

Practical experiences of local governments



TIME DEMANDS ON WOMEN AND MEN: IMPACT ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

The constitution of Nepal promises to create a more inclusive, democratic society by addressing the longstanding inequalities and grievances based on gender, caste, ethnicity, and geography that fuelled past conflicts. One of the constitutional provisions is for more equal political representation of women and disadvantaged groups in local government. Quotas in the local elections of 2017 saw the election of 14,352 women out of a total 35,041 elected representatives, i.e., 41% women (Election Commission 2017). This is a historic achievement in the progression of women in the political sphere. However, election to political office cannot be equated with political empowerment.

The Interim Capacity Support for Federalism Project ICSFP (July 2018 – January 2020), a project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), focused on building the institutional and strategic capacities of selected local governments (rural and urban municipalities) – building their capacities to respond to citizens' demands through effective planning and budgeting, well-functioning thematic committees, and appropriately formulated legal frameworks. With technical assistance from Helvetas, the project sought inclusive and equitable representation and participation in all these processes. However, it was soon observed that the engagement of women was neither equal in numbers (the percentage of women attending activities was on average 22%) nor meaningful in terms of active participation. Those women present tended to listen, and rarely expressed an opinion. There are many possible reasons for this, rooted in socio-cultural “ideals” of passive, domestically oriented behaviour. One problem commonly expressed by women themselves was time scarcity. To explore and raise awareness on this issue, a time diary exercise was carried out in one of the working municipalities of ICSFP, namely, Siddhicharan. One of the long-term commitments made by this municipality in its visioning exercise is to become a “gender-friendly municipality”.

Time diary exercise and findings

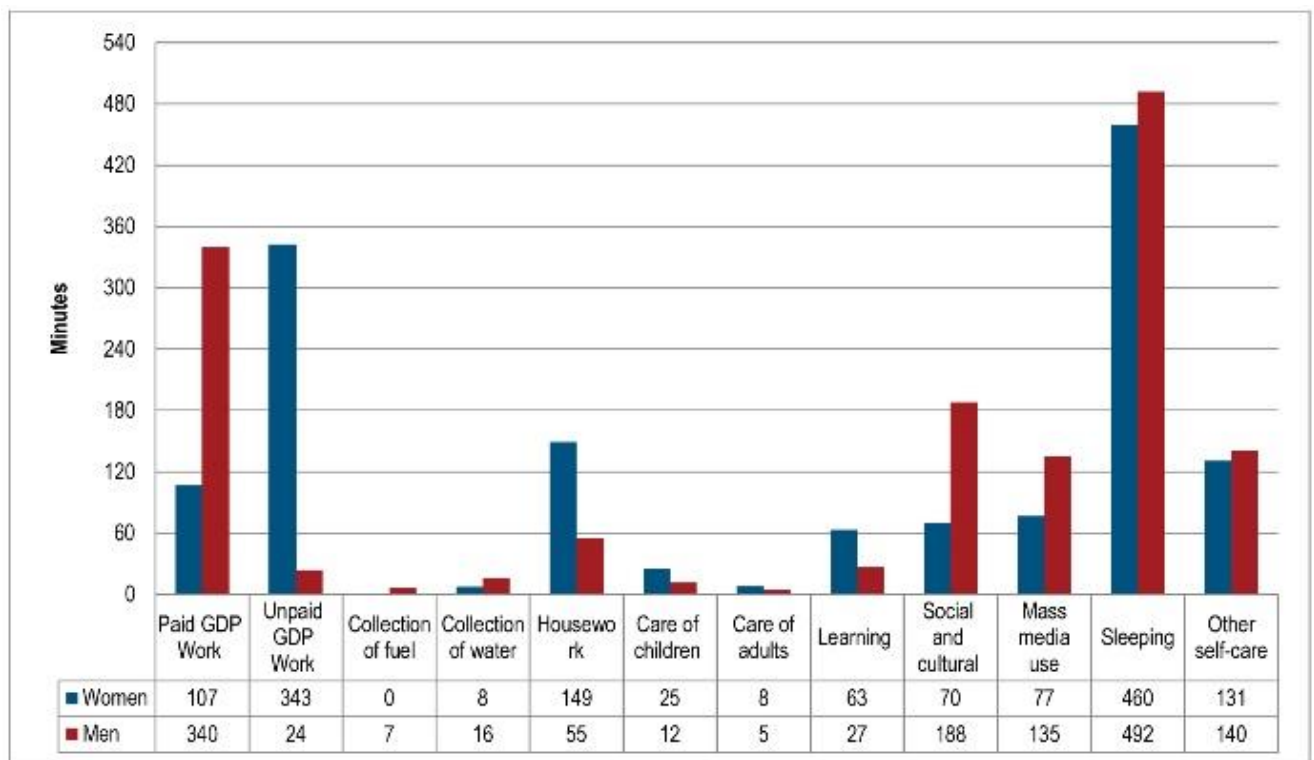
A time diary is a tool to quantify the time spent daily by an individual doing different kinds of work. The exercise was conducted by members of the executive committee of Siddhicharan municipality as well as a few administrative staff. In total, the participants numbered 19, of whom six were women, and the age group ranged from 30 to 67 years old. The data collected showed that on average within a 24-hour period, the women spent 10 hours and 39 minutes working, whilst the men spent 7 hours and 37 minutes. In other words, the working day of women was some 3 hours longer than that of men.

