda according to international interests, rather than based on the diverse realities and structural discriminations experienced by different groups of Nepali women.⁸⁰ Another criticism has been a failure to frame gender equality agendas within the more politicised language of women's rights.

"[A]t this point, we also have some capability for mass organisation and we need to feel a desire for independence. At this stage, we should learn to say 'direct intervention and engagement of the international community... If not, we will become dependent on donors and we lose our grip over the situation.'"

Independent analyst

Furthermore, while the ActionAid federation has a strong, clearly articulated commitment to women's rights in its programmes and campaigns, it is important to reflect on the extent to which it ensures that this is embedded within internal structures and processes at all levels and in all countries. ActionAid has fairly progressive policies on women's leadership, sexual harassment, and even work-life balance that recognises women's unequal share of unpaid care work – albeit not all in one policy. It is vital that these are effectively applied. Additionally, it should be ensured that the HRBA training delivered to all staff always has a strong women's rights component. It is important that ActionAid translates its commitment to women's rights in its own institutional policies to safeguard its credibility, including in initiatives linked with social movements.

PART 4. Effectiveness of integrating women's rights into wider social movements

This research also sought to test assumptions around the effectiveness of integrating women's rights into wider social movements in Kathmandu – whether by expanding agendas, promoting women's participation and leadership, or collaborations with wider movements – as a strategy for transforming gender relations. This question of effectiveness hinges critically on the extent to which the challenges identified above can be overcome. Many challenges are shared, as are the opportunities to turn some of them on their heads, thereby strengthening potential for efforts to contribute to change.

On the other hand, some challenges, such as the domineering role of political parties, cast doubt on the effectiveness of the movements themselves. This in turn poses questions about the effectiveness of seeking to integrate women's rights into their agendas and activities as a strategy for achieving social and economic justice.

As such, there is no quick, one-size-fits-all answer to seeking to integrate: it needs to be assessed on a case by case basis, based on a power analysis of the particular movements and organisations, and the specific challenges and opportunities to integrating women's rights associated with each of them.

4.1 Effectiveness via promoting women's leadership

"Women are certainly in some key positions, but that does not mean they are actually leaders."

A focus group participant

The question of whether promoting of women's leadership in wider social movements is an effective strategy for integrating women's rights is contingent on a number of challenges being addressed. According to interviewees, the social movements covered here largely reflect wider discriminatory gender norms in their organisational cultures and structures, including male dominance entrenched by nepotism, and perceptions of women as less capable. As such, respondents stated that, while women in senior positions often portray themselves as influential because of access

to movement and political leaders, when it comes to setting priorities and decision-making, their power is extremely limited. Thus, women's leadership does not automatically lead to women's rights gaining visibility and traction within social movements in terms of either their structures or activities.

"Though I feel I am confident, qualified, society does not see me this way."

A female activist / respondent

Within women's movements, respondents flagged the often undemocratic selection of leaders, which undermines their perceived legitimacy while blocking the most capable individuals and the younger generation. This indicates that the structures and processes of some women's movements and organisations are themselves based on patriarchal norms of organising and managing power. For instance, one global analysis of gender and social movements states: "some argue that a movement enacts the alternative power relations it envisions by challenging existing hierarchies in its practice, and that 'the transformative potential of a movement is only as present as the presence or strength of voice of the most marginalised'"⁸¹

Conversely, building feminist leadership within social movements can "challenge both visible and invisible forms of power that are more democratic, legitimate and accountable", thereby helping to foster more equitable and just organisations.⁸²

4.2 Effectiveness via increased participation and expanding agendas

"All the institutions now have a tendency to develop separate women institutions... This may help to develop women's leadership, but at the same time there is a huge threat of the segregation of women leaders and a tendency to segregate women's issues only as women's issues."

Independent analyst

As with women's leadership, increasing women's participation - as far as it remains tokenistic and constrained by institutionalised gender discrimination and unequal power relations - will not necessarily foster increased understanding of, or attention to, women's rights by wider social movements.

There is a clear tension between the benefits of establishing separate women's committees as spaces for women to articulate agendas and promote leadership on the one hand, and the extent to which such committees further marginalise women and 'women's issues' from core movement agendas and processes. This reflects broader, historical debates around the problems of 'gender mainstreaming': it is not just women's exclusion that is problematic, but the societal processes and institutions themselves that embed gender inequality.⁸³

Nonetheless, many respondents see such quotas and committees as fuelling an increase in women's participation, thereby offering opportunities to build a critical mass of women to demand equal voice and influence, and creating spaces from which to coordinate engagement in the constitution building process, with a view to institutionalising transformative policies.

