



International training of women lawyers in Nepal: A case study



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Executive summary



Since 2015, several global and Nepali organizations from the private and public sectors have collaborated to provide professional development training to women lawyers in Nepal. The goals of this project include building the capacity and increasing opportunities for advancement of women lawyers in the wake of a new constitution that prioritizes gender equality. Through an iterative process that has incorporated feedback from women lawyers and built on the experiences learned from each session, the trainings have allowed trainees to further their knowledge in critical legal areas while improving pragmatic skills that are universal in the practice of law. The trainings have also allowed Nepali women lawyers to develop professional networks while giving lawyers from around the world the opportunity to gain international exposure and build camaraderie.

Background

Since 2021, the [International Bar Association \(IBA\)](#) and [LexisNexis Rule of Law Foundation](#) have collaborated on an [ambitious global research project on gender equality in the legal profession](#) (the Gender Project or the “50:50 by 2030” study). This study focuses on women in four legal sectors in 16 principal jurisdictions, seeking to identify the statistical disparity between men and women at senior levels in the legal profession on a global scale and whether diversity initiatives introduced to address this disparity are having an impact. Beyond simply identifying challenges faced by women practitioners in the selected jurisdictions, the study will determine what measures are being enacted by the profession and whether they are having meaningful effects upon the proportion of women lawyers in positions of seniority. The goal is to provide practical conclusions and guidance to the legal profession at the midway point and at the end of the initiative in 2030.

As part of its outreach efforts, the IBA approached the global law firm [DLA Piper](#) regarding its work [training women lawyers in Nepal](#) through its nonprofit affiliate [New Perimeter](#). Although Nepal is not one of the 16 countries included in the study, New Perimeter’s work in Nepal, in collaboration with the Nepal Bar Association (a member of the IBA) and other organizations, provides a replicable example of a program that can support the advancement of women in the profession, particularly in countries with great disparities in the number of and opportunities for women lawyers. This case study seeks to complement the Gender Project by highlighting why this training was developed in Nepal, its goals and training model, how stakeholders were engaged, its impact, and lessons learned.¹



Country context

Economic, social, and political background

Nepal is a federal parliamentary republic located in the southern Himalayan Mountain ranges between India to the east, south, and west and the Tibet Autonomous Region of China to the north.² The capital of the country is Kathmandu, which is the only major city in the country. Most of the population, an estimated 30.66 million, live in small market centers and villages.³

Nepal is one of the least developed countries in the world. The economy is largely dependent on exporting agricultural products – rice, corn, wheat, jute, timber, and textiles. Industrial production manufacturing and tourism are two small but growing sectors of the economy, with opportunities for future growth.⁴

There are 141 different ethnic groups in Nepal.⁵ Although the primary official language is Nepali, only 44.9 percent of the population speak that language.⁶ Approximately 120 different languages are reported as the mother tongues of the local communities. In addition to this vast linguistic diversity, the population is relatively young, with a median age of 25.3 years.⁷ Access to education remains a challenge due to geographical remoteness, gender inequalities, and socioeconomic and ethnic differences, with girls from rural households particularly prone to dropping out.⁸

Politically, Nepal in recent times has gone through a complex transition to a new government and federal structure. After a decade-long civil war ended in 2006, a new constitution was adopted in 2015 and new criminal and civil codes in 2018. The government includes executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The executive branch is headed by a president as chief of state and a prime minister as head of government (Bidhya Devi Bhandari was elected Nepal's first female president in 2015, a milestone despite being a purely symbolic role).⁹ The legislative branch is a bicameral parliament with a national assembly and a house of representatives.¹⁰

The 2015 Constitution Article 18 guarantees a right to equality which prohibits discrimination based on gender and sex.¹¹ In addition to Article 18, the Constitution contains prohibitions against gender discrimination in the context of the right to communication, the right to housing, and the right to social justice.¹² The Constitution also established the National Women's Commission, charged with studying women's equality issues, proposing policies concerning women's rights, and monitoring



relevant international treaties and Nepal's compliance with those treaties.¹³ Additionally, the Constitution requires at least 30 percent female representation in the federal and state legislatures.¹⁴

The legal profession in Nepal

Nepal's legal system mixes English common law and Hindu legal concepts.¹⁵ The Supreme Court, consisting of a chief justice and up to 20 justices appointed by the President, is the country's highest court. In 2016, Sushila Karki became Nepal's first woman to hold the position of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.¹⁶ As of September 2023, there are 14 justices on the Supreme Court, including two female justices.¹⁷ The lower courts include seven High Courts and 75 District Courts.¹⁸ The District Courts are the courts of first instance for all civil and criminal cases.¹⁹

The Nepal Bar Association was established in 1956 but was not registered as a professional organization until 1961. The NBA has 89 units spread across the country based on the structure of the courts.²⁰ In response to a survey conducted by the authors of this study, the NBA stated that there are approximately 22,000 advocates in the country, with 15,000 being active lawyers.²¹ The Nepal Bar Council is a professional organization connected to the NBA and has authority to issue licenses to lawyers and take disciplinary action.²²

