

Solutions to achieve gender parity amongst national UNICEF Nepal staff

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ABSTRACT

The United Nations (UN) has fallen short in meeting commitments - which date back to 1970 - to achieve gender parity. Conversely, UNICEF globally has achieved gender parity. This global average however hides gender imbalanced workforce at regional level, in country offices and in functional areas. At UNICEF Nepal men are over-represented in the workforce. The greatest gender imbalance lies within the category of national staff. Based on analysis of Human Resources (HR) recruitment and workforce data and interviews with UN staff, potential reasons for under-representation of Nepalese women were identified and the majority were ruled out. Nepalese women are not leaving their jobs any more than men, career development opportunities are similar for men and women, selection procedures do not discriminate against women, there are policies in place for flexible work arrangements. From this elimination process, the main reason for under-representation of women at UNICEF Nepal is that only a small number of women are applying to positions in the first place. From an array of potential reasons for women not applying to UNICEF Nepal, after ruling out religion and insufficiency of qualified women and acknowledging that UNICEF Nepal can only do so much to alter the deep-rooted male-dominated Nepalese society, the reasons which UNICEF can address are the perception that UNICEF is a boys' club which is inflexible in terms of working arrangements. Next, solutions from other UNICEF country offices, UN entities, private sector and academia were explored based on grey literature, interviews and academic research. Practical solutions for UNICEF Nepal to adopt were presented: Temporarily hiring only women, talent outreach, adapting and creating new traineeship and fellowship programmes, better communicating UNICEF's goals on gender parity and job advertisements tailored to women. Beyond its direct application to UNICEF Nepal, this paper could inspire reflection at country office, regional office and headquarters on solutions to achieve a more diverse workforce respecting gender balance, equitable geographical distribution, caste and others. In sum, it could guide reflection on solutions for UNICEF to have a workforce which is more representative of the societies it works in.

Keywords: HR, gender parity, gender equality, talent outreach, UN, UNICEF, women-only

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1. BACKGROUND / SITUATION ANALYSIS

Achieving gender balance amongst the workforce is not only the right thing to do, it is also good for UNICEF. Research on whether gender balance leads to better results is not homogenous. (Turban, Wu, & Zhang, 2019). Most research suggests that gender balance in workforce results in benefits for the organisation (Dezső & Ross, 2012), yet some research indicates that gender balance can be detrimental to performance (Darmadi, 2011).

The determining factor that leads gender balance to be either good or harmful to performance is whether – in that given industry, region or organisation – gender diversity is accepted as an important value or not. Gender balance led to more productivity in countries and industries where gender balance is widely accepted, e.g. in telecommunication companies in Europe. On the other hand, in regions of the world or industries wherein gender-inclusiveness is not widely accepted as valuable, and in cultures that are strongly male-dominant – e.g. energy sector in the Middle East – gender balance did not lead to better performance (Turban, Wu, & Zhang, 2019). For the United Nations, given the organisational culture which values gender equality, gender parity leads to better performance.

United Nations (UN) commitments to gender equality date back to 1970 with Resolution 2715 (XXV). Between 1985 and 1996 several UN resolutions included percentage targets for gender balance ranging from 30 to 50 per cent. The 1995 and 1996 resolutions contain target of 50/50 gender balance at all levels by 2000, for managerial and decision-making positions. *Most of the United Nations system organisations have made commitments towards achieving gender parity [...] (UN, 2012a).* The year 2000 deadline has been surpassed by nearly two decades and there has been no shortage of policies, reports, commitments and recommendations to achieve this goal. UN-wide commitments include United Nations System-wide Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2006), the first phase of the UN System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP 1.0) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2012-2017), and the second generation of the UN System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP 2.0) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Parity or the equal representation of women for the purposes of UN-SWAP reporting (since 2018), to be within the 47%-53% margin (UN, 2017). UN's most recent and publicized commitment to gender parity including target setting is UN Secretary General's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity (2017). The UN Secretary-General has pledged to reach parity across the entire UN system well before 2030. The strategy lays out a phased approach, starting with leadership positions, then international staff, followed by national staff (UN, 2017, pp. 12-16).

The UN has fallen short in meeting commitments to attaining gender parity. Conversely, UNICEF globally has achieved equal representation of women in the workforce, at 48 per cent, falling within the 47%-53% margin (UN, 2017). However, UNICEF's global average masks regional disparities. None of the seven regions defined by UNICEF have achieved gender parity. Men are over-represented in four regions: West and Central Africa (63 per cent are men), South Asia (59 per cent are men), Eastern and Southern Africa (58 per cent are men) and Middle East and Northern Africa (56 per cent are men). Women are over-represented in three regions: Europe and Central Asia (63 per cent are women); Latin America and the Caribbean (60 per cent are women) and East Asia and Pacific Region (57 per cent are women). Regional averages may also mask country-level disparities.

