

Social Inclusion in Nepal: An Assessment

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Doi: <https://doi.org/10.3126/pragya.v14i2.90765>

Abstract

Inclusion, also known as affirmative action, has been regarded as one of the tools to increase the participation of underrepresented groups and communities in public services. However, many scholars believe that this system needs proper oversight, as it may undermine the merit-based system in the civil service. In Nepal, the past merit-based bureaucratic system failed to recruit people from marginalized communities in proportion to their numbers. Due to this, a social imbalance was created, and it prevented a larger section of society from having access to opportunities and thereby excluded them. Similarly, the absence of respectable representation in nation-building activities prevented equal benefit sharing. To minimize the imbalance in public service, the Civil Service Act (2007) of Nepal introduced a reservation system in government jobs. Similarly, the government has implemented a social inclusion policy in politics, government appointments, the budget, and other policy making process in various agencies. This article, based on the secondary source of data, aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the inclusion policy in the civil service, educational institutions, policies, and other various sectors of Nepal.

Keywords: Exclusion, reservation, quota system, representation, marginalized communities

Introduction

In terms of indigenous culture, tradition, and languages, Nepal is one of the most diverse countries in the world, which has 142 caste/ ethnic groups and 124 languages. Similarly, there are 8 major religious groups, in which Hindu (81.2%), Buddhist (8.2%), Islam (5.1%), Kirat (3.2%), Christian (1.8%), and Prakriti Pujak (Animist), Bon, Jain, Sikha, and Baha'i Faith are followed by smaller communities. Economically, it is also a diverse country. Economically, 8.1 million people reside in poverty. Among them, women and girls are more likely to be poor, despite their noteworthy contributions to the economy, especially through voluntary care and domestic work. More than one-third of children of Nepal under 5 years are stunted, and 10% suffer wasting due to acute undernourishment. Without a concerted effort to tackle inequality and pursue policies that benefit the many rather than the richest

few, the poorest and most marginalized Nepalis will continue to be excluded from progress (OXFAM, 2019). To address these inequalities, Nepal has implemented a social inclusion policy since the 1990s and enshrined it in the constitution since 2015. The constitution outlines a variety of laws, policies, acts, and procedures that support the social inclusion policy. The World Bank (2013) defines this as a process aimed at enhancing the conditions for individuals and groups to engage in society, while also improving the capabilities, opportunities, and dignity of those disadvantaged due to their identity, allowing them to participate more fully in societal activities (pp. 3-4). Likewise, the Commission of the European Communities (2003) describes it as a process that guarantees the necessary opportunities and resources for full participation in economic, social, political, and cultural life, enabling socially excluded groups to achieve a standard of living considered ordinary within society. This process also endorses superior participation in decision-making and access to fundamental rights for these groups (pp. 9).

Social exclusion is recognized as a significant issue within the country. The root causes of exclusion are primarily linked to the caste system, socio-cultural hierarchies, and the male-controlled nature of society. However, there is no universally accepted set of criteria for measuring social exclusion. The impoverished can be found across a diverse array of social groups, regardless of caste, religion, or geographical location. Women are represented in all groupings, nevertheless of caste and ethnicity, as well as individuals with disabilities and children. In general, six dimensions are recognized: gender, caste, ethnicity, region, religion, and physical condition (GSEA, 2006). The challenges faced by these marginalized groups include poverty, exclusion from mainstream development, discrimination, under-representation in governments and public administration, and inadequate skills. Additionally, cultural, linguistic, and religious rights are not sufficiently safeguarded.

Methods of data collection

This article applies the descriptive research design based on the objective. This article uses both primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected using an interview schedule with 120 civil service employees selected according to the inclusion criteria. These 120 respondents were nominated by applying a purposive sampling method. Secondary data was collected from reference books, reports, research articles, and other relevant documents. Mainly, there are six categories of social exclusion based on sex, caste, ethnicity, region, religion, and physical condition (GSEA, 2006). But the Central Department of Anthropology (CDSA, 2014) mentioned the six dimensions, i.e., social, economic, political, cultural, gender, and social cohesion of social inclusion. This article used some of the indicators like income, education, etc.