Women in the legal profession in Nepal

As of 2020, only around 12 percent of Nepali lawyers were female (approximately 2,200 women).²³ The first woman received her certificate to practice law in Nepal in 1960 but could not actually practice as a registered advocate until 1963. Since that time, the legal profession has remained dominated by men and traditional gender roles.²⁴

Women lawyers in Nepal face common gender stereotypes that remain pervasive in the legal profession.²⁵ Nepali society generally holds that a woman's role is in the home.²⁶ As in most countries, the legal profession in Nepal requires long hours, presenting challenges in balancing home and work life.²⁷ The number of women in leadership positions in law firms and in legal roles is limited, translating to lack of support for women in the profession generally.²⁸ The result is that in Nepal more women tend to leave the profession than do their male colleagues.²⁹

According to the NBA, most women lawyers in Nepal work in academia, followed by domestic or international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Nepali women lawyers at NGOs typically work as legal aid providers and advocates, offering legal assistance to vulnerable and marginalized communities.³⁰ In response to a survey conducted by the authors of this study, the NBA stated that women lawyers in the government sector hold some high-level positions, including serving as the Attorney General.³¹ While two women currently serve as justices on the highest court, only a small percentage of the judiciary is female.³² The title of

senior advocate, which is awarded by the NBA after a lawyer has served for at least 15 years, has only been granted to 30 women; the remainder of the 690 senior advocates are men. Approximately 30 percent of women lawyers work part-time.³³

Initiatives to advance women in the legal profession, including efforts to increase monitoring and programming, have centered on the Nepali Constitution's call for equal rights for women and prohibition of gender discrimination.³⁴ The NBA is currently working to increase the participation of women in the judiciary through affirmative action policies and training programs. The NBA has also reported trainings for women lawyers on mediation and arbitration, as well as gender equality and access to justice programs conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).³⁵

UNDP has highlighted several programs that provide professional development opportunities to women lawyers. Those include annual women lawyer conferences; internships for new and aspiring lawyers, especially those from underrepresented groups, to help establish them in the legal field and provide hands on experience representing women and marginalized people; collaborations between the Legal Aid and Consultancy Center and women lawyers, to provide legal support and training in areas related to gender-based violence and discrimination; and law school and legal education institutions' scholarships and support programs to encourage more women to pursue legal careers.³⁶



The international training of women lawyers in Nepal

The collaboration

In 2015, after being introduced by PILnet, a global NGO focused on building networks and collaborations between public interest and private lawyers, Women Lawyers Joining Hands and New Perimeter initiated work to design and deliver a continuing legal education training program for women lawyers in Nepal. Both organizations recognized that local involvement and support would be required for the success of any long-term training program. Accordingly, a collaboration began and has included:³⁷

Women Lawyers Joining Hands (WLJH), at the time, a Canadian charitable organization operating in Nepal, with a mission to leverage the knowledge and skills of international lawyers to support women lawyers in Nepal through legal training, briefings, instruction, and mentoring. WLJH was led by a Canadian lawyer living in Nepal who was involved in drafting the 2015 Constitution.

Nepal Bar Association (NBA), the federal organization of Nepali lawyers established in 1956, at a time when legal education in Nepal was in its initial stages, and that provides training programs for members.

New Perimeter, the nonprofit affiliate of DLA Piper, created in 2005 to provide long-term pro bono legal assistance around the world to support access to justice, social and economic development, and sound legal institutions, with an overarching focus on women's advancement.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UN's lead agency on international development, with an in-country office in Nepal since 1963. Among other things, UNDP works to reduce inequality and to assist countries to develop leadership skills through partnerships, training, and capacity-building programs.

As described below, the project partners have developed a continuing legal education curriculum, focused on critical areas of practice and emerging areas of law, and have delivered this curriculum in-person in Kathmandu five times, and once virtually, to 150 women from the country's seven provinces.

The training – goals

Project partners (members of WLJH in collaboration with the NBA) who were involved in drafting the 2015 Constitution noticed a lack of women's representation among senior officials and legal professionals throughout the constitution drafting process. That gave rise to the idea of setting up a training to build capacity of women legal professionals, as a means to ensure that women would be adequately prepared to participate at the levels contemplated by the new Constitution. New Perimeter, as an affiliate of a global law firm, was guided by its project partners at WLJH, the NBA, and UNDP to identify project needs and goals.