UNICEF Nepal, like UNICEF South Asia, has not yet attained gender balance. At UNICEF Nepal men are over-represented in the workforce. Forty-two per cent of the 171 UNICEF Nepal Country Office workforce are women (UNICEF, 2019). Amongst the category of national professional officers, women also represent 42 per cent of the workforce. The greatest gender imbalance lies within the category of general service staff. Only 40 per cent of women make up the general service category. In South Asia in addition to Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan are also facing gender imbalance amongst the UNICEF staff, which is heightened amongst national staff, and even more so, within the category of general service staff. Pakistan has a similar female:male ratio as Nepal within the category of national officers, however within the category of general service staff women are more acutely under represented, making up only 25 per cent of that workforce category. In Afghanistan the situation is more acute. Only 18 per cent and 15 per cent of the national officers and general service staff respectively are women.¹

This paper has six parts. This first part provides a background as to why it is important to achieve gender parity in the workplace, what policies are in place within the UN, and provides an overview of the status of gender parity in UNICEF Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Scope and objectives make up the second part. The methodology is the third part. The fourth part contains the main findings of this paper. The fifth part suggests solutions for achieving gender parity amongst national staff at UNICEF Nepal Country Office. The sixth and final part explains the value created from this paper to UNICEF.

2. SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

This paper explores concrete, feasible, implementable solutions to achieve gender parity amongst national staff at UNICEF Nepal Country Office, which is the short-term objective of this paper. In the long-term the expected outcome for UNICEF Nepal is to consistently gender parity over time – office wide and at disaggregate levels, namely within each zone office, programme team and category of staff – professional and general service.

The reasons for limiting the scope of the paper to national staff, as opposed to international staff or both, are that national staff constitute most of the workforce – 86 per cent, that national staff work for much longer periods of time than international staff and that the greatest gender imbalance within UNICEF Nepal Country office is amongst national staff. Thus, achieving gender parity amongst national staff will lead to sustainable longer-term gender parity in the office.

The main reason for gender imbalance amongst national staff is that simply not enough Nepalese women are applying to UNICEF Nepal Country Office positions in the first place. This paper focuses on proposing solutions to get more external candidates into UNICEF Nepal.

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper relied on a combination of literature review, interviews and analysis of Human Resources data. The literature review included peer-reviewed journal articles on gender equality, recruitment practices, workforce diversity policies/affirmative action, talent outreach, UN policies on recruitment,

¹ UNICEF Human Resources dashboard data from 19 May 2019 was used for this report. This data is accessible to UNICEF staff only and is not publicly available/accessible.

gender parity, gender equality and diversity globally, in South Asia and in Nepal; and articles (including scholarly) on what private sector and universities have done to achieve gender parity.

Unstructured interviews (informal discussions) with two Nepalese experts on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion² were conducted to gain an in-depth understanding into their views on what could potentially be the main reasons for gender imbalance amongst Nepalese staff in UNICEF. Both experts have worked directly – as staff - or indirectly (e.g. as consultants) with UN agencies in Nepal and globally and are knowledgeable of UN recruitment policies. They suggested that possible reasons included perception of UN as a boys' club, gender-biased interviews, lack of gender-parity amongst interview panel, insufficient mentorship opportunities for women to assume leadership positions. Semi-structured interviews were held with 11 UNICEF, UNHCR, UNDP and UNWomen colleagues in either senior management positions, in HR or as gender specialists/focal points.

UNICEF Nepal Human Resource data from 2010-2019 was analysed to identify trend over the past decade in terms of which categories of staff are most gender imbalanced, to enable defining which categories require special attention in terms of solutions. Recruitment data was used to a limited extent to ascertain whether gender-biased recruitment/selection processes could be amongst the reasons for gender imbalance. Global and regional – South Asia-specific UNICEF HR data was also analysed to compare Nepal's situation with the rest of the world and with neighbouring countries.

4. FINDINGS

At UNICEF Nepal Country Office, women represent only 42 per cent and 40 per cent of the category of national officers and general service respectively. Human Resource workforce data from 2010-2019 shows that between 2010 and 2015 Nepalese women represented on average 40 per cent of the national staff at UNICEF Nepal Country Office. The proportion of Nepalese women dipped to 37 per cent in 2015 and remained at this level through 2018. As of May 2019, the proportion of women is back to the pre-2015 levels, at 40 per cent. Expedited emergency recruitment following the April 2015 Nepal earthquake is a factor which contributed to gender imbalance. In practice, UNICEF Nepal did not have female candidates in the pipeline and given the need to quickly recruit staff to respond to the emergency relief efforts, these recruitments resulted in the hiring of disproportionate number of men in relation to women as temporary staff (UNICEF Nepal, 2016).

In Nepal, the gender imbalance is not a problem which is unique to UNICEF. Other United Nations agencies and funds in Nepal have similar gender imbalance in staffing structure. Likewise, women are also underrepresented in the workforce of International Non-Governmental Organisation in Nepal, wherein women comprise 32 per cent of the workforce. (Association of International NGOs in Nepal, 2011, p. 4). In Nepal, the exceptions are UNDP and UNWomen that fare slightly better than UNICEF Nepal in terms of gender balance. There is a need to learn from their experience.

Questions that emerge from this data include: Why are there less Nepalese women at UNICEF Nepal? Is it because Nepalese society is male-dominated and patriarchal? Are there not enough qualified women – with master's degree – in Nepal? What is the gender balance in other UN agencies, in the

² Bandana Rana, UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Vice-Chair and Bharati Silawal, former UNDP staff member and facilitator of UNICEF Nepal Country Office- wide Gender Capacity Building Training held on 9-10 August 2018

private sector, in the government, in non-governmental organisations? What can we learn from other organisations near – Nepal or in South Asia – or far, e.g. in developed/industrialized countries or private sector. This sector provides answers to these questions.

