

Gender Diversity and Organizational Performance: An Empirical Study of Leadership Representation in Nepal and South Asia

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Abstract

Gender diversity in leadership has emerged as a pivotal component of effective management and sustainable organizational development, particularly within developing economies such as Nepal and the broader South Asian region. This empirical study investigates the relationship between gender diversity in leadership representation and organizational performance through a mixed-method approach that integrates both primary and secondary data sources. Grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), Upper Echelons Theory and Social Role Theory, the research explores how gender-inclusive leadership structures influence innovation, employee satisfaction, decision-making quality and financial outcomes. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 180 mid and senior-level managers across the banking, manufacturing, education and service sectors in Nepal. Secondary data were obtained from organizational annual reports, national gender statistics and international databases such as UN Women, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report and the Asian Development Bank's gender indicators. Using descriptive statistics, correlation and multiple regression analyses, the study reveals a significant positive association between gender diversity in leadership positions and organizational performance. Furthermore, organizations with inclusive gender policies demonstrated higher innovation capacity, stronger employee engagement and improved adaptability compared to those with limited female representation in decision-making roles. The findings provide robust empirical evidence supporting the strategic and ethical importance of gender diversity in management. The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on diversity management in the Global South by contextualizing gender equity within South Asian corporate and socio-economic environments. Policy implications emphasize the need for institutional frameworks that foster gender-balanced leadership, promote inclusive organizational cultures and enhance competitiveness through diversity-driven innovation.

Keywords

Gender Diversity, Leadership Representation, Organizational Performance, Nepal, South Asia, Upper Echelons Theory

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Gender diversity in leadership has emerged as a significant factor influencing organizational performance and sustainability in the 21st century. Globally, organizations are increasingly recognizing that leadership teams comprising diverse genders offer a broader range of perspectives, improved decision-making and enhanced problem-solving capabilities [1]. In South Asia, female representation in leadership positions remains disproportionately low due to socio-cultural norms, organizational barriers and limited access to professional development opportunities [2]. Nepal presents a unique context for studying gender diversity in management. Despite policies promoting women's participation in governance and the labor force, corporate leadership positions continue to be male-dominated, especially in sectors such as banking, manufacturing and large-scale services [3]. Previous research has highlighted that organizations with gender-diverse leadership teams tend to report higher financial performance, increased innovation and stronger employee engagement, yet empirical evidence from Nepal and South Asia remains scarce [4].

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognized benefits of gender diversity in leadership, a persistent gender gap exists in Nepalese organizations and across South Asia. Women remain underrepresented in executive boards, top management teams and decision-making roles, which may constrain organizational performance and limit innovation potential [5]. Furthermore, organizations often lack structured policies or mechanisms to promote gender inclusivity, reinforcing career barriers for women [6]. Empirical studies investigating the relationship between gender diversity and organizational performance in South Asia are limited and much of the existing literature focuses on developed countries. This creates a research gap for evidence-based insights on how gender diversity in leadership affects financial outcomes, employee satisfaction and innovation in Nepalese organizations.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. Assess the level of gender diversity in leadership positions across selected industries in Nepal.
2. Analyze the relationship between gender diversity in leadership and key performance indicators, including financial outcomes, innovation and employee engagement.
3. Evaluate the role of organizational policies and inclusive cultures in moderating the impact of gender diversity on performance.
4. Compare Nepal's gender diversity trends with broader South Asian benchmarks.
5. Offer evidence-based recommendations for organizational leaders and policymakers to promote gender-balanced leadership.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study holds theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it extends the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Upper Echelons Theory by incorporating gender diversity as a strategic resource influencing performance outcomes [7,8]. Practically, it informs organizational leaders on the strategic value of gender diversity and helps policymakers design frameworks for gender-equitable corporate governance.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

- Resource-Based View (RBV): Gender-diverse leadership is a strategic organizational resource that contributes to competitive advantage [7].
- Upper Echelons Theory: Demographic characteristics of leadership teams shape organizational outcomes, including innovation and decision-making quality [8].
- Social Role Theory: Societal norms influence gender roles in leadership, highlighting the need for policies to facilitate women's participation [9].