With a particular eye toward parts of the legal market that were less accessible to women either due to a lack of professional experience or lack of guidance, the training initially had a heavy focus on building capacity in corporate and commercial law, a highly prestigious area of practice with few women lawyers that is usually not an area of focus in law school. In addition to preparing women for practices typically inaccessible to them, the training also sought to create a critical mass of female leaders who would be empowered to participate in and influence legal and policy reform and advocacy efforts. Project partners hoped that, with enhanced training, women lawyers would build not only the skills to participate, but also their confidence and standing in the profession, including in areas held in high regard. Project partners also cited as project goals the need to advance gender equality in line with the Sustainable Development Goals; enhance access to justice by training women to better represent women and other underserved groups; and promote global solidarity in the legal profession.³⁸

The overarching goal of the training has remained the same over time: to build capacity for women lawyers in Nepal in areas that will provide a broad range of options for professional concentration and legal sector leadership. As will be discussed below, however, the focus areas have evolved to reflect feedback from trainees and to incorporate practical professional development skills that are applicable across practices. The training also seeks to assist women to build professional networks and form mentoring relationships with peers and more senior lawyers. More recently, stakeholders have set a goal of providing training to all of Nepal's women lawyers.

The training – how it works

In December 2015, the project partners delivered the first training in Kathmandu to 30 women lawyers. The initial training (referred to as Track 1 training) included modules on legal ethics, the professional obligations of lawyers, corporate and commercial law, and business ethics. After a successful week of training, project partners solicited feedback from the women lawyers who participated as trainees, gathering information on what additional training the women might want next. The topics identified became Track 2 training, and the training model, which continues to date, was formed.

Specifically, the training takes place over six consecutive days. Trainees, split into two cohorts of 30 women, are invited to participate for two consecutive years (12 days of total training per participant): the first year they participate, they are in a group of 30 women who are new to the program (and receive Track 1 training); the next year, they are among 30 returning trainees, receiving Track 2 training. Trainees are selected by the NBA with the goal of achieving diversity of participants (now including women from outside of Kathmandu).

As noted, Track 1 training focuses on legal ethics and corporate and commercial law. Track 2 training, for returning trainees, has covered topics such as intellectual property and technology; arbitration, mediation, and negotiation; and trial advocacy.

Each session is co-taught by international trainers (affiliated with New Perimeter or WLJH) and Nepali lawyers (affiliated with the NBA). While the international lawyers focus on international law or comparative examples, the Nepali lawyers provide critical perspective on local laws. Each session is designed to incorporate experiential learning techniques and learn-by-doing activities. For example, after the trainers teach basic law on copyright and trade dress, as part of the intellectual property module, they present trainees with four real-life scenarios involving allegations that the design of a textile has been copied. Trainees contemplate the legal issue of whether the alleged infringing fabric has the same “look and feel” as the original, and whether there is a likelihood that the alleged infringing fabric would confuse potential consumers. Trainees present arguments on both sides before learning how the court ruled in each scenario. This activity is always a favorite among trainees and trainers and is a hands-on way to discuss the practical application of the law, practice advocacy skills, and actively engage with other women lawyers.

While the primary focus of the training was initially on substantive areas of the law, it soon became apparent to the project partners that, in addition to legal and doctrinal knowledge gained, an enormous benefit to trainees was the opportunity to network

with sister lawyers (some of whom were meeting for the first time and who quickly connected over shared experiences) and with international trainers. Based on this observation, the feedback of trainees, and the desire to impart practical skills, by the second year of training the curriculum for both tracks evolved to include topics such as business development, marketing, networking, personal branding, client interviewing, and client relations. For example, trainers now provide a module on how to deliver an effective “elevator pitch” (a short, oral introduction designed to quickly convey a lawyer’s skills and value to a potential client, employer, adversary, judge, or referral source). After trainers demonstrate their own elevator pitches, each participant drafts her own, and then practices and perfects it in front of the trainers and other participants, using video to further enhance the learning experience.

In addition, UNDP has provided training on a number of topics, including access to justice, legal aid, and business and human rights.



The trainers – a collaborative model

As noted, the collaboration between international and local trainers is a critical characteristic of the training. To fill the corps of international volunteers, New Perimeter selects DLA Piper lawyers, working on a pro bono basis, from around the world to participate as trainers in Nepal. New Perimeter trainers have come from the US, Canada, the UK, France, China, Hong Kong, and Australia. Similarly, WLJH board members and volunteers have traveled from Canada to serve as trainers. Trainers affiliated with the NBA and UNDP serve as local trainers.

Some trainers, both international and local, have participated over multiple years, allowing them to develop relationships and established helpful continuity between trainings. This is enhanced by the two-track model, with returning trainees returning to find familiar faces among the participants. In order to increase the sustainability and localization of the training, however, the project partners have prioritized trainer and leadership opportunities for more Nepali lawyers, including women who have taken part as trainees themselves.

Impact – by the numbers



Feedback

As part of this case study, New Perimeter conducted well over a dozen interviews with people involved in the training, including international trainers affiliated with DLA Piper and WLJH, Nepali trainers affiliated with the NBA, and women who participated as trainees.⁴⁰

International trainers

Lawyers from DLA Piper and WLJH who participated in the training (drafting and delivering training materials) have overwhelmingly positive views about the overall success and outcome of the trainings.

“The transformation of the women lawyers attending the training, whether in Track 1 or Track 2, is marked. Not only are their technical, legal skills augmented during the course of the six days, but also their confidence and soft skills. As a trainer, I could tell the difference in the trainees at the end as compared to the first day of the program.”