4.1. WHY ARE THERE LESS NEPALESE WOMEN THAN MEN AT UNICEF NEPAL?

Pinpointing the precise reasons that lead to Nepalese women being under-represented in the UNICEF Nepal workforce is not an easy task. Using the elimination process and UNICEF Nepal HR data, the following reasons have been ruled out: Nepalese women are leaving their jobs any more than men, career development opportunities are better for men than for women, selection procedures discriminate against women, there are no policies in place for flexible work arrangements. From this elimination process, the main reason for under-representation of women at UNICEF Nepal is that only a small number of women are applying to positions at UNICEF Nepal.

The following question which begs an answer is: Why aren't enough Nepalese women applying to UNICEF positions? Possible reasons for Nepalese women not applying include gender inequality in Nepalese society, perception that UNICEF is inflexible in terms of working arrangements compared to government or teaching jobs, religion, women's confidence gap and perception that the UN is a boys' club, and not enough Nepalese women meet the entry requirements. This part will briefly analyse each reason with the aim of ruling out some of the reasons.

Nepalese society is male-dominated and patriarchal. Whilst this factor is relevant, it alone cannot explain the gender imbalance amongst national staff in UNICEF Nepal Country Office. Nepal's Gender Inequality Index (GII) stands at 0.480. In South Asia, GII range from 0.343 to 0.653, with former Maldives being the most gender equal and the latter Afghanistan most unequal. Nepal is more gender equal than Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India (UNDP Gender Inequality Index 2017 data)³. By triangulating data on Gender Inequality and UNICEF country office workforce data in South Asia, data indicates that gender inequality does not directly lead to under representation of women in the UNICEF workforce. Some South Asian countries facing similar levels of gender inequality as Nepal have achieved gender parity amongst national staff in their respective UNICEF country offices. More specifically, Bangladesh and India are more gender unequal than Nepal, yet UNICEF Country Offices in both countries have achieved gender parity amongst national staff.

Whilst cultural norms in Nepal do not impede women from working all together, they do contribute to women getting married young. Nearly 40 per cent of girls get married before the age of 18 years. In wealthier families, where child marriage is less prevalent, women still get married quite young, and this happens either during university or straight afterwards. And the expected role of women after marriage is to either stop or never start working, to assume their role as child bearers and care takers of the husband's family.

In the case that the family (in-laws) allows the daughter-in-law to work, the family prefers jobs that have flexible working hours, which allow for women to leave work on short notice to attend to multiple family obligations, especially cooking meals during religious rituals and celebrations. UNICEF is

³ The UNDP Gender Inequality Index (GII) enables us to better understand how women are disadvantaged in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and economic status. The GII ranges between 0 and 1. Higher GII values indicate higher inequalities. No country has achieved perfect gender equality. Globally the most gender equal countries have a GII below 0.1, mainly in Europe.

perceived as being **less flexible and accommodating for women staff** when compared to teaching jobs and government positions.

Religion – Hinduism - could also be another potential reason for Nepalese women not to apply to positions at UNICEF or any other organisation. Hinduism is a male-dominated religion which fosters a male-dominated society, wherein women are expected to assume responsibility for household chores and child rearing. Approximately 81 per cent Nepalese people identified themselves as Hindus (Government of Nepal, 2011). That argument does not however hold true, as India which boasts a large Hindu population, fares better than Nepal in gender parity amongst national UNICEF country office staff.

Women's **confidence gap** - which is the common belief that women only apply for jobs if they think they meet 100 per cent of the requirements, whereas men feel confident enough to apply to positions if they meet 60 per cent of the requirements (Mohr, 2014) (UN, 2017, p. 26) – could be another potential contributing factor for women not applying to UNICEF positions. Whilst the confidence gap theory is not grounded on research it is cited by many organisations as an explanation for sparse number of female applicants. The confidence gap along with the perception that the UN (including UNICEF) is a **boys' club** that employs only men, may jointly lead to a sparse number of female applicants.

Another often cited reason for Nepalese women not applying to UNICEF positions is that **they do not meet the entry requirements**. This explanation however does not hold water. Whilst it is true that women in Nepal are under-represented in higher education when compared to men, the gap is not significant and the absolute number of women holding university degrees (bachelor or masters) is very high. Nepalese women represent 49 per cent of the bachelor's level and 40 per cent of the master's level student force. The total student force of higher education in Nepal is over half a million. (Government of Nepal. University Grants Commission, 2012/2013). In sum, there are sufficient numbers of qualified Nepalese women who meet UNICEF's entry requirements.

After ruling out religion and insufficiency of qualified women and acknowledging that UNICEF Nepal can only do so much to alter the deep-rooted male-dominated Nepalese society, the reasons which UNICEF can address are the perception that UNICEF is a boys' club which is inflexible in terms of working arrangements compared to government. The next parts will describe some promising practice from UN agencies, academia and private sector related to temporarily hiring only women and attracting female talent.