1.6 Thematic Literature Review

Gender Diversity and Leadership Representation in Corporate Governance: Recent scholarship emphasizes that gender diversity strengthens corporate governance by improving oversight, ethical accountability and risk management. Studies show that women leaders often adopt more collaborative and transparent governance approaches, which can reduce organizational vulnerabilities and enhance stakeholder trust. Gender-diverse leadership enhances decision-making, fosters innovation and improves organizational outcomes [10,11]. In emerging economies, gender-balanced boards have been linked to stronger compliance mechanisms and more prudent financial practices. This is particularly relevant in South Asia, where governance systems frequently struggle with regulatory inconsistencies and limited disclosure standards. Greater female representation in leadership positions can support governance reforms by encouraging inclusive decision-making and adherence to organizational values. Such governance-focused perspectives complement existing RBV and Upper Echelons explanations for why diverse leadership structures matter. South Asian organizations face cultural and structural barriers to female leadership [12].

Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Asia: Organizations with gender-diverse management demonstrate superior financial performance, higher innovation and increased employee satisfaction. Although policy improvements exist, structural barriers continue to affect women's progression into leadership roles across South Asia. These barriers include limited access to professional networks, gender stereotypes, childcare responsibilities and organizational cultures that favor male mobility and availability. Research has noted that women are often excluded from informal leadership pipelines, even when they have comparable educational qualifications and performance records. In Nepal, cultural expectations regarding household responsibilities and constrained opportunities for leadership training further restrict women's access to senior roles. These socio-cultural norms intersect with workplace dynamics, creating a persistent leadership gap. Understanding these barriers is essential for interpreting organizational performance outcomes, as gender diversity cannot be enhanced without systemic reforms. [1,13].

Gender Inclusive HR Practices, Policies and Cultural Moderators: Diversity-focused policies, mentorship and flexible work arrangements strengthen the impact of gender diversity on performance [14]. Human resource practices; such as gender-sensitive recruitment, transparent promotion systems and flexible work arrangements; significantly affect women's representation in leadership. International studies highlight that organizations adopting structured diversity programs tend to demonstrate higher innovation and more inclusive cultures. South Asian organizations, however, often lack formal HR mechanisms to support women's career progression. Inclusion initiatives such as mentorship programs, leadership development pathways and anti-discrimination policies can directly strengthen organizational capability by fostering a more skilled and diverse leadership pool. These HR practices also enhance psychological safety, reducing turnover and improving organizational adaptability. The integration of gender-inclusive HR measures is therefore essential when evaluating how leadership diversity influences performance. In Nepal, government initiatives are improving female participation, though challenges remain [3].

Research Gaps: Empirical evidence in Nepal and South Asia is limited; existing studies often rely on Western data. This study addresses this gap by combining primary survey data with secondary macro-level indicators.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method, explanatory research design, integrating both primary and secondary data to comprehensively examine the relationship between gender diversity in leadership and organizational performance. A quantitative approach is used for the primary survey data, complemented by document-based secondary analysis from corporate reports, national statistics and international gender indices. This dual approach allows for triangulation of findings, enhancing validity and reliability [15]. The study employs a cross-sectional design, capturing data from multiple organizations at a single point in time, enabling a snapshot of the current gender diversity landscape and its association with organizational outcomes in Nepal and the South Asian context.

2.2 Population and Sample

Population:

The population includes medium and large-scale organizations across Nepal, spanning banking, manufacturing, education and service sectors. Both private and public enterprises are considered to ensure representativeness.

Sample Size:

Using stratified random sampling, 180 respondents were selected, comprising mid- and senior-level managers and HR professionals. Stratification ensured representation across sectors and gender. This sample size satisfies the requirements for multiple regression and correlation analyses [16].

Sampling Rationale:

Managers are targeted because they possess direct knowledge of organizational practices, leadership composition and performance outcomes. Stratification by sector and organization type allows for comparative insights across industries.

2.3 Data Collection

A.Primary Data

Instrument: A structured questionnaire divided into three sections:

- 1.Demographics (age, gender, designation, sector)
 - 2.Leadership diversity metrics (percentage of women in leadership, perception of inclusivity)
 - 3.Organizational performance indicators (financial performance, employee satisfaction, innovation, decision-making quality)
- Scale: 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) for attitudinal questions; numeric reporting for leadership representation.
 - Procedure: Questionnaires were distributed via email and in-person interviews with managers. Responses were anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

B.Secondary Data

Sources:

- Corporate annual reports (gender composition, financial performance)
- Government and NGO databases (Central Bureau of Statistics Nepal, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens)
- International sources (UN Women, World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, Asian Development Bank)
- Use: Secondary data validated primary survey findings, provided contextual benchmarks and facilitated regional comparisons for South Asia.

2.4 Variables and Measurement

Variable	Type	Measurement
Gender Diversity	Independent	% of women in leadership, inclusivity index
Organizational Performance	Dependent	Composite of innovation, employee satisfaction, decision-making, ROA
Control Variables	Moderator	Sector, organization type, presence of inclusive policies

2.5 Data Analysis

- Descriptive Statistics: To summarize demographics, leadership diversity and performance indicators.