“A goal was to provide higher level of training in areas that are revenue generating. I think we achieved that. The trainees engaged in thoughtful discourse and clearly understood the issues. We worked to develop their confidence so that they are competent and capable of taking on complex legal issues.”

With respect to the content of the training, international trainers thought that the topics covered in the trainings were valuable to the trainees and that the collaboration with the NBA was critical for identifying appropriate training topics and including local law and practice. While international trainers recognized the value of the substantive training topics, most reflected that one of the most impactful outcomes of each training session was the opportunity for trainees to form new networks and to discuss ways to overcome the challenges they face as lawyers.

International trainers described how the trainees warmed up over the course of the week and gained confidence in their own professional capabilities. Two DLA Piper partners who served as repeat trainers remembered the session on personal branding and building confidence as a professional. One of the trainers encouraged the trainees to stand tall in a power-pose position with their arms in the air and palms stretched out wide. The other trainer reflected on the moment:

“It was such a powerful moment. You could feel the electricity in the room that was magnified through all of these women taking up space. It was a feeling of wow, this is really working.”

International trainers also shared the lessons they learned over time. For example, trainers realized that rather than getting into the weeds on numerous topics, high-level overviews of basic principles were most effective, followed by engaging trainees in learn-by-doing simulation exercises. These exercises encouraged trainees to practice their professional skills, enhanced networking between the trainees, and built confidence among trainees.⁴¹

Trainers also commented on the importance of focusing on the practical tasks and skills related to the practice of law, such as case management. Several spoke about the interesting conversations that trainers and trainees had about engagement (retention) letters, and why they are critical when initiating and setting expectations for new legal work and an attorney-client relationship. During each training, trainers and trainees drew distinctions between pro bono work, done intentionally and without the expectation of pay, and paid work for which lawyers are not compensated (and how to avoid this situation). Another trainer commented that the training was most effective when it focused on universal skills that are used by all lawyers. For example, in addition to forming attorney-client relationships – something every lawyer does – all lawyers engage in negotiations of some form, so this topic was particularly impactful.

On a personal level, many of the international trainers commented that they became involved with the program because of their own experiences in and passion about women's rights. International trainers reflected on the impact their involvement had on them personally, expanding their view regarding the challenges women lawyers face globally. One commented that the trainers have learned just as much as, if not more than, the trainees.

Finally, trainers have been impressed by how seriously the NBA, and people at the highest level of the profession, have taken the training, with NBA leadership and other dignitaries, including Supreme Court justices, actively participating in opening and closing ceremonies.

Nepali participants

In addition to interviews with international trainers, New Perimeter conducted interviews with local trainers, coordinators, trainees, and other stakeholders in Nepal. Lawyers who helped plan the training on behalf of the NBA described the training as a way to give women lawyers international exposure, and to increase opportunities for them within the legal market. They described the goal of the training as providing women lawyers experience in areas of the law that are typically outside of their reach and as a long-term process to build capacity, enhance skills, and build a network of women lawyers. These lawyers described the training as largely successful, noting that some of the trainees have since increased their involvement with the NBA and grown their careers in other ways.

One former NBA program facilitator described a discussion he had with one trainee, who credited the training as the encouragement she needed to continue working as a lawyer:

“The trainee had a lot of barriers and constraints; her family was not supportive of her working in the legal profession because it takes a long time for women to actually start earning money. The trainee said the training was her first time sitting with other women lawyers and getting to share their experiences together. The training gave her the courage, patience, and motivation to continue working in the legal profession. It was very emotional.”



Similarly, a former program coordinator spoke about how she is still in touch with many of the trainees and has watched as their careers advance. She said:

“The training was exceptionally beneficial to the trainees, who came from diverse backgrounds across Nepal. They gained valuable exposure, built a strong network, participated in practical courses, and have all gone on to excel in their careers following the training.”

One woman who participated in the training as a trainee, and now works for the NBA, said her experience in the training taught her the essential skills she needs to stand firmly in the legal field. She said that after she completed the training, she felt confident in her ability to handle clients and to do her own personal branding.

In post-training evaluations, numerous trainees commented that they appreciated the practical skills orientation of the training, with many noting that the personal branding module was particularly helpful. A trainee commented that the training was important to her because it was her first in areas of commercial law. One Track 2 trainee reported in her evaluation that since participating in Track 1 training, she had used the personal branding skills she had learned to enhance her practice. One described the “energy” that the training provided her. Another noted that since completing Track 1 training, she was able to increase her fee structure and get new business.

“The training built my confidence, recharged me, and helped me develop a good network.”

UNDP shared similar perspective:

“Following their participation in the project, women lawyers have not only applied the knowledge gained in further studies but have also made significant strides in their careers. Many have secured prestigious job positions and attained high-ranking roles within the legal profession. . . . Some are successfully running their own law firm. These tangible outcomes clearly demonstrate the project’s success in empowering women lawyers and facilitating their professional growth, which aligns with the project’s objectives of capacity-building and career advancement for women in the legal field.