4.2. TEMPORARILY HIRING ONLY WOMEN. SHOULD AND CAN UNICEF DO THIS?

UN entities do not – generally - explicitly advertise for women only positions, nor carry out women-only recruitments. UNHCR is the exception. UNHCR explicitly had a woman-only recruitment policy in place in 1995-1996 for external recruitment, which had a significant impact on improving the gender balance at the P2 and P3 levels that year (UN, 2017, p. 39). Whilst this policy may have been effective for a year to achieve gender parity for entry level international positions, this policy has not led to sustained gender parity at UNHCR globally over time. UNHCR currently does not have a balanced workforce in terms of gender and is faring worse than UNICEF at every level. Currently, UNHCR has not attained gender parity amongst its workforce globally – only 39 per cent of the workforce are women. Amongst national UNHCR the gender imbalance is even greater - only 35 per cent of national staff are women. It is necessary to consider that UNHCR has a larger portion of positions based in

hardship duty stations (Sandvik-Nylund, 2019) (Sanguos, UNICEF NYHQ HR Specialist, 2019b) (Mukama, 2019).

Despite not leading to gender parity, the sheer existence of this policy is valuable, as it creates a legal precedent for other UN entities to formulate policies on women-only hiring, which could be adapted to national staff and has potential to yield positive results in terms of gender parity.

In terms legal precedent, existing job advertisements targeting under-represented nationalities could also serve as a legal basis to justify women-only recruitments. The UN National Competitive Recruitment Examination and the Young Professionals Programme are both UN recruitment processes which are restricted for nationals of countries which are under-represented in the UN.

Within academia, universities in the Netherlands and Australia, are explicitly hiring women-only positions to attract female applicants to senior positions, fellowships, and faculty members in typically male-dominated areas, such as in engineering, computer and mathematical sciences (Rapana, 2018) (Rice, 2014). In 2011, Delft University of Technology launched a fellowship programme – ‘Delft Technology Fellowship – open only to women. After being legally contested on the grounds of gender discrimination, the university won the case and the programme is running to date. The university’s argument to convince the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights was that having more women faculty members was a top priority and that more gentle measures had not succeeded (Rice, 2014).

Some HR practices in UNICEF amount to de-facto women-only hires. When a UNICEF Country Office Representative repeatedly refuses to endorse the outcome of a recruitment process resulting in a male recommended candidate, this is a de facto women-only hire. The hiring manager in this case is pushed to scout for female talent. Whilst this may lead to the ultimate desired outcome of hiring women, it has drawbacks. It puts the burden for talent outreach on the hiring manager, who may not have the necessary skills nor time to properly do talent outreach, given that – in the case of UNICEF Nepal - the hiring managers are usually the chiefs of programme sections, who are international staff; and do not usually have a network of Nepalese technical staff to tap into to scout for female talent (Hoar, 2019). An additional drawback is that de facto women only hires could lead to UNICEF hiring underqualified female staff. Such a hiring places an additional burden on the hiring manager or supervisor of the newly recruited staff who is required to provide her additional support – in terms of coaching, mentoring and on the job training – to ensure she performs well. Hiring less-qualified staff impacts negatively on the quality of the work and is a reputational risk to UNICEF (Hoar, 2019).

4.3. HOW TO ATTRACT MORE WOMEN TALENT?

Existing UN-wide and UNICEF policies on gender parity provide very little guidance on how to attract more female applicants to UN positions, which is – in Nepal, amongst Nepalese staff – is possibly the second most important measure, after women-only hire, to be taken to achieve gender parity.

4.3.1. TALENT OUTREACH

Talent outreach is critical for attracting female job applicants. Whereas recruitment is about filling vacancies, talent outreach is a long-term strategy to find appropriate – and female - candidates for positions that require a very specific skillset, such as specialists in the different functional areas of UNICEF Nepal’s work. Talent outreach can be in the form of partnering with higher education institutes with faculties or departments that have graduates in areas of UNICEF’s work, such as Education, Law,

Social Work, Medicine, Public Health, Nutrition, Nursing, Communication/Journalism, Economics, and Water Engineering. Establishing a professional network with alumni of these higher education institutes is also useful for talent outreach purposes. The goal is for UNICEF to have an equal number of female and male candidates (e.g. roster of consultants) in the pipeline.

In Nepal, UNDP has successfully done outreach to hire female drivers in 2010. The outreach included going to '*safa tempo*' – three-wheeler electric vehicle which fits up to 12 passengers and is used as public transportation in Kathmandu - stops to scout for women drivers to fill UNDP driver positions. Following this dissemination, UNDP HR staff went back to *tempo* stops and received 50 women applicants. After screening the female applicants, the 12 qualified women received a 2-day orientation and preparation sessions for the interview and exam, including getting a feel of the UNDP cars, learning what the examination would consist of. This orientation had the objective of reducing the women applicants fear and anxiety related to the exam. Five women were hired as drivers. Following their recruitment, these women received on-the-job training on driving in highways and off-road, to complement their limited driving experience. More experienced male UNDP drivers were assigned to provide on-the-job training on driving in highways, and received over-time pay for this support (Chhetri, UNDP Nepal HR Specialist, 2019a) (Magar, 2019) (Gurung, 2019).