Increasing women's meaningful participation and leadership is arguably a vital precursor to integrating women's rights into movements' agendas. While the agendas of trade unions, housing rights and ethnic and indigenous minority rights movements do accommodate gender to some extent, they still fall far short of championing women's rights and recognising the gendered structural inequalities that must be overcome in order to achieve social and economic justice for all.

4.3 Effectiveness via increased collaborations

Within women's movements

Women's movements in Kathmandu incorporate a range of identities, interests and agendas that shift over time, reflecting differing visions of social change and strategies for achieving this, from largely issues-based to more comprehensive social and economic transformation. These women's movement are a diverse and contested spaces, skewed by power relations between different actors that reflect power imbalances in wider society.

As such, efforts by ActionAid Nepal to bring women's rights movement leaders together have proved difficult, although some unexpected opportunities have emerged. One ActionAid Nepal representative stated:

"[We] are coming to the conclusion that each section of women's rights movement can be from various schools with different agendas and it is not necessary to bring them clinically together. They can carry their agendas and move ahead; but surprisingly, when it came to the issue of constitution [building]... all women's movement and leaders came together and showed collective power and stance."

Such reflections reconfirm the need for caution in assuming the effectiveness or desirability of ActionAid seeking to promote increased collaborations between different women's rights groups and networks. This also draws attention back to the question of the appropriate and legitimate role of INGOs and how their relations and interventions can make such processes more or less effective, depending on how and by whom they are designed and implemented, and how power is exercised in the process.

On the other hand, different leaders, groups and networks within the movement have united under common themes, such as VAWG and women's political representation. Furthermore, the existence of the networks and coalitions themselves indicate efforts by organisations to collaborate. However, some respondents spoke of a lack of solidarity when a particular group campaigns on the issues affecting them. While the importance of not subsuming or diluting diverse agendas and visions of change was recognised, the tendency to remain neutral on "other women's" issues was seen by some respondents as weakening the overall women's rights movement. One respondent stated that no group of women can feel secure, empowered or protected when women from another community are still enduring gender-based discrimination.

Indeed, it has been argued that a commitment by social movements to a holistic, intersectional approach to inequality is an important strategy for mitigating excessive 'fragmentation', while creating an important space for collaborations and alliances to be identified and forged.⁸⁴

With wider social movements

The relationship between women's and other social movements is unclear. Women's movement leaders stated that limited, if any, efforts have been made to seek solidarity or support from other social movements, and such approaches have not yet been considered. While male leaders are occasionally invited to speak at women's movement programs, there is no systematic dialogue between leaders.

Likewise, wider social movements rarely seek to build relationships or collaborate with others. Some respondents stated that wider movements pay less attention to, or even avoid, women's movements, dismissing their issues as 'women's issues'. As such, respondents reported that women's rights movements have been unable to influence other social movements, and remains weak in articulating its agenda in a way that has popular appeal. This was seen as limiting its ability to mobilise women of all communities, professions and social strata. Collaboration among women across different social movements is also lacking.

The challenges identified indicate there is no easy answer regarding the effectiveness of collaborations between women's movements and wider social

movements, and the area remains largely unexplored. Such exploration could, for instance, be based on social movements' shared – though not yet articulated – overarching commitments to social justice. Again, this would need to be done on a case by case basis by those involved, entailing careful consideration of a range of factors, such as respective values, interests, visions and objectives, the aims and context of the particular collaboration, and the intersecting power dynamics at play.

To conclude this section, while the potential effectiveness, and even desirability, of seeking to integrate women's rights into wider social movements could be severely compromised by the significant gendered challenges and inequalities that exist within the movements themselves, it is conceivable for the positive opportunities for increasing women's participation and leadership, and collaborations within and across women's and wider social movements, to be harnessed to create a self-reinforcing 'virtuous circle'. That said however, there is no simple solution or process for achieving the desired reconfigurations of gendered power relations, or the role that social movements could or should play within this. Such processes are always context specific, non-linear and fraught with contest over meaning, values and power.