Theoretical Concept of Inclusion

Social inclusion is the process of improving the condition of the disadvantaged groups based on culture, gender, infirmity, race, ethnicity, location, religion, economic and social status through improved opportunities, access to various types of resources, and respect for human rights (UN, 2016). It has no single rigid theory but a framework focused on ensuring everyone has the opportunity to access resources, dignity, economic, social, and cultural rights, combating barriers of poverty and discrimination by improving access to services, education, jobs, and community life, creating a sense of belonging and shared prosperity. So, this article is based on the theory of social inclusion that focuses on participation, access to resources, all aspects of human rights, dignity, empowerment, and decision-making.

Situation of Social Inclusion in Nepal

Nepal has introduced diverse kinds of policies to resolve the problems of social exclusion. It was started from the Rana regime, and the abolition of slavery in 1934 was one of the prominent steps during that period. Some main wits are beleaguered to endorse equality, participatory development, social sanctuary, positive discernment, reservation on administration provision, local development, targeted program, gender planning, and strategies of ending all forms of discrimination. To upsurge participation in civil service, the government announced the inclusion policy with the amendment of the Civil Service Act, for females, ethnic groups, Madhesis, Dalit, the disabled, and people of remote areas.

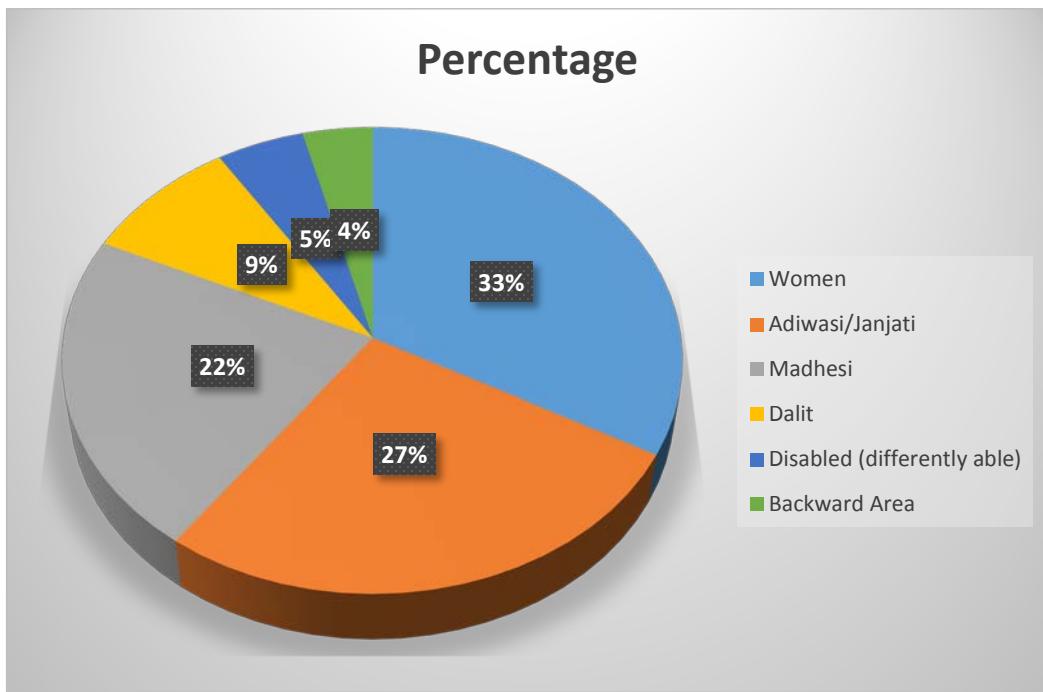
Table 1: Inclusive Governance in Nepalese Civil Service (2000-2024)

Introduction of Legal Frameworks	Civil Service Act 1993, 2007, 2015
Legal Revisions and Updates	Amendments in 2007
Civil Service Composition	Gender, Ethnicity, Caste breakdown
Representation Ratios	45% Women, Minorities vs Population
Women in Civil Service (2000-2024)	5% (2000), 12% (2007) to 28.45% (2024)

Source: Bhul (2025)

The constitution of Nepal (2015) provides that special arrangements for socially and culturally backward women, Dalits, tribals/tribes, Madhesis, Tharus, Muslims, oppressed classes, backward classes, minorities, marginalized communities, economically backward Khas-Aryas, backward areas, etc. Accordingly, the Civil Service Act has been amended to

provide 55 percent open and 45 percent reservation in filling posts in the civil service. Assuming the reserved seats to be 100%, there has been provision for 33% reservation for women, 27% for tribals/tribes, 22% for Madhesis, 9% for Dalits, 5% for the disabled, and 4% for backward areas. But in practice, it has some problems, like a lack of educational qualification, awareness, remoteness, etc., and the number of applications is insufficient. The provisions of social inclusion in the civil service are mentioned in section 7.7 of the Civil Service Act. According to this act, 45% of the posts to be fulfilled by open competition shall be set aside and be filled by having a separate competition between the following candidates only, by considering the percentage into 100%:



Source: Civil Service Act (2007).