The graphs of the time use data collected, as shown below, indicate that women spent most of their time in unpaid work such as agriculture and care, while the men spent most of their

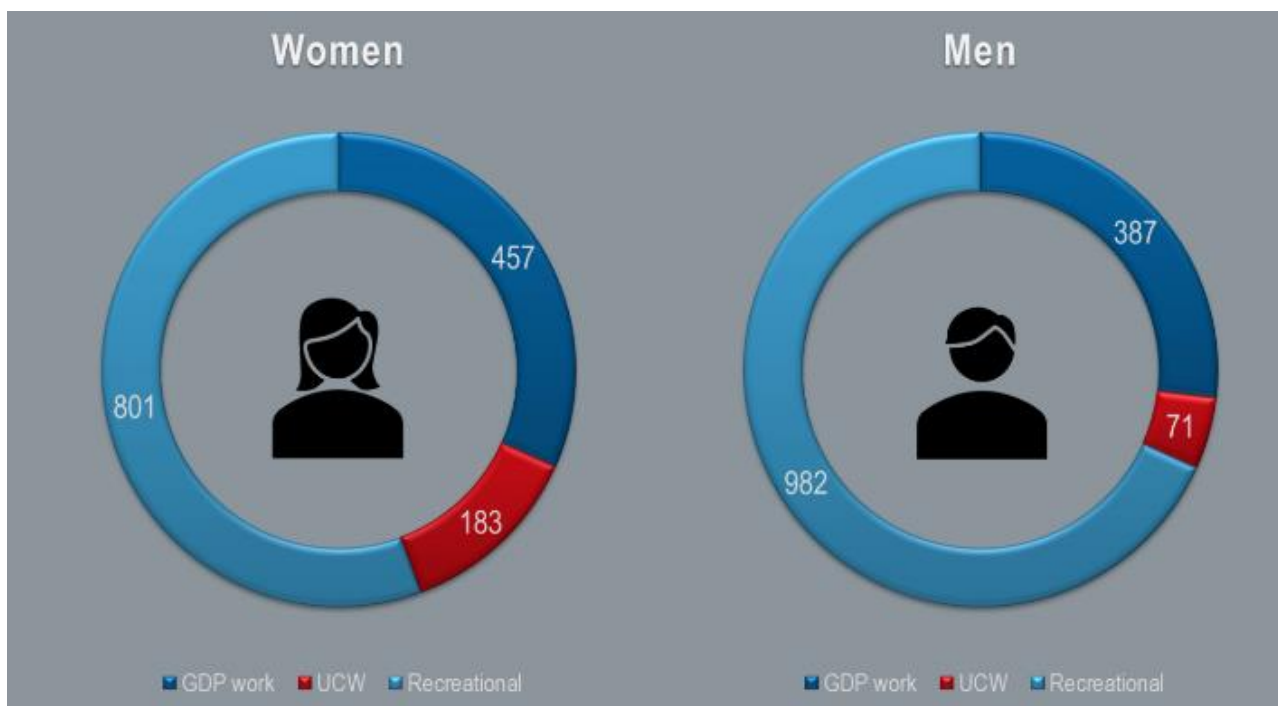
time in paid activities such as owning a business and working in an office.