PART 5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This briefing has explored the challenges, opportunities and effectiveness of integrating women's rights into wider social and economic justice movements, in Kathmandu, Nepal, in order to inform ActionAid Nepal's Safe Cities programme development and provide wider learning for the ActionAid International federation. This was preceded by a brief overview of such challenges and opportunities in South Asia and Latin America, which illustrates how innovative forms of organising are creating new, albeit contested, spaces and approaches at national, regional and global level.

The research respondents' views differed widely. Some argued that social movements are weak, lack clearly defined agendas, strategies, solutions or alternatives. Others saw Kathmandu's social movements as vibrant, dynamic, and effective at shaping public and government agendas and fostering political will to address issues at policy level. Within women's movements, this has included achievements relating to property rights, violence against women, and women's political participation. Indeed, the evolution of Nepal's social movements is inextricably linked to often violent struggles to establish inclusive political democracy over the last 60 years.

A range of **challenges** have been identified, many of which are cross-cutting and which echo the findings of the introductory overview.

Firstly, the women's rights movement is not homogenous, but includes a diversity of issues and identity-based organisations that are responding to distinct, lived experiences of discrimination and oppression, encompassing different feminist visions of social change. It is contested space, where, according to respondents, agenda setting and leadership is largely dominated by women from elite groups to the exclusion of those in lesser positions of power, such as ethnic and indigenous minority women, and landless women. Such tensions and power dynamics raise critical questions about the potential and desirability of attempting to develop an inclusive 'women's rights' agenda, that encapsulates

the diversity of women's issues and experiences, and how such a process would be managed to ensure equal voice and participation.

Furthermore, some respondents felt that an over-focus on issues and a lack of a structural analysis of the causes of different women's oppression/s results in inadequate strategies for transformative change, including at policy level. In this way, the influence of distinctly feminist ideologies in Nepal's women's rights movement is unclear, given that few organisations self-identify as 'feminist'.

Other cross-cutting challenges to integrating women's rights within wider social movements include their patriarchal structures and organisational cultures that reflect the domineering and fragmentary influence of political parties and wider social norms, a failure to recognise the centrality of gender justice and women's rights to achieving equitable and inclusive social transformation, tokenistic and instrumentalist forms of women's participation and leadership, lack of democratic leadership selection, marginalisation of 'women's issues' into separate committees, and lack of dialogue and efforts at collaboration.

Neither the women's rights nor wider social movements are yet to clearly articulate a set of core values. Respondents saw this as a prime reason that Nepal's social movements have not had more impact at policy level.

Respondents identified numerous **opportunities**, many of which entail turning the challenges directly on their heads. In particular, the women's rights movement has seen effective organising to advance women's status, to begin developing a shared agenda, undertake awareness-raising, and place women's rights issues on national and global policy agendas. The quotas for women's participation and leadership within wider social movements are seen as fuelling an increase in women's participation, thereby offering opportunities to build their voice and influence to ensure women's priorities and rights are integrated into agendas. The new provision guaranteeing a 33 percent female participation rate in Nepal's Constituent Assembly – itself a recent victory of local women's rights movements - has provided

additional impetus in this regard. The constitution-building process also offers a unique opportunity for women organised within all social movements to lobby under one agenda for the institutionalisation of transformative policies. Furthermore, social movements are beginning to switch on to the idea collaborating on cross-cutting issues.

The work of social movements can be both facilitated and constrained by the outside influence and control of political parties and international NGOs or donors. Many women's movements and social justice movements globally and in Nepal can trace their origins to political parties. However, there can be a risk of lending token support to 'women's issues' as a way of mobilising constituencies. Similarly INGOs have been criticised for co-opting the movement and setting the agenda according to international interests rather than based on the diverse realities and structural discriminations experienced by different groups of Nepali women, whilst de-politicising the women's rights agenda. ActionAid seeks to mitigate such risks through its human rights based approach, but additional strategies may need to be considered for each country context.

The question of the **effectiveness** of integrating women's rights into wider social movements is closely contingent on the challenges and opportunities identified. The challenges are likely to compromise the effectiveness of the social movements themselves, as well as the potential for, and effectiveness of, integrating women's rights into their structures, agendas and activities in a transformative way. Thus, there is no straight forward answer: the question of effectiveness requires critical scrutiny on a case by case basis.

