



# Economic Empowerment of Nepalese Women and Marginalized Groups

At the Balaju School of Engineering and Technology

Uniterra is a Canadian volunteer cooperation and international development program that is jointly operated by WUSC (World University Service of Canada) and CECI (the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation). The program supports inclusive economic development to benefit women and youth in 14 countries across Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Uniterra works with key private, public, and civil society partners to facilitate growth and change in markets that have the greatest impact on the marginalized.

## Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Vocational Schools

**The Balaju** School of Engineering and Technology (BSET) is a member school of the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT), an apex body of over 600 vocational schools, and is funded by the Government of Nepal.

Nepalese youth, particularly women and other excluded groups, have significant challenges securing employment. In response, CTEVT and BSET aim to attract more women and excluded groups to their vocational schools. They also aim to ensure that their programs better respond to the needs of employers and achieve 100% employment of their graduates. This goal is at times undermined by a lack of an inclusive teaching and learning environment that can provide opportunities for all.

Staff and leadership from CTEVT state that issues of gender, social inclusion and discrimination are only understood theoretically by staff. Female staff are under-represented, and not always acknowledged or listened to by their male colleagues. Female students are at times subject to harassment when teachers are absent.

**Country** Nepal

**Program** Uniterra Volunteer Program  
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**Date** 2017–2019

**Implementing partner** Balaju School of Engineering and Technology, Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training

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**Key themes of the story** Inclusion of women, non-traditional trades, vocational training



*Feelings and thoughts of students and staff have changed... Male students support and cooperate with female students instead of bullying or harassing them. People talk about the discrimination they feel.*

**Usha Adhikari**  
Head of BSET's GESI unit

**Sushma Tiwari**, a 23 year old graduate of BSET, has just been recruited for her dream job at the Nepal Electricity Authority, a permanent, well paid government position with benefits. Sushma stated: "As a woman there are too many difficulties... People say you are a woman, you cannot do it... ladies should only work in the office but I didn't want an office job!" The instructors at BSET encouraged and supported her. The female head of the Electricity Department was her role model and male students accepted her. Sushma also highlighted the inclusive environment for marginalised groups. "Teachers said you are all students, not Dalit, not ladies. What matters is our skills not our caste".

## Vocational education: An opportunity for economic empowerment of women and excluded groups

The Skills Development Project (SDP) is an Asian Development Bank and Government of Nepal funded project, implemented by CTEVT with support from WUSC and CECI, Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICAN) and Industrial Enterprise Development Institute. The project contributes to making CTEVT and ten model public schools more efficient, market-driven, and responsive to gender equality and social inclusion (GESI).

In 2017, **Nathalie Paradis**, a Unitererra Program volunteer, supported the CTEVT and BSET Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Units to better develop and implement their action plans. This included developing and facilitating drama sessions and rolling out a training module for teachers and students to raise awareness and skills in gender equality and social inclusion in the context of vocational training. In addition, she supported the institutions to develop a robust reporting system for harassment and discrimination through finalising complaint forms and procedures for students to report discriminatory behavior.

CTEVT and BSET requested more support, and so in January 2018, Nathalie began a second mandate with Unitererra. She is currently supporting CTEVT in reviewing its draft GESI policy and strategy which will apply to not only CTEVT but also to all its member schools. During her second mandate, Nathalie wrote two handbooks to support the work of SDP and CTEVT: *Gender Equality and Social Inclusion, A Handbook for CTEVT Staff and Students of Nepal*, and *TVET Sector, Mentorship Program for Soft Skills*.

### Results and next steps

Working in the context of an ongoing funded initiative with both government and donor support has allowed Nathalie to ensure that her actions are sustainable. BSET's GESI Unit has grown from 1 to 4 members (including 2 women) and will be adding additional staff and student members in the coming months.

The 10 model schools have for the first time a gender and social inclusion budget allocated by CTEVT to implement their action plans. Staff of the Unit continues to facilitate gender and social inclusion training for teachers and students in all departments, integrate concepts of equality and inclusion into school curriculum and organize special events with external speakers. As an example of concrete action, schools have established washrooms for women with sanitary pad distributors and disposal containers.

Complaint mechanisms and procedures for investigating, addressing and settling claims of discrimination have been formalized and institutionalized into regular reporting practice. There are many opportunities on the horizon to further scale this innovation, as **other CTEVT schools have expressed interest in replicating the BSET initiatives**.

### What have we learned?

The results achieved by CTEVT and BSET, supported by volunteers from the Unitererra Program, can be attributed in part to:

- The program's alignment with the policy of the Government of Nepal to address unequal power relations experienced by people, on the grounds of gender, wealth, ability, location, caste, ethnicity, language, etc.;
- Unitererra Program volunteers and the SDP have provided concrete and complementary support to CTEVT and BSET; and
- Some members of the GESI Units of the 10 model schools and CTEVT have assumed the role of GESI champions, providing the context to mainstream more durable attitudinal changes regarding gender and social inclusion.

SDP has provided indicators for monitoring GESI, but moving forward it is essential that CTEVT institutionalizes its proper mechanism for monitoring the implementation of its commitments towards gender equality and social inclusion.