Job fairs could be useful to UNICEF Nepal even when there are no positions under recruitment. Whilst the main aim for attendees is to be recruited, job fairs have multiple effects on those who attend, including learning about the organisations that are present at the job fairs. For job-seekers and organisations present at job fairs alike, the most important contribution of a job fair is likely to be information rather than jobs (Beam, 2016, pp. 32-33). And effects on organisations present at job fairs include influencing how external audience – including female job seekers – perceive the organisation.

UNICEF Bangladesh mindful of the role job fairs can play in shaping the perception of UNICEF, adopted a talent outreach programme which entailed being present at job fairs even with few or no positions were vacant. It used the job fair as a platform for informing attendees about UNICEF recruitment policies, minimum requirements, as well as demonstrating UNICEF's commitment to gender equality by being present with a "female face" (e.g. with women HR manager and officers present, and other women staff), ensuring timing of job fair was good for women, encouraging women to attend and providing child care facilities at the job fair. Though one cannot solely attribute to women-friendly job fairs the achievement of gender parity amongst national staff at UNICEF Bangladesh, this women-friendly presence in job fairs seems to have contributed to gender parity. Presence at the job fairs helped dispel the prevailing perceptions that UN recruitment favours men (Kargbo, 2018). Another positive spin off of being present at job fairs is that they serve to dispel prevailing perceptions that the UN only hires applicants who have close connections to 'internal old friends clubs' (Chhetri, UNDP Nepal HR Specialist, 2019a) and that the UN is a 'closed group' whereby positions/recruitment are 'rigged' because hiring manager already knows who he/she wants to hire.

The recruiters/HR managers present at job fairs or other outreach programmes need not be women to attract female applicants (Avery, 2006, p. 161). Portraying images of female staff, having female staff showcasing their work, and showing with evidence that women are part of the workforce, is more important for the success of female talent outreach than having female recruiters present at job fairs.

Within UNICEF Nepal, talent outreach needs to be shared responsibility of the HR unit, the programme sections and zone offices. Section chiefs need to understand that it is part of their job to look for female talent (Parisi, 2018).

4.3.2. COULD COMMUNICATING UNICEF'S COMMITMENT TO GENDER EQUALITY HELP ATTRACT WOMEN CANDIDATES?

Making UNICEF's commitment to gender parity public and communicating our goals to women could compel more women to apply. Job seekers' perception of the organisation influences whether they believe they would be a good fit as a newcomer (Avery, 2006) (Gardner, 1988). Evidence suggests that the following factors attract female job applicants: employee diversity, work-life balance, and the presence of similar colleagues were more important to women, whereas a high starting salary was more important to men (Avery, 2006, p. 159).

UNICEF Nepal can and should better communicate to external audience that it cares about gender equality, that it is a gender-sensitive and women-friendly organisation, which cherishes work-life balance. UNICEF Nepal could also publicise its diversity policy⁴ and gender parity targets. These measures signal that the organisation takes diversity seriously and believes in accountability (Huang, 2017). UNICEF could also further publicise UN top leaders' (including UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore's) personal and public commitments to gender equality as International Gender Champions (International Gender Champions, 2019).

Since 2016, with the creation of *Paradigm for Parity* – a coalition of female business leaders which encourages companies to follow a five-point plan to achieve gender parity by 2030 – and the White House Tech Inclusion Pledge, over 80 companies⁵ have set and publicized their gender diversity or parity goals either individually or as members of these coalitions. Some companies have even tied a portion of their top managers' bonuses to meeting certain diversity metrics, including how many women they hired in the previous year (Huang, 2017).

4.3.3. ARE JOB ADVERTISEMENTS TAILORED TO WOMEN HELPFUL TO ATTRACT MORE WOMEN?

Evidence suggests that effective job advertisements to attract women have three elements in common: use of language, use of images, and use of equal employment opportunity statements.

The language used in vacancy announcements plays a significant role in making women feel that they are fit for the job. Women are more likely to apply for jobs which explicitly mention women in the advertisement (e.g. policewoman) compared with job advertisements which use gender-neutral language (e.g. police officer) or male-only formulations (e.g. policeman) (Sczesny, 2016, p. 318). Job descriptions should explicitly encourage women to apply and should only contain criteria that are essential to the functions of the post. Non-essential qualifications that may limit female applicants should be removed (UN, 2017, p. 26).

Portraying images of women workforce job advertisements (e.g. on employment webpages, Facebook, LinkedIn or on banners at a job fair) is essential for organisations wishing to attract women applicants. Female job seekers will only apply if they can see evidence that women are employed by the organisation (Avery, 2006), (Rynes SL, 1991).

⁴ Nepal Country Office Human Resources Guidelines on Workforce Diversity (2016).

⁵ These companies include Accenture, AirBnB, American Electric Power, AOL, Astrazeneca, Bank of America, BASF, BHP Billiton, Ltd, Box, Cargill, General Mills, GoDaddy, Intel, Johnson & Johnson, Lyft, Nordstrom, Pinterest, SAP, Twitter, UNILEVER, Xerox, and Zynga among others.