- **Correlation Analysis:** To examine the relationships between gender diversity and organizational performance measures.
- **Multiple Regression Analysis:** To test the effect of leadership diversity on performance outcomes, controlling for sector, size and policies.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Comparing primary survey results with secondary regional data to assess alignment with South Asian trends.

All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26, ensuring accuracy and reliability in statistical testing.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

- Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all respondents.
- Data were anonymized to protect respondent confidentiality.
- The study followed ethical guidelines for research involving human participants and secondary data [17].

Summary:

This methodology ensures a rigorous, empirical investigation of gender diversity in leadership and its impact on organizational performance in Nepal and South Asia. By combining survey data with secondary sources, the study achieves triangulation, regional relevance and robust analytical depth.

3. Results and Analysis

3.1 Descriptive Statistics-Demographics

The primary survey included 180 respondents across banking, manufacturing, education and service sectors in Nepal. Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of the respondents across gender, managerial level and organization type. The demographic distribution was as follows:

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents.

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	99	55%
	Female	81	45%
Position	Mid-level Manager	108	60%
	Senior Manager	72	40%
Organization Type	Private	117	65%
	Public	63	35%

As shown in Table 2, the percentage of women in leadership varies significantly across sectors.

Table 2. Female leadership representation by sector.

Sector	Average % Female Leaders
Banking	28%
Manufacturing	12%
Education	35%
Services	22%

Leadership Representation:

- Average percentage of women in leadership roles across organizations: 21%
- Sectors with highest female representation: Education (35%) and Banking (28%)
- Sectors with lowest female representation: Manufacturing (12%)

Organizational Performance Metrics (Likert scale 1-5):

- Innovation Output: Mean = 3.8, SD = 0.7
- Employee Satisfaction: Mean = 3.6, SD = 0.8
- Decision-Making Quality: Mean = 3.7, SD = 0.6

Secondary data from corporate annual reports and national statistics indicated similar trends: Nepalese firms average 19-22% female representation in top management, compared to South Asian regional average of 24% [18]. Similar patterns are observed in international contexts; Li and Mohammad (2024) found that gender-diverse leadership teams in multinational corporations in China also demonstrate stronger organizational performance, reinforcing the relevance of gender-inclusive leadership structures across different economic environments [19].

3.2 Correlation Analysis

The correlation coefficients among the key study variables are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation matrix of key variables.

Variables	Innovation	Employee Satisfaction	Decision-Making	ROA
Gender Diversity	0.42**	0.38**	0.35**	0.31*

*Note: $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Interpretation:

- Positive correlations indicate that organizations with higher female representation in leadership demonstrate higher innovation, better employee satisfaction and improved decision-making quality.
- Financial performance (ROA) also shows a modest positive association, suggesting gender diversity contributes to profitability.

3.3 Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple regression model was developed to examine the impact of gender diversity on organizational performance while controlling for sector, organization type and policy presence. Table 4 reports the regression estimates examining the effect of gender diversity on organizational performance.

Regression Model Summary:

- Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance Index (composite of innovation, satisfaction, decision-making and ROA)
- Independent Variable: Gender Diversity
- Control Variables: Sector, organization type, inclusive policies

Table 4. Multiple regression results for organizational performance

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Gender Diversity	0.38	0.09	0.35	4.22	0.001**
Sector	0.12	0.07	0.11	1.71	0.09
Organization Type	0.08	0.06	0.09	1.33	0.18
Inclusive Policies	0.29	0.08	0.27	3.62	0.002**

Model Fit: $R^2 = 0.41$, $F(4,175) = 30.5$, $p < 0.001$

Interpretation:

- Gender diversity significantly predicts organizational performance ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$).
- Presence of inclusive policies also has a strong positive effect ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$).
- Sector and organization type were not statistically significant, indicating the effect of gender diversity is broadly applicable across industries.

3.4 Comparative Analysis with Secondary Data

- Nepal: Avg female leadership = 21%
- South Asia: Avg = 24%
- Global: Avg = 29-32%

Higher female representation correlates with higher innovation and employee satisfaction, consistent with secondary data.

Observation:

- Nepalese organizations lag slightly behind regional and global benchmarks.
- Organizations with higher female leadership percentages (>30%) consistently report higher innovation scores, corroborating primary survey findings.
- Secondary sources (UN Women, 2021) highlight that countries with strong gender-inclusive frameworks (e.g., India, Sri Lanka) have higher female participation in leadership and better organizational outcomes, supporting the study's hypothesis.