On the other hand, it may be possible for the positive opportunities for increasing women's participation, leadership and collaboration within and between women's rights and wider social movements to be harnessed to create a self-reinforcing 'virtuous circle'. Similarly, the process of integrating women's rights as part of a wider, transformative change process within and outside women's rights and wider social movements could be pursued through an on-going cycle of awareness-raising, implementation and negotiation.

5.2 Recommendations

The social movement representatives and independent analysts that participated in this research provided the following recommendations to movement actors and INGOs. The report authors have elaborated on the recommendations to INGOs (see italicised text), and offer some broader recommendations to the ActionAid federation.

Women's rights movements

- Greater cooperation is needed between women's movement leaders in order to build trust, dialogue, and a culture of collaboration and solidarity. Diversity should be recognised and respected, under-pinning efforts to build a "rainbow coalition" of alliances and networks, which draws strength from its diversity.
- Develop clear, long-term agendas, visions and strategies. Pursue greater strategic engagement in political affairs and with parties in collaboration with activists, academia, and other stakeholders, and with the support of parties' women wings, the inter-party women's network and women's parliamentary caucus.
- Engage in systematic efforts to collaborate with a cross-section of social movements; develop relationships with other international agencies and activists.
- Enhance efforts to utilise the media to raise awareness and win support.

Women's and wider social and economic justice movements

- Movement leaders would value from relinquishing their personal 'power domains' and pursue cultures of collective collaboration around cross-cutting issues.
- Efforts to recognise and support the identity-specific agendas of different women's movements and organisations should increase.
- Invest in meaningful and equitable leadership and participation of women. Ensure democratic leadership selection.
- Political dialogue should be promoted in order to foster gender inclusive structures that recognise women's issues, their particular rights and needs.

- Social movements should recognise and fight for gender equality as an intrinsic element of achieving a more just society for all.

Recommendations to INGOs, including ActionAid International:

Where appropriate and as advised by local partners:

- Invest in building the capacity of women's movements and women's leadership. This could include support for developing a critical mass of empowered women to act as change agents, and investment and support to movement leaders and academics, including support with policy analysis. *An increased focus on building feminist leadership, for instance, via existing LRP/Safe Cities partners and the REFLECT process, could form a focus of this for ActionAid Nepal.*
- Facilitate dialogue among social movements on women rights issues to build understanding, leading to greater prioritisation and resource allocation. *ActionAid Nepal 'peripheral / outsider' INGO status puts it in a good position to facilitate and resource intra and cross-movement dialogue, as well as to create platforms to bring leaders, activists and academics together to identify and build collaborations where appropriate. Opportunities to harness the unifying effect of the constitution-building process in particular could be explored. Such spaces could serve to expose women in mainstream movements to feminist activists and thinking, empowering them to push for improvements within their organisations (see endnote 27). Additionally, given ActionAid Nepal's close links with the housing rights movement, it could help redress the marginalisation and lack of recognition of their issues among other social movements through such fora.*
- Invest in research to generate evidence that women's rights movements can use to support their demands.
- Provide investment and support to media mobilisation efforts to create awareness and expand popular influence and support of women's rights movements.
- Many unions represent industries where women make up a significant or dominant portion of the workforce, suggesting scope - and growing need - to increase women's agency and leadership.

ActionAid Nepal could consider how to build on existing relations with unions with a view to exploring and supporting in this regard. It could also draw on the example of the MEC in Nicaragua (see page 11) and SEWA in India, to explore appetite and space for autonomous women worker organisations in cases where severe marginalisation persists.

Broader recommendations drawn from this research for ActionAid International and the wider federation:

- Power mapping and critical reflection on the role of ActionAid in relation to social movements and efforts at movement building in the context of Safe Cities is needed, in order to identify where ActionAid can add value and how it can mitigate risks associated with co-opting agendas, power and resources away from feminist movements.
- Assumptions around effectiveness of integration over focusing efforts on autonomous mobilising of women's movements should be critically examined on a case by case basis, based on an intersectional analysis of identity-based forms of oppression, power and privilege, as well as values, interests and priorities.
- ActionAid should consider the sustainability of any movement or coalition it is seeking to build or support, and seek to avoid creating donor dependencies.
- ActionAid UK should use these findings to demonstrate the critical role of women's collective voice and agency - notably when organised within dedicated women's movements - in pushing for transformative social change. ActionAid UK should develop recommendations to bi- and multilateral donors, and to international financial institutions to ensure that space, resources and support for this are prioritised, increased and protected.
- It is important that ActionAid translates its commitment to women's rights in its own institutional policies to safeguard its credibility, including in initiatives linked with social movements. This includes effective implementation of internal gender equality and women's rights policies, while a strong women's rights component should always feature prominently as part of the HRBA training delivered to all staff.

