

Section 3

Inclusion

The much-feared relapse into conflict has been staved off mainly because Nepal's transformation since 2006 has been unprecedented. Although far from complete, elements of a more inclusive polity and society have been institutionalised to a significant degree. The declaration of Nepal as a secular state soon after the 2006 People's Movement was an early precursor, but the periodic introduction of policies aimed at providing equal opportunities to all the people of Nepal have also been instrumental.

The push for inclusion pre-dates the Maoist conflict by decades. At the forefront have been Nepal's vibrant **social movements**, which have been significant forces in Nepal's socio-political landscape, challenging the prevalent political power structures and informal institutions. **Mukta Singh Tamang** describes the evolution of four major mobilisations – by women, Janajatis (indigenous groups), Dalits ('low caste') and Madhesis (from the Tarai plains). The agendas and strategies of these movements have differed according to their specific histories. All have succeeded in effecting significant change in different ways. Inclusion has provided a common thread connecting their causes, which have otherwise been largely disparate and sometimes contradictory. Gains have been hard won against persistent resistance. But the movements have been less effective due to splits both among and within them. As the struggle for ethnic, class, cultural and gender equality progresses, these movements might look to more coordinated strategies to advance their agendas, individually and collectively.

Deepak Thapa describes how **post-war armed groups** have operated at the margins of politics and criminality. Governments have adopted both hard and soft policies in response, but such groups have had a limited impact on Nepal's transition.

Chiara Letizia outlines how Hinduism became embedded in Nepal's national identity and was used to administer the dominance of the established elite, such as through the caste system. Accordingly, for many communities **secularism** has been associated with emancipation, and has been a focal point for dispute and dialogue between progressive and conservative forces – for example in the relationship between religion and the state. The new constitution confirms Nepal as 'secular', although its equivocal definition leaves the door open to future contestation.

Mohna Ansari, a **member of the National Human Rights Commission** explains in an **interview with Accord** the NHRC's role in protecting rights and promoting transitional justice. She stresses the importance of Nepal's international human rights commitments, but also the problems with implementation of instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women vis-à-vis the new constitution that denies women full citizenship rights.

Lynn Bennett stresses that mistakes have been made in failing to incentivise inclusion throughout Nepal's bureaucracy, or to support advocates of inclusion among the traditional political elite. **Inclusion has now**



Running helter-skelter away from the police in Kathmandu during the Second People's Movement, April 2006. © Kiran Panday

been 're-branded' to prioritise gender equality as a way to navigate resistance to the more politicised aspects of the agenda. De-emphasising caste, ethnicity or regional identity as the basis for enhancing social mobility has helped to make social inclusion more acceptable and broadly impactful, but there is a real risk that its non-gender aspects will get lost.

Yam Bahadur Kisan describes how the Nepali state gradually opened up to the idea of inclusion as the war intensified. Inclusion was a key bargaining point in the peace talks as a core grievance of the Maoists, and was prominent in different ways in a number of peace agreements. Legislative commitments have helped to establish a more **inclusive Nepali state**, such as through the Civil Service Act, but the 2015 Constitution exposes how important gains have also been tempered by ambiguity and contradictions.

Shankar Sharma, former Vice-Chair of the National Planning Commission, tells **Accord in an interview** how social inclusion entered the national development agenda as a result of the 'People's War' and an attempt to deal with the root causes that were propelling it.

National and donor priorities began to align around inclusion mid-way through the fighting. At the same time, inclusion was operationalised through the involvement of communities in development programming, to identify and implement projects.

The idea of inclusion has had both advocates and opponents, and **Shradha Ghale** describes how a **backlash against inclusion** has gathered momentum as the peace process has progressed. This has also embroiled the Maoists, with some Nepalis accusing them of having abandoned the inclusion agenda and the marginalised communities they purport to represent.

Hundreds of thousands of Nepalis work abroad. **Amrita Limbu** explains that, as the war advanced, **migration** became an increasingly proactive state policy, as a response to domestic underdevelopment and equally as an alternative recruitment opportunity to the growing Maoist insurgency. Today remittances make up a significant proportion of Nepal's GDP and are having important social impacts, and their benefits have also flowed in large measure to economically marginalised communities.