Figure1: Social Inclusion Category and its Percentage

According to the Civil Service Act, "backward area" means Accham, Kalikot, Jajarkot, Jumla, Dolpa, Bajhang, Bajura, Mugu, and Humla districts, and "women, Adiwas/Janajati, Madhesi, and Dalit" means women, Adiwas/Janajati, Madhesi people, and Dalit who are backward economically and socially. All the residents of these districts and all women, Adiwas/Janajati, Madhesi, and Dalit, are considered economically and socially backward.

Available posts to be filled by people with disabilities shall be filled through competition between such disabled individuals only, as may be quantified for any specific nature of work. Similarly, according to the Federal Civil Service Act (2082), 49% of the total vacant seats are reserved for diverse ethnic groups by dividing fifty-fifty percent to male and female, assigning as follows:

Table 2: Social Inclusion in the Federal Civil Service Act

SN	Groups	Total Population (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Reserved Population (%)
1	Dalit	13	13	16	14.5
2	Adibasi Janajati	28.5	26	33	29.5
3	Marginal Khas-Arya	31.2	28	10 (Poor)	19.0
4	Madhesi	15.3	16	20	18.0
5	Tharu	6.6	5	7	6
6	Muslim	4.4	4	5	4.5
7	Remote area		4	5	4.5
8	Differently abled	2	4	4	4
9	Women	51.5	50		50

Source: Federal Civil Service Act (2082) and Report of State Order and Good Governance Committee (2077 BS)

The annual report of the Public Service Commission (2081/82 BS) has mentioned that, out of the total 2,592 candidates recommended during the reporting period, 875 (33.76 percent) candidates are from the Brahmin Hill, and 21.57% from the Chhetri caste. The classification of candidate recommendations based on caste/ethnic group is presented in the following table.

Table 3: Social Inclusion based on Caste/ethnicity

S.N.	Caste/ethnic groups	Assistant level	Officer level	Total	Percentage
1	Brahman (Hill)	458	417	875	33.76
2	Chhetri	417	142	559	21.57
3	Magar	87	27	114	4.40
4	Newar	55	57	112	4.32

5	Yadav	74	25	99	3.82
6	Tharu	82	13	95	3.67
7	Brahman (Terai)	52	36	88	3.40
9	Bishwokarma	36	19	55	2.12
10	Teli	38	15	53	2.04
11	Thakuri	34	17	51	1.97
12	Rai	33	9	42	1.62
13	Koiri/Kushbaha	28	7	35	1.32
14	Tamang	23	8	31	1.20
15	Pariwar	17	10	27	1.04
16	Others	263 (1434)	93 (802)	356 (2236)	13.75 (86.25)
17	Total	1697	895	2592	100

Source: Annual report of PSC (2081/82)

Among the 78 caste and ethnic groups, only 15 caste/ethnic groups have secured their positions, with more than 86% remaining groups having 13.75 %. Some of the ethnic communities have no seats in the public service.

Results and Discussion

In the last four years, the Public Service Commission has recommended 39,979 posts for recruitment in various services under the categories of Civil Service and Nepal National Health Service. Out of these, 25,023 posts have been recommended for open posts and 14,956 posts for reserved posts. According to the National Inclusion Commission (2079), 12 percent of the open posts have been recommended through open internal competition, while only 53 posts have been reserved. Among total reserved seats, 5,180 (34.63 percent) were reserved for women, 543 (3.63 percent) for backward areas, 4,057 (27.12 percent) for indigenous/ethnic communities, 3,199 (21.38 percent) for Madhesi, 1,308 (8.74 percent) for Dalit, and 698 (4.66 percent) for differently abled people.