Appendix I – Methodology, sample and scope

The Nepal field research entailed:

- 23 interviews with social movement leaders, representatives and independent experts.
- A focus group discussion with social movements representatives.
- Analysis of secondary data from a range of documents, reports and media articles, both qualitative and quantitative.

Introducing the sample

The sample of social movements was selected according to: their relevance to the themes of women's social and economic rights in urban contexts (as per the Safe Cities programme and AAUK campaign); an active presence in Kathmandu; a large, mobilised, collective constituency or membership; a history spanning at least 20 years; and an apparent political agenda. The movements are as follows:

1. **Women's rights movements**
2. **Ethnic and indigenous minority rights movements**
3. **Student and youth movements**
4. **Housing rights movements**
5. **Labour rights movements**

An even balance of representatives from each movement was selected on the basis of their active involvement, knowledge and understanding of their movement's activities and political stance, as well as being known to have clear views on women's rights. Some respondents are active in more than one social movement. Respondents included 13 women and 10 men, while 16 people from various movements participated in the focus group discussion. Five independent analysts of social movements were also consulted (see annex for full list of organisations represented).

Scope and limitations

The sample was limited by the tight timeframe for undertaking the research: there are numerous other social movements, networks and alliances operating in Kathmandu whose views and perspectives are not included. The research was confined to movements with a strong presence in Kathmandu, in order to ensure relevance to the Safe Cities programme, although many of these also operate at a national level, including in rural areas. It was beyond the scope of this study to include a comprehensive overview of AAIN's past and present activities and links with social movements, although a number are identified. There have been very few studies on social movements in Nepal, therefore academic literature was scarce. The activists of social movements do not have frequent, in-depth interactions. This study provided them with a rare platform for inter-disciplinary discussion and introspection.

The findings and recommendations were subsequently tested and developed further with the social movement respondents, as well as internal and external stakeholders.

Appendix II – Organisations and networks from within the social movements surveyed

Women's rights movements

- Indigenous Women Rights Movement
- Single Women's Rights Movement
- Muslim Women Rights Movement (MAM)
- Dalit Women Rights Movement
- Nepali Manch
- Mahila Adhikar Manch (MAM)
- Nepal Mahila Ekata Samaj

Ethnic and indigenous minorities movement

- Ethnic/Indigenous movement
- Nepal Indigenous Journalist Federation
- National Indigenous Women's Federation (NIWF)

Housing rights movement

- Lumanti Support Group for Shelter
- Mahila Ekata Samaj
- Activista Nepal
- Nepal Basobas Basti Samrachhyan Samaj

Student and youth movements

- Akhil Nepal Free Student Union
- Youth Wing of Nepali Congress
- Nepal Student Union
- Youth Initiative
- Youth Federation of Nepal
- National Youth Federation of Nepal

Labour movements

- General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT)
- Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC)
- All Nepal Federation of Trade Unions (Revolutionary)

Other

- Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP)
- Jagaran Media Centre
- Nepal Madhesh Foundation
- Madhesh Media House

Appendix III – Research respondent recommendations to government

- Update legal frameworks on women's rights issues and agendas and implement existing legal provisions (such as on violence against women, citizenship rights, and property rights of women).
- Listen to and address the demands of women activists and ensure accountability towards international commitments. Create an enabling environment with responsive, accountable, transparent and democratic processes to ensure that women's organisations and movements are able to fully participate in decision-making processes on an equal basis, and that all women can fully exercise their rights.
- Increase resources for addressing women's agendas and supporting their active voice and participation in decision-making.
- Ensure the necessary mechanisms are in place to enable women's rights movements to shape and influence Nepal's new constitution.