On a daily average they spent a mere one hour and 10 minutes in unpaid care work, such work took women over three hours. Men also spent more time in recreational activities (social and cultural activities, use of mass media use, sleep/rest, self-care) but interestingly, women seemed to have spent more time than men in learning activities. This was possibly because they recognized the need to better inform themselves to conduct their duties effectively. These findings should not be extrapolated too widely, as the sample is small (particularly of women).

Nevertheless, the figures are striking, and crucial, allowed for evidence-based discussion amongst those concerned.



Graph 1: Comparative average of time use of women and men executive/administrative members of Siddhicharan municipality



Graph 2: Time use of women and men executive/administrative members of Siddhicharan municipality in three different categories of activities (in minutes)

Recognizing gender stereotypical behavior

Globally, men tend to spend more of their time in paid employment and women spend more time on unpaid work. This of course varies between different countries and contexts but is based on, and reproduces, a distinction between “male breadwinners” and “female caregivers”. The time diary exercise showed that Siddhicharan elected municipal representatives are no different. Although the women are at the frontline of local government, they have far more hurdles to overcome than men to be able to participate actively - one of them being the burden of unpaid work, and specifically unpaid care work.

for discussions and for determining indicators of “gender friendliness” by which the municipality could assess itself. The findings were discussed in a municipal meeting in early December 2019 alongside an analysis of the prevalence of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in the municipality, conducted by another SDC project specializing on this topic. Both women’s time scarcity and GBV were recognized and recorded in the meeting minutes as important issues to address in the municipality’s upcoming Gender Equality Strategy.

“Whenever I have to attend a meeting, I have to wake up at 3 am, finish all my household chores and only then attend it.” Sharmila Katwal, Municipal Executive member

Evidence-based planning

Often, women’s difficulties in managing all the tasks expected of them are dismissed as either their own business or (worse), their fault for being poor time managers. The time diary data, having been recorded by the municipal executives themselves, provided a factual base

Ways forward

Siddhicharan municipality has already shown itself to be ahead of many others in responding to gender-based needs. The most obvious example of this is the establishment of a One-Stop Crisis Center and safe house for women victims of GBV, both run by the municipality. In elaborating its Gender Equality Strategy, the

municipality is being encouraged to take the following into consideration.

- Stimulating public recognition of the demands placed on women by unpaid care responsibilities is the first step towards seeking ways to redistribute and reduce this burden at household, community and ultimately national level. In conducting the time diary exercise, the executives of Siddhicharan municipality have data that they can use as an argument for change. Ideally, they should become role models for making this change – putting into practice activities in their own lives that redistribute and reduce unpaid care responsibilities and publicizing what they are doing through further tracking their time allocation.

“Thinking about my everyday routine, I do not get to spend much time at home due to the nature of my work. My wife does all of it [housework]. If everybody in the family works together, dividing their roles, everybody will have a happy family.”
Madan Bahadur Magar, Ward Chair, Siddhicharan Ward 6 after completing the time diary

“I realized that nowadays I spend a lot of time in supervising the cultural events taking place through our Guthi [kinship clan]. I spend very less time at home due to my meetings and travel.... “Any work done by any individual has to be respected. The municipality is committed to and is already working on fair wages for women and men. Everybody needs to support one another in their work.” Mohan Kumar Shrestha, Mayor, Siddhicharan municipality

- The redistribution of household chores between family members is a particularly challenging issue in the context of one or more family members being absent on labor migration to an urban area or abroad. In this case, there are clear limits to redistributing work within the family or household. Here the role of public services should be considered – supporting women in ways that do not reinforce gender stereotypes but rather mitigate them and offer alternatives. Thus, for example, flexible childcare provision by the municipality is one obvious means of freeing women to attend higher education or skills training, and access employment opportunities. Regularly involving women in the planning of development interventions, pro-actively seeking their opinions and encouraging them to speak out, also gives space for identifying appropriate, progressive gender-responsive measures.
- Related to the above is the need for men in positions of power to be conscious of their agency and to refrain from reinforcing traditional roles and ways of speaking. Here, for example, keeping track of the amount of time spent speaking by men and women in meetings, and the number of proposals put forward by men and women, can be used to promote reflection and changed behavior patterns.
- A time diary exercise amongst a larger sample of the municipality’s population could be used to quantify the amount of time invested by women in unpaid care more generally – thus rendering it visible within local and national accounts.

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