Notably, a Nepali Supreme Court justice who has participated in the training observed the “happiness and excitement that comes with the training.” She has found that one of the most effective aspects of the training is that, unlike much of the training women lawyers receive, it is not focused on gender or women’s issues. While acknowledging that gender is cross-cutting, she appreciated that the training focuses on areas of specialized need, such as corporate law and emerging practice areas like technology. She also noted that in addition to sharing knowledge, the training’s focus on improving skills – leading to more effective and quality representation – is critical. She commented on the increased confidence she’s seen in trainees, and on the importance of the sisterhood that emerges from these shared experiences.



Challenges

Stakeholders who were interviewed identified several logistical and cultural challenges, most of which are not surprising:

- With the training occurring in Kathmandu, it was originally accessible only to people who lived within reasonable distance of the capital city, and not those in more rural or remote areas.
- To address this and broaden impact, the NBA was eventually able to provide support for women who live and work outside of the Kathmandu region to participate, which had clear benefits (including, among other things, by expanding the reach and impact of the training, and by creating an opportunity for women in more remote areas of the country, some of whom are the only lawyer in their community, to meet and connect). This, however, also presented certain challenges, because many women lawyers outside of Kathmandu focus on family law, a topic that is local in nature and difficult for international trainers to speak on, and were less proficient in speaking English, the primary language of most trainers.
- As may be expected, stakeholders had different opinions on the most effective format of the training. Some appreciated the broad array of topics covered at a high level, while others would have preferred a closer look at only one topic. Most agreed that the simulation exercises were most effective, and some suggested that these should be the entire focus of the training, with substantive topics woven in (for example, creating simulations that require participants to negotiate a contract, intellectual property ownership, or dispute settlement).
- Inevitably, language differences present a challenge. While many trainees spoke English, some did not, and most international trainers did not speak Nepali. During the training, simultaneous translation was used, which worked well during lectures and large group activities, but proved difficult during small breakout groups and simulations.
- The pandemic, and related moratorium on travel, also presented significant challenges. Stakeholders tried to maintain momentum via a virtual training, but time differences, technological barriers, and spotty Internet access made it difficult to do so effectively.
- Stakeholders noted that this type of training requires a significant commitment of time from trainers, acting on a pro bono basis, and trainees, who took time away from their practices and lives. This was particularly apparent when project partners delivered a virtual training, which ran through midnight for many trainers and required trainees to interrupt early morning activities, which started well before their workdays and often affected family schedules.
- Finally, while efforts were made to stay in touch with and survey past trainees, tracking their career progressions and measuring the direct impact of the training is a challenge. The number of women lawyers in Nepal remains low. The project partners continue to brainstorm ways to measure impact.

Impact, lessons learned, and opportunities for replication

While measuring impact is difficult at this stage of the training, project partners are heartened that 150 women lawyers have participated in the training, and expect that number to grow. Stakeholders were particularly pleased to see, in 2017, the first of its kind network of women lawyers emerge from the training, and, in more recent years, former trainees being selected to serve as local trainers and assist with the planning of the training. Likewise, stakeholders are glad that the opportunities to participate in the training has been extended beyond Kathmandu, and that women lawyers from more remote areas have had access to the skills development and networking opportunities that the training presents. Because some of the training topics focus on emerging areas of law in Nepal (eg, intellectual property topics), they are hopeful that the women who participated in the training will have a leg up and an international perspective as these areas become sources for business.

Project partners and stakeholders draw the following lessons from our work, and successes, in Nepal, which we believe can be instructive for similar trainings in other parts of the world:

- **Support from the highest level of the bar association and legal sector is necessary for the program to be successful.** Because NBA leadership support has been strong, as has support from dignitaries including senior advocates and judges, potential trainees view participation in the training as a prestigious opportunity and important credential. This support has also helped encourage the involvement of Nepali lawyers who have served as local trainers. Additionally, other international partners, such as UNDP, have been willing to support the program, knowing that it is a priority for those in the highest level of the legal sector.
- **Local participation in the training is critical.** First, Nepali trainers are able to take international principles and examples and apply them to laws and practice in Nepal, and to speak specifically to Nepali law. Second, local participation, including the involvement of graduate trainees as trainers, is crucial to enhancing the sustainability of the training, and to providing additional advancement opportunities to trainees. Third, it was particularly important to include women leaders in the profession, setting examples for trainees in leading by doing.
- **Governmental support for gender equality is also helpful.** The training received strong support from the moment in which it was developed, in the aftermath of the adoption of the new Constitution, because Nepal was making gender equality a priority. The momentum and energy around the training was fueled, in part, by the law reform it followed. Similarly, the commitment of UNDP – which has provided funding for the training – to gender equality has been important.
- **Topics included in the training must have an international or universal element.** International lawyers cannot add the same value if a topic requires specific knowledge of the laws of the particular country. By way of example, while many of the trainees handle divorce and family law matters, the nuances of local law means those are not topics on which most international trainers are qualified to speak. Trainees were excited to focus on emerging areas of law, such as some of the topics covered in the intellectual property module. Although these areas were not yet a part of their practices, project partners received feedback that they felt more prepared to be pioneers and leaders in these practice areas because of the training.