Social Inclusion Category

This research is based on the 120 respondents who had joined the civil service through the policy of inclusion. This provides a check to see if the respondents really come from families with lower socio-economic conditions. Different parameters were used to derive the information, as are presented below in the following topics/tables:

Table 4: Classification of the respondents according to their inclusion categories

Inclusion Category	Number of respondents	Percentage
Woman	44	37
Adivasi/Janajati	36	30
Madhesi	34	27
Dalit	4	5
Disabled	2	2
Remote Area	0	0
TOTAL:	120	100

Source: Field study, 2024

The respondents reviewed come from different inclusion categories and roughly represent the quotas set aside by the Public Service Commission. The women have the largest number, with 37 percent, whereas no respondents were recruited through the remote area quota.

Family Background

In case of their family background, 35.5 percent of the fathers of the employees had completed 12th standard, while 42.22 percent had completed IA or higher. The percentage of unmarried fathers was only 22.22 percent, while that of mothers was 53.33 percent. While 40 percent of the working-age population had fathers in agriculture, only 33.33 percent were in social services, and 8.8 percent were in business (National Inclusion Commission, 2079). In my research, I found that 56.8 percent come from a joint family and 43.2 percent from a nuclear family.

Economy

The economy is the most important factor in social inclusion. It has income, expenditure, job/occupation, distribution of resources, etc. Among these, the following table shows that the income level.

Table 5: Classification of the respondents according to the annual income of their families

Annual income of the family	Number of respondents	Percentage
Less than 400,000	28	23
Between 400,000 and 700,000	72	60
Between 700,000 and 1 million	16	13
Over 1 million	4	3
TOTAL:	120	100

Source: Field study, 2024

The distribution of the family income of the respondents is similar to the average income distribution of the households in Nepal. The median income range falls within 400,000-700,000 Nepali Rupees, and a few respondents have more or less than that range. However, one observation with several

respondents is that not all family occupations generate monetary income, as seen in cases of subsistence agriculture and other non-monetary income-generating trades. According to NLSS- III (2011), annually, Rs. 356,555 people belongs in rich category in Nepal (Gyanwali, 2017). It shows that social inclusion categories come from a lower economic status is not willingly reflected here, and most of them come from the higher class. Similarly, the major occupation of the respondents is given in the following table.

Table 6: Classification of the respondents according to the primary occupation of their parents

Primary Occupation of parents	Number of respondents	Percentage:
Agriculture	36	30
Small business/craft	44	37
Government salaried	24	20
Private salaried	16	13
TOTAL:	120	100

Source: Field study, 2024

The primary occupations of the respondents' parents were mainly agriculture and small business/craft. A significant proportion of respondents had parents who were government-salaried, with government school teachers being the most common occupation.

Education

Most of the bureaucrats in the social inclusion category come from a community college. 42.22 percent had completed their education from both community and private educational institutions.

Among them, 40 percent obtained their full vocational qualifications from community colleges and 17.77 percent from private institutions (National Inclusion Commission, 2079).

Table 7: Classification of the respondents according to the maximum education of their parents

Maximum Education level	Number of respondents	Percentage:
Illiterate	4	3
SLC/Below SLC	72	60
Intermediate Level	32	27
Bachelor level	10	8
Higher than Bachelor	2	2
TOTAL:	120	100%

Source: Field study, 2024

The maximum education level of the parents was reviewed so as to determine the level of education in the households of the respondents, which would help in creating a basis for understanding the awareness threshold of the respondents' families. The results clearly show that the education level is not very high, as 63 percent of the parents have studied only up to SLC (Formerly SLC-School Leaving Certificate and currently renamed as SEE- Secondary Education Examination). However, compared with the age-wise distribution of the parents of the respondents, this statistic does not seem too deviated from the national level.

Table 8: Classification of the respondents according to the type of secondary school attended

Type of secondary school attended by the respondent	Number of respondents	Percentage:
Government Community School	72	60
Missionary School	0	0
Private English School	48	40
TOTAL:	120	100

Source: Field study, 2024

The above table shows that, predominantly, with 60 percent, the respondents obtained their secondary schooling from government /community schools, as those are the only schools that are available in the rural areas of Nepal. A substantial number, 40 percent, of the respondents studied in private English schools, which implies the inclination of the parents in modern times to enroll their students in English medium school as these schools are perceived to be better than government schools.