Female job applicants respond more positively to job advertisements promoting policies of equal opportunity, as it enhances female perceptions of organisations. (Avery, 2006)

4.3.4. UN TRAINEESHIP PROGRAMME

The UN Traineeship Programme launched by the Nepal United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in 2011 is a promising practice that has enormous potential in terms of contributing to both gender parity and ethnic diversity. This 11-months-long paid⁶ programme, which is now in its seventh cohort in 2019, provides Nepalese youth from socially excluded groups professional skills and competencies through a practical training encompassing mentoring in a UN environment. The programme targets bachelor's degree holders belonging to socially excluded groups. A total of 220 trainees have been or are currently part of the programme over seven cohorts. Women are 60 per cent of the UN Trainees (Chhetri, UNDP Nepal HR Specialist, 2019b). UNICEF Nepal Country Office has hosted 60 UN Trainees since the programme's inception, of which 57 per cent have been women. Typically, trainees have some previous work experience in teaching (part or full-time).

This programme is promising as it enables trainees to obtain UN work experience which, albeit alone does not guarantee future employability with the UN, increases their chances of prospective employment. Data on current employment status of UN Traineeship alumni suggests that only 11 per cent of graduates from the first six cohorts are unemployed, the rest are either employed, pursuing further studies in Nepal or abroad. Whilst data on where the graduates are working is not available, anecdotal information from suggests that 10-15 per cent of UNICEF-hosted trainees end up being hired by UNICEF a few years after the programme ends (Gurung, 2019). One of reasons UN Trainees are not employed by UN directly after the programme is potentially that for most UN positions, having a masters' degree is a minimum eligibility criterion. Expanding the programme in terms of numbers of trainees, adapting it to include masters' graduates as well, and hosting women-only cohorts are promising strategies to have more women candidates in the pipeline for future recruitment.

4.3.5. ARE DIVERSITY POLICIES EFFECTIVE IN ATTRACTING WOMEN?

In Nepal, UNCT (Nepal United Nations Country Team (UNCT), 2010), UNICEF (UNICEF Nepal, 2016), UNDP (UNDP Nepal, 2009) and the SDC Swiss Cooperation Office (SDC Swiss Cooperation Office Nepal, 2007) have Workforce Diversity Policies or Guidelines which are *de facto* affirmative action plans with a view to achieving gender balance and ethnic diversity.

Whilst the double aim of these policies - the UN having a workforce which mirrors the composition of the Nepalese society (UNDP Nepal, 2009, p. 5) and rectifying deeply entrenched historic injustices – are both relevant, the problem is that these policies have not been effective in reaching either. Possible reasons for these policies being ineffective in reducing gender imbalance include: these policies are

⁶ Trainees of the first five cohorts received a monthly stipend of 15,000 NPR (roughly 135 USD) which was raised to 20,000 NPR (roughly 180 USD) after the sixth cohort. This amount was based on the market price.

not self-executing, they lower the bar⁷ for candidates but do not attract more female candidates and combining gender equality and social inclusion (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Working Group. International Development Partners Group, Nepal. , 2017) could be counter-productive for achieving gender parity. In Nepal, the caste-based exclusion is usually discussed jointly with gender. This means that when hiring, under-represented castes, ethnic minorities and women are all considered priority groups in diversity policies, and they are not ranked in order of importance. In practice, given the heightened importance placed on reducing caste-based discrimination, men from under-represented castes may be preferred over women if competing against each other. In a way, the caste card can 'trump' the gender card.

Proponents of affirmative action argue that it is a positive discrimination tool required to correct historic injustices. Findings from a study conducted amongst WFP Kenya staff suggest that staff perceive affirmative action to be a justifiable, equal and fair tool for women's employment (Njoroge, pp. 32,36). Literature on the criticality of having at least two women to the last stage of recruitment for her to have a chance of being hired reinforces the merits of affirmative action. Evidence suggests that when there is only one woman in a finalist pool, the odds of her being hired are statistically zero. But this dramatically changes when there is more at least two women in the finalist pool, irrespective of the total number of finalists (Stefanie K. Johnson, 2016). A likely reason for hiring managers not to hire the woman if she is the only woman in a pool of finalist is that hiring managers may perceive it to be risky to deviate from the norm. And if she is the only woman in the finalist pool then it highlights how different she is from the norm. Hiring managers and HR colleagues need to know that ensuring one woman reaches the interview or written assignment phase will not increase the chances of that woman getting the job. If managers can include two women in the finalist pool, then the women stand a real chance of getting hired (Stefanie K. Johnson, 2016).

Opponents to affirmative action question its fairness (Onsongo, 2009, p. 74) and consider affirmative action plans to be reversely discriminatory. Affirmative action plans may have drawbacks. For instance, male employees or applicants may perceive affirmative action as unfair, and this can stimulate backlash among male applicants who may feel unfairly disadvantaged by these policies (Gilbert & Stead, 1999, p. 240). Also, these policies can cause women who benefitted from affirmative action to be stigmatized as incompetent by employers, others (Leslie, Mayer, & Kravitz, 2014) as well as a negative self-perception of the woman herself (Gilbert & Stead, 1999, p. 240).

UNICEF Bangladesh, which has achieved gender parity without implementing affirmative action plans, is an opponent of this affirmative action. Arguments against its use echo those of the opponents of affirmative action mentioned above. Another argument is that UNICEF Bangladesh does not need to resort to affirmative action because there are plenty of capable Bangladeshi women. There is no need to positively discriminate because they are capable, what is required is to actively scout for female talent and attract them to work for UNICEF (Kargbo, 2018).