To deepen the regional comparison, it is useful to examine gender leadership trends in specific South Asian economies. For instance, India reports approximately 26-28% female representation in senior management, supported by targeted diversity policies in large corporations and legal provisions mandating board diversity in some industries. Sri Lanka

shows comparatively higher participation of women in middle management but still reports a limited share of women in top executive positions. Bangladesh, despite rapid economic progress, continues to exhibit one of the lowest female leadership rates in the region, with fewer than 15% of women represented in senior corporate roles. Pakistan also reports leadership representation below regional averages, primarily due to socio-cultural constraints and limited institutional support.

These variations indicate that institutional frameworks, cultural norms and organizational policies significantly shape gender diversity outcomes across South Asia. When positioned within this broader context, Nepal's 21% representation aligns more closely with regional mid-range values but demonstrates clear potential for improvement. The consistency of positive performance effects across countries reinforces the argument that strengthening gender diversity is beneficial regardless of local variations in development or industry structure.

3.5 Key Findings

1. Positive Impact: Gender diversity in leadership is positively associated with innovation, employee satisfaction, decision-making quality and financial performance.
2. Policy Moderation: Organizations with inclusive policies amplify the positive effects of gender diversity.
3. Sector-neutral Effect: The benefits of gender diversity appear consistent across banking, manufacturing, education and services.
4. Regional Context: Nepal lags slightly behind South Asian averages but shows similar trends regarding the positive effect of female leadership.
5. Strategic Implications: Gender-diverse leadership teams contribute to competitive advantage and organizational resilience, supporting the integration of diversity into strategic management.

3.6 Interpretation

The findings align with Upper Echelons Theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), suggesting that demographic diversity in leadership influences organizational outcomes. The results also support the Resource-Based View, indicating that gender-diverse leadership is a valuable and strategic organizational resource [7]. The combination of primary survey data and secondary regional statistics strengthens the validity of these conclusions, demonstrating that gender diversity is not only an ethical imperative but also a driver of measurable organizational performance in Nepal and South Asia.

4. Discussion

- Positive Impact: Gender-diverse leadership enhances innovation, satisfaction, decision-making and financial performance.
- Policy Moderation: Inclusive policies amplify benefits.
- Sector-neutral Effect: Positive effects observed across banking, manufacturing, education, services.
- Regional Comparison: Nepal lags slightly behind South Asia but shows similar patterns.

The findings indicate a clear and measurable link between gender diversity and organizational performance, yet the implications extend beyond statistical associations. In practical terms, the presence of women in leadership can reshape organizational culture by introducing collaborative communication styles, improving conflict resolution and enhancing empathy-driven management practices. These qualities are relevant in Nepalese organizations where hierarchical structures often limit open dialogue. Diverse leadership can help balance authority-driven decision-making with participatory approaches, thereby increasing employee engagement and organizational cohesion.

Furthermore, gender-diverse teams are better positioned to understand consumer preferences in markets where purchasing behavior is heavily influenced by women. This perspective is especially relevant for Nepal's growing service and retail sectors. By incorporating diverse viewpoints, organizations can design more inclusive products and services, strengthening their competitive position. These cultural and market-oriented advantages complement the statistical associations with innovation and financial performance, showing that gender diversity contributes to broader organizational resilience.

Finally, in a region affected by economic fluctuations and shifting labor markets, gender diversity can support long-term strategic stability. Organizations that invest in inclusive leadership pipelines are better prepared to respond to socio-economic changes, technological disruptions and global competitiveness pressures. This reinforces the argument that gender diversity should be integrated into strategic planning rather than treated as a symbolic initiative. The findings align with RBV, Upper Echelons and Social Role Theories, highlighting both strategic and cultural importance of gender diversity.

4.1 Gender Diversity and Organizational Performance

The study's findings clearly indicate a positive relationship between gender diversity in leadership and organizational performance in Nepalese organizations. Organizations with higher representation of women in leadership reported

higher innovation scores, better employee satisfaction, improved decision-making quality and moderately higher financial performance (ROA). These findings are consistent with global literature suggesting that gender-diverse leadership enhances creativity, problem-solving and strategic decision-making [10,11].

Interpretation in Context

In the Nepalese and South Asian context, the findings are particularly significant due to historically low female representation in corporate leadership. Despite socio-cultural barriers, organizations that proactively include women in leadership positions benefit not only ethically but also strategically. The integration of women in decision-making processes introduces diverse perspectives, reduces groupthink and improves organizational adaptability; critical factors in emerging economies facing rapid social and economic change [13].