Impacts of inclusion policy in the civil service

The Civil Service Act 1993 (as amended) did not include a provision for inclusion. Before the inclusion policy was introduced by the Government of Nepal in 2007, the proportion of women in the civil service was only eleven percent. Similarly, the percentage of Dalit, Muslim, and disabled people was virtually zero; Adivasi/Janajati and Madhesi had a slightly higher in percentage. The percentage of Khas/Arya people was as high as 80%. Because of the implementation of the inclusion policy, the percentage of women, Adivasi/Janajati, Madhesi, Dalit, disabled, and people from backward areas is cumulative in the civil service. The domination of the Khas-Arya people in civil service has been increasingly declining over the last 10 years. The inclusion of various social, cultural, religious, ethnic, and gender groups and remote areas has made government services more reachable to the local

communities, and a sense of proprietorship is growing towards civil service among women and other marginalized communities. According to the National Inclusion Commission (2079), out of the total 14,956 recommendations for reservation from the Public Service Commission, the highest number of recommendations were made by women (5,180) or 34.63 percent of the total recommendations, while the lowest number (543) or 3.63 percent were made by the least backward classes. The second largest number after women was made by the unemployed/unemployed (4,057) or 27.12 percent, followed by the Madhes (3,199) or 21.38 percent. Among the reserved groups, 1,308 (8.74 percent) were recommended by the Dalits and 698 (4.66 percent) by the disabled.

Similarly, the government has commenced to internalize the spirit of positive discrimination while making political appointments. The practice of approving programs and distributing budget for them in the spirit of reservation and positive discrimination is increasing, and seats reserved for women, Adivasi/Janajati, Madhesi, and Dalit are actually reserved for socially and economically backward women and Adivasi/Janajati, Madhesi, and Dalits. As a result of this policy, participation of women and marginalized communities is increasing while the portion of Khas/Arya is declining. Consequently, those communities whose domination is on the wane seem to have launched a campaign in mainstream and social media to belittle those women and relegated people who have joined the civil service through reserved quotas.

Due to the reservation policy of the government, the number of ethnic communities, Dalits, women, and economically backward areas has tremendously increased in all sectors. According to BK. (2078), the total number of judges in the Supreme Court, High Court, and District Court is 459. Of these, five (1 percent) are from the Dalit community, out of the total strength of 65,500 in the Nepal Police, and 6,192 (9.45%) are from the Dalit community, out of the 87,972 members of the Nepal Army, and 7,163 (8.14%) are from the Dalit community. But the representation of Madhesi Bahun/Chhetri is 413 percent, 197 percent of Khas/Aryans. While Muslims have only 16 percent, and Dalits have only 11 percent. The proportionality of Madhesi Bahun/Chhetri is 313 percent higher and Khas/Aryans 97 percent higher, while Muslims have 84 percent and Dalits have 89 percent lower.

Similarly, the presence of 3.89 and 19.14 percent of indigenous/indigenous people, 5 and 17.49 percent of Madhesis, 2.5 and 2.6 percent of Dalits, and 5 and 1.89 percent of women in the posts of Chief Village Officer and Chief Administrative Officer in Nepal, respectively (National Inclusion Commission, 2079). The total number of open referrals in the

Construction and Nepal Health Services is 25,023, distributed in 11 services in varying numbers. The most open referrals are in the Nepal Health Services, with 8,022 referrals, accounting for 32.03 percent of the total referrals, followed by the Nepal Administration Services, with 7,759 referrals, accounting for 30.98 percent of the total referrals. If we take the two services together, the total referrals are 15,781, accounting for 63.03 percent of the total referrals. In addition, Nepal Foreign Service, Nepal Agricultural Planning and Statistics Service, and Nepal Accounting Service received only 166 (0.6 percent), 137 (0.54 percent), and 157 (0.6 percent) recommendations under this inclusion criterion, during this fourteenth-year period. The remaining six services, namely Nepal Industrial Service, Nepal Forest Service, Nepal Justice Service, Nepal Miscellaneous Service, Nepal Agricultural Service, and Nepal Education Service, received 35 percent of the total recommendations, amounting to 8,813 persons. (National Inclusion Commission, 2079). It suggests that they have the potential to transform not only the administrative culture but also the broader culture of the country. As the majority increasingly demands a change in their experience and perception of their own rights, the traditional one-sided perception of rights is shifting. The idea that everyone is equal and that everyone is important is growing. The social structure based on this Arab division has been transformed into harmony and social harmony. Nepali society is gradually becoming more egalitarian.