⁷ Some of the common elements of the diversity policies in Nepal include lowering the minimum requirements in terms of academic qualifications and minimum number of work experience; giving extra points when grading; and lowering the passing mark for written assignments to enable women to reach the following – interview - stage of the selection process.

5. SOLUTIONS IDENTIFICATION AND KICK-START

The following concrete, feasible, implementable solutions have been identified for achieving gender parity amongst national staff at UNICEF Nepal Country Office. These solutions will be presented and discussed with UNICEF Nepal senior management, as part of the monthly Country Office Management Team (CMT) meetings, which include gender parity as one of the standing agenda items. During the monthly UNICEF Country Management Team meeting, the Representative should go beyond asking for updates about gender parity and ask about gender metrics of previous month's recruitments, updates on actions being taken to achieve parity – temporarily hiring only women, presence in job fairs, outreach to universities, review of job-advertisements, and others. UNICEF Nepal could also consider temporarily slightly changing the organisational positioning of HR by creating a 'dotted' reporting line between the Representative and the HR manager. Currently, at UNICEF Country Office, the HR manager reports to the Operations chief, who in turn reports to the Representative. HR would be better positioned to strategically advise senior management on strategies to attain gender parity if the HR manager would directly report to the Representative.

TEMPORARILY HIRING ONLY WOMEN

Whilst hiring only women – even if temporarily under gender balance is achieved - may be legally contested on the grounds of gender discrimination, considering that more gentle measures, including workforce diversity policy, have not been effective in achieving gender balance at UNICEF Nepal, a temporary women-only hiring could be a potential solution worth pursuing.

Considering UN Secretary General's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity (2017), whereby the UN Secretary-General has pledged to reach parity across the entire UN system well before 2030. (UN, 2017, pp. 12-16);

Considering that other UN entities have implemented positive discrimination in recruitments to achieve gender balance (UNHCR woman-only recruitment policy in 1995-1996) and equitable geographical distribution (UN National Competitive Recruitment Examination, the Young Professionals Programme, and the International Organization for Migration);

Some practical examples and steps towards this include:

- Consult with Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) regarding the legality of temporarily hiring only women at UNICEF Nepal – either office-wide or for zone offices or functional areas/programmes that are more imbalanced - as a special measure until gender parity is achieved.
- Propose/suggest for UNCT to have a women-only cohort of the Nepal UN Traineeship Programme or alternatively UNICEF to request that all UN Trainees hosted by UNICEF to be women.
- Women-only drivers' hire for future recruitment of drivers for UN as whole, or at least for UNICEF-hired drivers.
- In the event of an emergency, if there are not enough qualified women in the pipeline, UNICEF Nepal can hire men as consultants to ensure having immediate response, whilst simultaneously reaching out to talent for temporary appointments.

TALENT OUTREACH

UNICEF Nepal Kathmandu-based Programme Section chiefs, Zone Office Chiefs and Operations Section managers are jointly responsible along with HR to be constantly on the lookout for female talent, to ensure that UNICEF Nepal has an equal number of female and male candidates (including consultants)

in the pipeline. Having qualified women in the pipeline is a crucial element to reduce the risk of hiring men on temporary appointments in the case of an emergency response. Some steps towards this include:

- Identify job fairs where UNICEF could be present, following a similar approach as UNICEF Bangladesh.
- Each programme section to meet with HR to identify which university programmes to target for outreach.
- Female staff from programme and operations sections - preferably Nepalese women in senior positions, at NOC-level - to attend, along with HR staff, job fairs and university outreach to provide testimonials of what their job entails.
- Outreach to hire female drivers, learning from UNDP Nepal's 2010 experience.
- Training sessions for UNICEF staff attending job fairs or sessions at universities to ensure that UNICEF staff are well-informed and articulate when speaking about UN and UNICEF policies related to maternity leave policies, breastfeeding policies, number of days of annual leave, availability of creche facility, breastfeeding space, amongst others (Parisi, 2018).
- Include in the performance assessment of senior management, programme section chiefs, zone office chiefs, chiefs of programmes/sections, programme staff NO-B and above a standard / automated indicator related to talent outreach with universities and gender parity in recruitment.

ADAPTING AND CREATING NEW TRAINEESHIP AND FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMMES

- Adapt the existing the Nepal UN Traineeship Programme to (1) raise the academic requirements from bachelor's degree to master's degree; (2) create a female only cohort; (3) increase the number of trainees. These changes could increase the employability of the trainees with UN agencies, as well as increasing number of qualified female candidates in the pipeline. Lessons learned and experience from implementing the programme since 2011 are valuable. This joint UN solution is more cost-effective than creating a new UNICEF-specific traineeship programme.
- In case adapting existing UN Traineeship Programme is not a viable option, UNICEF Nepal could explore the possibility of creating a UNICEF Nepal-specific Traineeship or Fellowship Programme, in partnership with public universities (possibly Tribhuvan University). Programme areas or zone offices with under-representation of women (e.g. WASH, Child Protection and Nutrition) could explore the possibility of establishing a specific fellowship in either a functional or geographic area.
- Create a structured (possibly female-only) Paid Internship Programme, building on lessons learned from UNICEF India CO internship programme, and adapting to be women-only. This could contribute to increase the number of qualified female candidates in the pipeline. To be effective – in terms of increasing employability of interns - entry requirements for applicants should include either being enrolled in graduate study programme (master's or PHD) or be a holder of a master's degree.