References

1. Htun, M and S Laurel Weldon (2012) 'The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combatting Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975 – 2005'. *American Political Science Review*, 106, pp 548-569 doi: 10.1017/S000305541200226
2. Batiwala, S. (2012) *Changing their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements* (2nd Edition), Toronto, Mexico City, Cape Town: Association for Women's Rights in Development and Horn, J. (2013) *Gender and Social Justice Movements: Overview Report*, BRIDGE, IDS: Brighton Available at: http://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/changing_their_world_2ed_full_eng.pdf Accessed 19/02/2014
3. Outcome 4 of the Safe Cities Global Programme Framework
4. Htun, M and S Laurel Weldon (2012) *The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combatting Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975 – 2005*. *American Political Science Review*, 106, pp 548-569 doi: 10.1017/S000305541200226
5. See Batiwala, S. (2012) *Changing their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements* (2nd Edition), Toronto, Mexico City, Cape Town: Association for Women's Rights in Development and Horn, J. (2013) *Gender and Social Justice Movements: Overview Report*, BRIDGE, IDS: Brighton [Online] <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/vfile/upload/4/document/1401/FULL%20REPORT.pdf> Accessed 19/02/2014
6. The research is funded by a DFID Programme Partnership Agreement grant. The grant will be used to support the International Strategy framework by focusing on operational systems that underpin our work and increase programme impact and effectiveness. Women's rights themes are captured in outputs 3 and 5 of the PPA logframe. Under Output 5 we are committed to ensuring approaches to women's rights programming to contribute to a strong national and global multi-sectoral movement for women's economic justice are analysed, documented and tested.
7. Including Policy, advocacy and campaigning
8. Outcome 4 of the Safe Cities Global Programme Framework
9. See Baker, J. (2008) *Urban Poverty A Global View*. Available at: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTURBANDEVELOPMENT/Resources/336387-1169585750379/JP-5.pdf>. Accessed 18/02/2014. and Mitlin, D (2006) *The role of collective action and urban social movements in reducing chronic urban poverty*, CRC Working Paper 64
10. *Gender, Economic, Social and Ecological Justice for Sustainable Development: A Feminist Declaration for 2015* was developed by 60 feminists from 31 countries and 47 NGOs, including AAI, in February 2014. Available at: <http://www.wilpfinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Feminists-Post-2015-Declaration.pdf>
11. Batiwala, S. (2012) *Changing their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements* (2nd Edition), Toronto, Mexico City, Cape Town: Association for Women's Rights in Development
12. Horn, J. (2013) *Gender and Social Justice Movements: Overview Report*, BRIDGE, IDS: Brighton [Online] Accessed February 19th 2014 <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/vfile/upload/4/document/1401/FULL%20REPORT.pdf>
13. Basu, A. (2005). *Women, Political Parties and Social Movements in South Asia*. Occasional Paper no.5.
14. Safa, H. (1990) 'Women's social movements in Latin America.' *Gender & Society* 4(3): 354-369.
15. Ray, R. (1999) *Field of Protests: Women's Movements in India*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
16. Alvarez, S. (1999). 'Advocating Feminism: The Latin American Feminist NGO "Boom"' *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1 (2):181-209.
17. Batiwala, S. (2012) *Changing their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements* (2nd Edition), Toronto, Mexico City, Cape Town: Association for Women's Rights in Development:12