- **Learning-by-doing simulation exercises are the most effective teaching tools for this type of training.** These exercises push people to get out of their comfort zone in a non-threatening way, experiment with different styles and strategies, and engage with peers and trainers. Overall, such exercises promote networking and mentoring and allow trainees to creatively explore different areas of law.
- **Simplicity is key for these simulation exercises.** Complicated mock scenarios will not work where there are language and cultural differences. Trainers learned to avoid complicated scoring mechanisms for negotiations or complex fact patterns for advocacy lessons. Less is more. It is remarkable how nuanced and sophisticated conversations around even simple exercises can be.
- **Simulation exercises are also the most fun way to convey legal and practical information, and the value of creating a fun experience should not be minimized.** Several stakeholders described the personal friendships and professional networks that emerged from trainees spontaneously dancing, sharing memorable work and life stories, taking selfies with new friends, and discovering commonality. Tea breaks were crucial; in these moments, candid and impromptu conversations occurred that furthered the goals of the program and the fun people had.
- **Engaging high quality live translation services, ideally from people familiar with legal terms and access to justice issues, has been crucial to the success of the program.** Using the same translators from year to year has enriched the experience. Given the length of the sessions and training, having numerous rotating translators has also been important.
- **The training has improved by directly incorporating the feedback of trainees from one training session to the next.** Project partners have selected new training topics and skills-based exercises based on the input of the people receiving the training, the NBA, and UNDP. The trainee-suggested topics have been among the most popular ones.
- **Relatedly, being adaptive and flexible has been critical.** This has meant revising curriculum on the spot, ensuring that curriculum is culturally sensitive and incorporates the feedback from local trainers, and making up exercises or simulations as trainings proceed (which is how our session on elevator pitches was established during the second training).
- **Training should be seen as a continuous process.** One training alone will not create the relationships, network, and opportunities for collaboration that are so critical, nor will one training alone impart the knowledge to improve lawyering skills.
- **It is essential to constantly consider avenues for sustainability,** including the establishment of alumni groups, social media pages, and train-the-trainer programs.
- **Tracking impact and staying in touch are important.** Even anecdotal accounts of the impact of the training are helpful in determining whether to continue or how to modify the training. Staying in touch with participants allows stakeholders to see how participants have used the training, and furthers the networking and relationship-building goals of the training.



Press and other media

For more information regarding the Nepal Women Lawyers Training, see:

- Video: [New Perimeter Works with Female Lawyers in Nepal](#)
- DLA Piper New Perimeter – [New Perimeter conducts sixth training for women lawyers in Nepal](#)
- DLA Piper New Perimeter – [Helping Women Lawyers in the Himalayas](#)
- DLA Piper New Perimeter – [Ileana Blanco](#)
- DLA Piper New Perimeter – [Giving Thanks in Nepal](#)
- DLA Piper New Perimeter – [New Perimeter conducts fifth training for women lawyers in Nepal](#)
- [Building a network in Kathmandu | Hub \(jhu.edu\)](#)
- Additional information about the training may be found [here](#).