BETTER COMMUNICATING UNICEF'S GOALS ON GENDER PARITY

- UNICEF Nepal communicates on different media platforms corporate UNICEF-wide goals, policies and targets on gender equality, preferably in Nepali and with simple language and compelling graphic representations. The communication could include UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore's pledge as International Gender Champion, UN Secretary General's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity (2017), SWAP Scorecard and others.

JOB ADVERTISEMENTS TAILORED TO WOMEN

- Formulate job advertisements explicitly mentioning women in the language used to describe the position (Sczesny, 2016).
- UNICEF Nepal Website and recruitment/vacancy webpages (employment webpages, Facebook, LinkedIn or on banners at a job fair) to portray images of female staff.

6. VALUE CREATED FOR UNICEF

Beyond the practical application by UNICEF Nepal of solutions for achieving gender parity presented in this paper, this report also creates value UNICEF globally. This paper could inspire reflection at country office, regional office and headquarters on solutions to achieve a more diverse workforce respecting gender balance, equitable geographical distribution, caste and others. In sum, it could guide reflection on solutions for UNICEF to have a workforce which is more representative of the societies it works in.

In terms of gender balance, as this paper focuses on solutions to achieve gender parity at UNICEF Nepal, where women are under-represented, if the suggestions presented here are implemented and prove to be effective in achieving gender balance, these suggestions could be discussed with little adaptation in countries or regions where men are also over-represented.⁸ For countries and regions where women are over-represented⁹, solutions from this paper could be revised/adapted to have more men in the workforce, e.g. male-only hiring, attracting male candidates, amongst others. It could also serve as a reflection piece for achieving gender parity in functional areas of UNICEF's work which are dominated by either sex. Globally, for instance this paper could be a resource to explore solutions to attract more women to work in UNICEF functional areas which are skewed towards men: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, Transport, Information Communication Technology, and Health¹⁰, or to attract more men to work in functional areas dominated by women, including Early Childhood Development, Human Resources, Administration and Child Protection¹¹.

Beyond gender parity, lessons learned from this paper could potentially be adapted to other areas of unbalance in UNICEF's workforce, and to which UN is committed to, such as equitable geographical distribution (UN, 2012b), caste, amongst others.

Beyond UNICEF, these solutions could potentially be adapted and implemented by other UN entities, INGOs, NGOs, academic institutions, Governments and private sector more widely. If these solutions can be effective in UNICEF Nepal, they could potentially be useful in other contexts.

⁸ As per data stemming from UNICEF Human Resources Dashboard of 27 May 2019, regions where men are over-represented are West and Central Africa, South Asia Eastern and Southern Africa and Middle East and Northern Africa.

⁹ As per data stemming from UNICEF Human Resources Dashboard of 27 May 2019, regions where women are over-represented are Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and East Asia and Pacific Region.

¹⁰ As per data stemming from UNICEF Human Resources Dashboard of 26 May 2019, there is an over-representation of men in the following functional areas: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) (74 per cent are men), Transport (96 per cent are men), Information Communication Technology (80 per cent are men) and Health (61 per cent are men).

¹¹ As per data stemming from UNICEF Human Resources Dashboard of 26 May 2019, there is an over-representation of women in the following functional areas: Early Childhood Development (80 per cent are women), Human Resources (72 per cent are women), Administration (67 per cent are women) and Child Protection (59 per cent are women).

INTERVIEWS

Aino Efraimsson. Gender specialist. UN Women Nepal (23 April 2019)
Ayshanie Labe, UNDP Nepal Deputy Representative (6 February 2019)
Bandana Rana. UN CEDAW vice-chair (7 February 2019)
Bharati Silawal. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion expert. Former UNDP staff member. She was the facilitator of UNICEF Nepal Country Office- wide Gender Capacity Building Training held on 9-10 August 2018 (2 January 2019)
Binda Magar. Gender Specialist, UNDP Nepal (6 February 2019)
Giunia Valeria Gatta. EMMIO Capstone tutor. Professor at Bocconi School of Management (25 October 2018 & 7 February 2019)
Gloria Mukama. UNHCR Malawi Protection Specialist (25 April 2019)
Marcos Mendez Sanguos. UNICEF New York Headquarters HR specialist (identified by South Asia Regional Office HR to support Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan Country Offices to achieve gender parity (16 January 2019 & 10 April 2019 & 25 April 2019)
Marilyn Hoar, UNICEF Nepal Chief Education (4 February 2019)
Monika Sandvik-Nylund. UNICEF Kenya Chief Child Protection, former UNHCR staff member (25 April 2019)
Moon Gurung. UNV Nepal, former UNDP HR manager (22 April 2019)
Ranya Kargbo. UNICEF HR Manager at Middle East and North Africa Regional Office. Former UNICEF Bangladesh Country Office HR Manager (27 November 2018)
Rina Chhetri, HR specialist, UNDP Nepal (6 February 2019 & 19 April 2019)
Rownak Khan, UNICEF Nepal Country Office Deputy Representative (28 December 2018)

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