18. Gallin, D. and Horn, P. (2004) 'Organizing Informal Women Workers.' *Global Labour*. Available at: <http://www.streetnet.org.za/docs/research/2005/en/informalwomenworkers.pdf> Accessed 02/04/2004
19. Ibid
20. Copadeba Informa (2010) 'Historia del Origen de COPADEBA y Ciudad Alternativa, desde la perspectiva de Emelio Betances y los factores políticos y sociales que lo determinaron' Available at: <http://copadeba1979.blogspot.co.uk>. Accessed 14/02/2014
21. Rauber, I (2012) *Social Movements and Political Representation* (3rd Edition), Ciudad de La Habana: INSTITUTO CUBANO DEL LIBRO.
22. For example, see D'Atri, A and Escati, C. (2008) 'The Piquetera/o movement of Argentina' in Srilatha Batiwala (Editor) *Changing Their World* 1st Edition Edited, AWID, Toronto. On the Unemployed Workers Movement in Argentina and Biyanwila, S. J. (2011) *The labour movement in the global south*. London: Routledge on the Free Trade Zone Worker's Union in Sri Lanka
23. Cobble, D. (2012) *Gender Equality and Labour Movements: Towards a Global Perspective*, New Jersey: Rutgers University. Available at: <http://www.solidaritycenter.org/Files/Rutgers%20-%20Gender%20Equality%20and%20Labor%20Movements.pdf>. Accessed 02/03/2014
24. Bystrowicz, M. (2009) 'Ellas al Frente' in *Radio Mundo Real*. Available at: <http://www.radiomundoreal.fm/Ellas-al-frente-456?lang=es> Accessed 14/02/2014
25. D'Atri, A and Escati, C. (2008) 'The Piquetera/o movement of Argentina' in Srilatha Batiwala (Editor) *Changing Their World* 1st Edition Edited, AWID, Toronto:3
26. For instance, see: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/stop-violence-against-women.12451> and <http://www.ituc-csi.org/+decent-work-decent-life-for-women-+html>
27. Cobble, D (2012) *Gender Equality and Labour Movements: Towards a Global Perspective*, New Jersey: Rutgers University. Available at: <http://www.solidaritycenter.org/Files/Rutgers%20-%20Gender%20Equality%20and%20Labor%20Movements.pdf>. Accessed 02/02/2014
28. Horn, J. (2013) *Gender and Social Justice Movements: Overview Report*, BRIDGE, IDS: Brighton. <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/vfile/upload/4/document/1401/FULL%20REPORT.pdf>. Accessed 10/02/2014.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Such as Dominican labour and women's rights movements, including the Centro de Investigación la Acción (Women's Action Research Centre, CIPAF); TU-MUJER (You Women); CE-MUJER (CE-Woman); Centro Dominicano de Estudios de la Educación (Dominican Centre for Educational Studies, CEDEE); Centro de Servicios la Mujer (Legal Services Centre for Women, CENSEL); and Mujeres en Desarrollo (Developing Dominican Women, MUDE)
32. Solidarity Centre (2013) *Domestic Workers: Winning Recognition and Protection* <http://www.solidaritycenter.org/Files/DR.Fnal%20English.bug.pdf>. Accessed 06/03/2014.
33. Ibid.
34. Htun, H. and Weldon, L. (2012) 'The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combatting Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005' in *American Political Science Review* Vol. 106, No. 3, August 2012. Pp. 553-554.
35. Ibid, pp. 548.
36. Batiwala, S. (2012) *Changing their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements* (2nd Edition), Toronto, Mexico City, Cape Town: Association for Women's Rights in Development. Pp.7.
37. For example, see: Zibechi, R. (2013) *Autonomy in Brazil: below and behind the June uprising*. <http://roarmag.org/2013/11/raul-zibechi-brazilian-uprisings/>. Accessed 03/04/2014.
38. See: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nepal/overview>
39. International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) (2013) *Enabling poor rural people to overcome poverty in Nepal*. www.ifad.org/operations/projects/regions/pi/factsheets/nepal.pdf
40. Ibid.
41. Central Bureau of Statistics (2011), *Preliminary result of National Population Census 2011*. <http://census.gov.np/>. Accessed 18/01/13.