Critical Appraisal

According to the Inclusion Commission, since the implementation of reservations, the Public Service Commission has stated that 25,023 people have registered for open and 14,956 for reservations. Among them, 5,160 women, 4,057 Madhesis, 3,199 indigenous communities, 1,308 Dalits, 698 people with disabilities, and 534 people have entered from backward areas. The Inclusion Commission has reported that there is a dominance of certain surnames in reserved seats. The report mentions that Chaudhary, Shrestha, and Rai have taken the opportunity in 38.92 percent of the seats reserved for indigenous communities. Similarly, the commission has stated that Yadav, Sah, Chaudhary, Mahato, and Shah have benefited from 50.64 percent of the seats reserved for the Madhesi community. Bishwakarma and Nepali have got the opportunity in 37.46 percent reserved for the Dalit community. The report mentions that Joshi, Budha, Shahi, Upadhyay, and Thapa have benefited from the backward areas. (Magar, 2079).

Similarly, the Supreme Court (2079) also questioned the inclusion and quota system of Nepal. The Supreme Court's decision on the reservation dispute, which referred to the term 'Tarmara class', has sparked a deep debate in the social and political arena. The judgment states that the essence of social justice is to distribute reservation facilities based on need

and justification, excluding the newly wealthy class, i.e., the 'Tarmara class'. While saying this, the court did not say that the facilities received by any of the 24 social or cultural groups listed in Articles 18 or 42 of the Constitution, as women, Madhesi, Dalit, and backward classes, should be transferred to others. It was not said that the Madhesi quota or Dalit quota should be cut and given to the Khas-Arya or Muslim class. It was only said that since the newly wealthy class does not need such facilities, it is in accordance with the spirit of the Constitution to provide them only to those who need them. While interpreting this, the court has interpreted the phrase "socially or culturally backward classes" in front of each cluster in Article 18(3) of the Constitution and has only made a directive order stating that if the class within that cluster is not also socially or culturally backward, then it is appropriate to enact a law in such a way that its facilities are given to the economically and socio-economically backward class within it (Bhattarai, 2078). These data indicate that the inclusive policy in Nepal is not satisfactory. It has some contradictory issues, debates, and is not properly implemented.

Conclusion

Inclusion policy has been regarded as one of the tools to increase the participation of underrepresented groups and communities in public services. Though numerous scholars believe that this system requires appropriate handling, as it may destroy the merit-based system in civil service. Civil service is part of government, and in a democratic system, people of every community have the right to participate (Dhakal, 2013). The inclusion policy announced in Nepal has formed an encouraging atmosphere for the marginalized to enter the government sectors, political appointments, and civil services. Most of those unrepresented communities have got chance through the reservation system, but exclusion based on religion, language, and class has not been recognized by the inclusion policy. Religious minorities like Buddhist and Muslim people are under-represented till now. In the case of women, Dalits, and marginal communities, the reservation policy has been able to attract them towards civil service and other sectors of the government, and the number of applications of women, Dalits, marginal communities, and people from remote areas seems to be increasing. But, among the applicants, few people have been able to enter the service without reserved quotas. So, capacity development programs are needed to increase their competitiveness. The objectivity of the reservation system, being a promotion of the economically and socially backward communities, requires corrective measures to control the dominant caste group utilizing the quota system to enter the civil service.

Out of these benefits, inclusion policies have lots of shortcomings. The verdict of the Supreme Court and the report of the social inclusion commission have indicated these shortcomings. The implementation of this policy created a social imbalance, and it prevented a larger section of society from having access to opportunities and thereby excluded them. Similarly, the absence of respectable representation in nation-building activities prevented equal benefit sharing. This is why the Civil Service Act of Nepal

introduced an inclusion system in government jobs. Moreover, the ultimate objective of this policy is capability enhancement, as said by Sen (2000), so more considerations are needed in building meaningful participation. It is believed that the inclusion policy of Nepal has not given comprehensive attention to all the dimensions of inclusion and exclusion, but its effects on generating attraction of women, Dalits, people of backward areas, and marginalized people towards the national bureaucratic system are praiseworthy.

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