4.2 Role of Inclusive Policies

The analysis demonstrates that organizational policies play a moderating role. Companies with formal gender equity policies, mentorship programs, flexible work arrangements, or training initiatives exhibit stronger performance outcomes linked to gender diversity. This finding aligns with Ely and Thomas's (2001) argument that diversity initiatives and inclusive cultures enhance the positive impact of demographic diversity on organizational outcomes.

Practical Implication

For Nepalese firms, merely increasing female representation is insufficient; organizations must embed inclusive practices that support participation, mentorship and career progression for women to maximize the performance benefits.

4.3 Comparison with South Asian Trends

Secondary data comparisons indicate that Nepal slightly lags behind regional South Asian averages in female leadership representation (21% vs. 24%). However, the pattern of positive impact of gender diversity on performance is consistent regionally, suggesting that the findings are not unique to Nepal but reflect broader South Asian organizational dynamics. Countries with stronger legal and policy frameworks for gender equity, such as India and Sri Lanka, report higher female participation and better organizational outcomes, confirming the importance of institutional support [3,6].

4.4 Theoretical Implications

The study reinforces several key theories:

- 1.Resource-Based View (RBV): Gender-diverse leadership teams constitute a strategic resource that is valuable, rare and difficult to imitate, positively influencing organizational performance [7].
- 2.Upper Echelons Theory: Leadership composition directly shapes strategic decisions and the inclusion of women enhances decision-making quality and innovation [8].
- 3.Social Role Theory: Socio-cultural norms in Nepal and South Asia influence women's participation in leadership, but organizational policies can mitigate these effects, fostering gender equity in practice [9].

These theoretical linkages demonstrate that gender diversity should be viewed as both a strategic and cultural organizational lever, not merely a compliance or ethical concern.

4.5 Managerial Implications

Based on the findings:

- Organizations should implement inclusive leadership frameworks to ensure women are represented in decision-making positions.
- Mentorship and professional development programs for women can enhance leadership readiness and retention.
- Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established to track gender diversity metrics and associated performance outcomes.
- Sector-specific strategies may be necessary, as female representation varies significantly across industries (highest in education, lowest in manufacturing).

4.6 Policy Implications

The study's results are relevant for policymakers in Nepal and South Asia:

- Encourage gender equity legislation that incentivizes organizations to include women in leadership positions.
- Support public-private partnerships that promote gender-inclusive leadership training programs.
- Benchmark organizational performance metrics to include diversity indicators, ensuring accountability.

Strengthening gender diversity in leadership requires coordinated action from both policymakers and private sector actors. At the policy level, government agencies can encourage gender-inclusive leadership by offering incentives for

organizations that demonstrate progress in diversity metrics. Regulatory bodies may also introduce disclosure requirements obliging companies to report gender composition at senior levels. Such transparency can motivate organizations to adopt more equitable practices.

Additionally, training programs focused on leadership development for women; implemented in collaboration with universities, corporate associations and development partners can help address skill and opportunity gaps. For the private sector, adopting structured diversity strategies and implementing accountability mechanisms will be crucial. Monitoring gender-disaggregated data, conducting internal audits and integrating diversity goals into performance indicators can enhance organizational commitment. These policy-level supports create an enabling environment in which gender diversity becomes a sustained organizational priority rather than a temporary initiative.

5. Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence that gender diversity in leadership positively influences organizational performance in Nepalese organizations, with implications for South Asia more broadly. Both primary survey data and secondary macro-level indicators corroborate that organizations with higher female representation achieve greater innovation, employee satisfaction and decision-making efficiency. Inclusive policies further strengthen these outcomes, highlighting the strategic importance of combining representation with supportive organizational culture. The research contributes to management theory by extending RBV, Upper Echelons and Social Role theories into the South Asian context, while also offering practical recommendations for organizational leaders and policymakers to foster gender-inclusive corporate governance.

Limitations:

- The study relies on cross-sectional data, which captures a snapshot in time; longitudinal studies may provide deeper insights into causality.
- Primary data are restricted to certain sectors and Nepalese organizations; broader sampling across South Asia could enhance generalizability.

Future Research Directions:

- Investigate longitudinal effects of gender diversity on organizational performance.
- Explore the intersectionality of gender with other demographic factors (age, ethnicity, education) in leadership roles.
- Assess sector-specific best practices for promoting women in leadership in South Asia.

Overall Conclusion:

Integrating women into leadership roles is not only an ethical necessity but a strategic imperative for organizational success in Nepal and South Asia. Organizations that embrace gender diversity and inclusive practices are likely to achieve superior performance, innovation and resilience in today's competitive and evolving business environment.

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