Endnotes

- 1 This case study was drafted by DLA Piper lawyers who led and participated in New Perimeter's engagement in Nepal, with input from and review by other stakeholders including Nepali women who participated in the training. In the course of preparing this case study, the authors of this study interviewed approximately 17 stakeholders, in addition to Nepali women lawyers who underwent the training, those affiliated with DLA Piper (project managers, one-time trainers, and repeat trainers), Women Lawyers Joining Hands (its founder and board members, each of whom participated in the training), the Nepal Bar Association (project coordinators and trainers), UNDP (project funders and trainers), and the Nepali Supreme Court (a woman justice who has participated in the training). It bears noting, however, that the primary perspective reflected in this case study is that of the law firm. It also bears noting that there has not yet been a formal evaluation or effort to collect data regarding the outcomes of this training. It is nevertheless the belief of the authors of this case study that the anecdotal information and observations that have been collected from those involved with the training can be valuable for others who are seeking to engage in work to support the advancement of women lawyers globally.
- 2 *Nepal, The World Factbook*, CIA, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/nepal/#government> (last updated Sept. 14, 2023); Richard Riseley Proud, Pradyuma P. Karan & Leo E. Rose, *Nepal*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nepal> (last updated Sept. 24, 2023).
- 3 *Nepal, The World Factbook*, *supra* n.2; Proud et al., *supra* n.2.
- 4 Proud et al., *supra* n.2.
- 5 *Nepal, The World Factbook*, *supra* n.2.
- 6 *Id.*
- 7 *Id.*
- 8 Dragana Borenovic Dilas, Jean Cui & Stefan Trines, *Education in Nepal*, WORLD EDUC. NEWS & REVS. (Apr. 3, 2018), <https://wcnr.wes.org/2018/04/education-in-nepal>.
- 9 *Bidya Devi Bhandari, Profile*, Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/profile/bidya-devi-bhandari/?sh=5326954a6fb7> (last visited Oct. 3, 2023).
- 10 *Nepal, The World Factbook*, *supra* n.2; Proud et al., *supra* n.2.
- 11 THE CONSTITUTION OF NEPAL, Sept. 9, 2018, art. 18, <https://lawcommission.gov.np/en/?cat=87>.
- 12 *Id.* at arts. 19, 37, 42.
- 13 *Id.* at art. 252.
- 14 THE CONSTITUTION OF NEPAL, Sept. 9, 2018, art. 84(8), 176(9), <https://lawcommission.gov.np/en/?cat=87>.
- 15 *Nepal, The World Factbook*, *supra* n.2.
- 16 Gopal Sharma, *Nepal Gets First Woman Chief Justice, Sign of Changing Attitudes*, REUTERS (Apr. 13, 2016, 12:16 PM), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nepal-women-judge-idUSKCN0XA1XE>.
- 17 *Justices*, SUPREME COURT OF NEPAL, <https://supremecourt.gov.np/web/index.php/justices>.
- 18 *Judiciary in Nepal*, SUP. CT. OF NEPAL, <https://supremecourt.gov.np/web/index.php/generalinfo>.
- 19 Sirjana Sharma Pokhrel & Ershadul Karim, *Researching the Legal System of Kingdom of Nepal*, HAUSER GLOBAL L. SCH. PROGRAM, https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/Nepal1.html#Section_4 (Feb. 2023).
- 20 *Introduction*, NEPAL BAR ASSOC., <https://nepalbar.org.np/en/introduction/> (last visited Sept. 8, 2023).
- 21 Nepal Bar Association Response to Case Study Questionnaire, email dated April 16, 2023.
- 22 *Introduction*, NEPAL BAR COUNCIL, <https://nepalbarcouncil.org.np/en/introduction-3/> (last visited Sept. 14, 2023).
- 23 Dikshya Koirala & Harsh Mahaseth, *Why Does Nepal Still Have So Few Women Lawyers?*, THE DIPLOMAT (Jan. 18, 2020), <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/why-does-nepal-still-have-so-few-women-lawyers/>. The Nepal Bar Association, in response to a Case Study Questionnaire, confirmed that as of 2023, there are approximately 2,200 women lawyers. Nepal Bar Association Response to Case Study Questionnaire, email dated April 16, 2023.
- 24 An example of the male-centric perspective of the legal profession in Nepal is the term often used to address judges: "Shreeman." Koirala & Mahaseth, *supra* n.23. This term is also used to address a woman's husband and has led to women in the legal profession being mocked for their perceived gender-shifting role. *Id.* See also Saroj K Ghimire, *Women Lawyers Corporate Law Practice: Magnitude of Challenge and Prospects*, Nepal Bar Council Law Journal (2016).
- 25 Koirala & Mahaseth, *supra* n.23; see Charlotte Proudman, *The Legal Profession is Rife with Prejudice – I've Seen it First-Hand*, THE GUARDIAN (Feb. 18, 2019, 6:32 AM), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/18/legal-profession-prejudice-sexism-racism-class> (discussing sexism in the legal profession from the personal perspective of UK barrister and reports from international reporters); DEBORAH L. RHODE, THE UNFINISHED AGENDA: WOMEN IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION (ABA Commission on Women in the Profession ed. 2001), http://womenlaw.law.stanford.edu/pdf/aba_unfinished_agenda.pdf (A comprehensive report on barriers women face in the legal profession including gender stereotypes, lack of support networks, and sexual harassment).
- 26 Koirala & Mahaseth, *supra* n.23; see ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK, OVERVIEW OF GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN NEPAL 1-2, 4, 9 (2010), <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/32237/cga-nep-2010.pdf>.
- 27 Koirala & Mahaseth, *supra* n.23.
- 28 *Id.* (citing RHODE, *supra* n.25); see ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK, *supra* n.26, 9, 17-18 (reporting that women's participation and representation in professional and governance domains is less than men's in Nepal).
- 29 Koirala & Mahaseth, *supra* n.23. This was also confirmed in an interview with a Supreme Court Justice, who noted that while the number of women graduating from law schools is increasing, there is a large drop off of women as people progress through the profession. See also Saroj K Ghimire, *Women Lawyers Corporate Law Practice: Magnitude of Challenge and Prospects*, Nepal Bar Council Law Journal (2016).
- 30 Saroj K Ghimire, *Women Lawyers Corporate Law Practice: Magnitude of Challenge and Prospects*, Nepal Bar Council Law Journal (2016) (noting that women lawyers are engaged mostly in human rights, family, property, and criminal law matters). In that article, the author notes that commercial law opportunities are often directed to male lawyers, and that such opportunities offer higher compensation and longer term engagements. The author adds that many of the commercial law opportunities are international in nature, as local investors are less likely to use lawyers at each stage of a transaction, so women's lack of participation in such work limits their international exposure. In addition to working with NGOs and government organizations, women have been crucial to providing access to justice to other women. In a 2022 event in Kathmandu, 48 legal professionals participated in a discussion organized by the International Commission of Jurists and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation in Law on the "Role of Justice Sector Actors on Enhancing Women's Access to Justice in Nepal," discussing how judicial committees in rural municipalities could work to be more gender responsive. *Nepal: Local 'Judicial Committees' Can Help Enhance Women's Access to Justice*, INT'L COMM. OF JURISTS (Oct. 12, 2022), <https://www.icj.org/nepal-local-judicial-committees-can-help-enhance-womens-access-to-justice/>. Outside of the event, some other organizations working to help Nepali women include the Women's Foundation Nepal, Womankind Worldwide, the Nepali Congress Party, and the Feminist Dalit Organization. Caitlin Calfo, *The Fight for Women's Rights in Nepal*, THE BORGEN PROJECT (Sept. 14, 2020), <https://borgenproject.org/womens-rights-in-nepal/>.