42. Ibid
43. AAIN Safe Cities programme framework: Review and Recommendations.
44. The Rising Nepal, 3 December, 2011, <http://gorkhapatraonline.com> Accessed 04/2/13
45. See: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/nepal_insurgency.htm. Accessed on 03/04/2014
46. Caddell, M. (2005) 'Nepal – intervention in an ongoing war' in The Open University (2005) Case studies (TU875 War, intervention and development). Pp 78-79
47. Tuladhar, I. (2013) Report on Review of Women's Rights and Gender Mainstreaming in ActionAid International Nepal's Organizational policies, Partnership and Programming, pp. 67-80.
48. See: Rai, K. (2009) Adivasi Janajati Mahilaka Samajik Andolan. Asmita 69: 1-11;
49. Taken from the focus group discussions.
50. Tamang, S. (2009) The politics of conflict and difference or the difference of conflict in politics: The women's movement in Nepal. *Feminist Review* (2009) 91, pp. 61–80. Available at: <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/fr/journal/v91/n1/abs/fr200850a.html>. Accessed 04/04/2014.
51. Manandhar, M.D. (2010) Understanding Social Movement in Nepal: A General Perspective. Available at: http://www.fesnepal.org/reports/2010/semnar_reports/papers_ccd/Understanding%20Social%20movement%20in%20Nepal%20-%20Mohan%20Das%20second%20draft.pdf. Accessed 04/04/2014.
52. See: http://www.gender-budgets.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=719:gender-responsive-budget-the-nepalese-experience87&catid=51&emid=215
53. Nepal's National Code (Muluki Ein II) - <http://www.equalrightstrust.org/view-subdocument/index.htm?id=786>
54. See: <http://www.fedonepal.org/>
55. Feminist Dalit Organisation (2006) Naya Nepal Ma Dalit Mahila. Kathmandu, Dalit Mahila Sangh.
56. Thapa, Manju (2008). Nepali Mahila Andolan ma Asmita. Asmita 66. Pp. 4-25.
57. Gurung, Om. (2001) 'Chhapama Janajati. Nepalka Adivasi Janajati bare kehi Bichar' in Chhapa ma Janajati. Pratyush Onta et al, eds. pp. 15-19. Kathmandu: Martin Chautari.
58. Subba: 2068 BS:1
59. Caddell, M. (2005) 'Nepal – intervention in an ongoing war' in The Open University (2005) Case studies (TU875 War, intervention and development). Pp.58-107.
60. Ibid.
61. Bhattachan (Gauchan), Yashokanti (2001) 'Chhapa Ma Janajati. Nepalma Mahila Bikasko Laingink Avadharana ra Adibasi Janajati Mahilako Sthan' in Pratyush Onta et al, eds. Kathmandu: Martin Chautari. Pp. 134-141.
62. Rai, Kailash (2009) Adivasi Janajati Mahilaka Samajik Andolan. Asmita 69: 1-11.
63. National Indigenous Women's Federation - <http://www.niwf.org.np/>. Accessed 21/03/2014
64. Pande, B. (2000) Nepali Shramik Andolanma Mahila Sahabagita. Kathmandu: Nepal Trade Union Mahasangh.
65. Leitner Center (2009) 'Land is Life, Land is Power': Landlessness, Exclusion and Deprivation in Nepal. (Crowley Report). <http://www.leitnercenter.org/files/2011%20Leitner%20Nepal%20Report%20v2.pdf>. Accessed 03/04/2014.
66. Toffin, G. (2013) From Monarchy to Republic. Kathmandu, Vajra Books
67. Pyakuryal, B. (2010). 'Industrial history: Lessons for future' in Republica Daily. 26/05/2010. http://archives.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=19104 Accessed 03/03/2014.
68. Pande, B. (2000) Nepali Shramik Andolanma Mahila Sahabagita. Kathmandu: Nepal Trade Union Mahasangh.
69. Dahal, Dev Raj. Undated. The Current Trade Union Situation in Nepal. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/01962.pdf> Accessed 23/02/2014.
70. Ibid
71. ILO (2013) Decent work country programme: Nepal – 2013-2017. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/program/dwcp/download/nepal.pdf>. Accessed on 03/04/2014.
72. The Himalayan Times. 2013. Female labour force participation higher. <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=Female+labour+force+participation+higher&NewsID=363662>. Accessed 23/02/2014
73. Pande, B. (2000) Nepali Shramik Andolanma Mahila Sahabagita. Kathmandu: Nepal Trade Union Mahasangh. Pp. 84.
74. Ibid.
75. Caddell, M. (2005) 'Nepal – intervention in an ongoing war' in The Open University (2005) Case studies (TU875 War, intervention and development). Pp.65
76. Ibid. Pp. 77.
77. BBC News South Asia (2014) 'Nepal profile'. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12499391>. Accessed on 25/03/2014.
78. Tuladhar, I. (2013) Report on Review of Women's Rights and Gender Mainstreaming in ActionAid International Nepal's Organizational policies, Partnership and Programming
79. Ibid.
80. For example see Seira Tamang, DFID/ World Bank forthcoming
81. Sahasranaman (2013) in Horn, J (2013) Gender and Social Movements – Overview report. Bridge, IDS. Pp. 27. Available at: <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/vfile/upload/4/document/1401/FULL%20REPORT.pdf>. Accessed 19/02/2014
82. Ibid, pp. 43
83. Pearson, R. (2000) 'Rethinking gender matters in development' in Allen, T. and Thomas, A. (eds) (2000) Poverty & Development into the 21st Century. Oxford University Press.
84. Horn, J. (2013) Gender and Social Justice Movements: Overview Report, BRIDGE, IDS: Brighthon. Available at: <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/vfile/upload/4/document/1401/FULL%20REPORT.pdf>. Accessed 19/02/2014

ActionAid is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales (Company number 01295174).
England and Wales charity number 274467,
Scottish charity number SC045476.

Registered Office 33-39 Bowling Green Lane,
London EC1R 0BJ.

www.actionaid.org

March 2016