- 31 Nepal Bar Association Response to Case Study Questionnaire, *supra* n.21.
- 32 According to UNDP, only 3.8 percent of the judiciary is female. *UNDP: Promoting Gender Equality in the Judiciary*, UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE INDEP. OF JUDGES AND LAWS., <https://independence-judges-lawyers.org/gender-in-the-judiciary-and-the-legal-profession/> (last visited Mar. 13, 2023). The Nepal Bar Association, in response to questionnaires sent by the authors of this study, reported that as of 2019, 15 percent of the judiciary was female, and that as of September 2023, approximately 10 percent of judges are women. They also noted that they anticipate that the percentage of women judges will increase, due to ongoing judicial appointments. Nepal Bar Association Response to Case Study Questionnaire, email dated April 16, 2023., *supra* n.21; Nepal Bar Association Email regarding Case Study, dated September 13, 2023.
- 33 Nepal Bar Association Response to Case Study Questionnaire, email dated April 16, 2023., *supra* n.21.
- 34 See Himalayan News Service, *New Gender Equality Policy to End Discrimination*, THE HIMALAYAN TIMES (Mar. 11, 2021, 9:55 AM), <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/new-gender-equality-policy-to-end-discrimination>; NEPAL BAR ASSOC., 28TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF WOMEN CONFERENCE REPORT, DHARAN, SUNSARI (Sept. 6-7, 2019), <https://nepalbar.org.np/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/28th-Women-lawyers-conference-.pdf> (summarizing the conference of women lawyers on promoting equality and a main session dedicated to the Nepal constitution). In practice, women continue to face legalized discrimination. For example, Article 11(7) of the Constitution provides that men can automatically confer citizenship on their children, while a woman must prove that her child's father is Nepali before the child will receive citizenship. A woman's declaration may be refuted, and if it is found false, the woman will face prosecution. Shivani Mishra, *Equal Laws in Nepal Crucial for Ending Discrimination Against Women*, HUM. RTS. WATCH (Mar. 8, 2023, 9:08 AM), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/08/equal-laws-nepal-crucial-ending-discrimination-against-women>.
- 35 Nepal Bar Association Response to Case Study Questionnaire, email dated April 16, 2023, *supra* n.21.
- 36 UNDP Responses to Case Study Questionnaire, email dated September 10, 2023.
- 37 Given the duration of the program, the partnership and organizations involved have evolved through the years. As of 2023, WLJH is no longer involved, having ceased operations. For ease of reference, we are referring to the organizations with which we have collaborated to plan and deliver the training as project partners. We use the term stakeholders more broadly, to include others such as trainees, volunteer Nepali co-trainers, and judges and other dignitaries who have supported the training.
- 38 Telephone interviews with participants from Women Lawyer's Joining Hands, New Perimeter, and NBA conducted between June and August 2023; Nepal Bar Association Response to Case Study Questionnaire, email dated April 16, 2023. Nepal Bar Association Email regarding Case Study, dated September 13, 2023; UNDP Responses to Case Study Questionnaire, email dated September 10, 2023.
- 39 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project partners were not able to conduct in-person trainings for several years, but did conduct one virtual training through weekly sessions over the course of five weeks in late 2021. The project partners are actively planning the next in-person training, to be held in 2023.
- 40 The contents of this section is derived from telephone interviews and written surveys conducted between April and September 2023, which included DLA Piper lawyers, lawyers affiliated with WLJH, current NBA leadership, a Nepali Supreme Court Justice, UNDP, former NBA officials, a former training coordinator, and former trainees. In addition, after each training sessions, trainees are asked to complete post-training evaluations, the contents of which offered additional material for this section.
- 41 Anecdotally, trainees reported that male lawyers were more likely to have had opportunities abroad (most in the United Kingdom or India) that would expose them to different forms of legal education, while many women lawyers' training experiences were limited to law schools in Nepal. Thus, trainers were excited to use case studies to engage trainees in analyzing legal problems, testing remedies, and developing strategies, teaching techniques that are common in many of the countries from which trainers come.



