

IDRC Grant number: 102927003

Decentralization and Promotion of Women's Rights in Nepal: Exploring Constraints, Opportunities and Intervention Avenues

Researchers:

Ram Bahadur Chhetri, Netra Prasad Timsina, Harisharan Luintel, Radhika Regmi, Basundhara Bhattarai and Rama Ale Magar

Research Assistants:

Nirmala Sannyashi, Gokul Sharma, Dipendra Sijapati, Pragati Sharma

Final Scientific Report



Forest Resources Studies and Action Team (ForestAction), Nepal

Phone: +9771 5550631, 5552974 Fax: + 9771 5535190

P. O. Box 12207, Kathmandu, Nepal

Email: forestaction@wlink.com.np

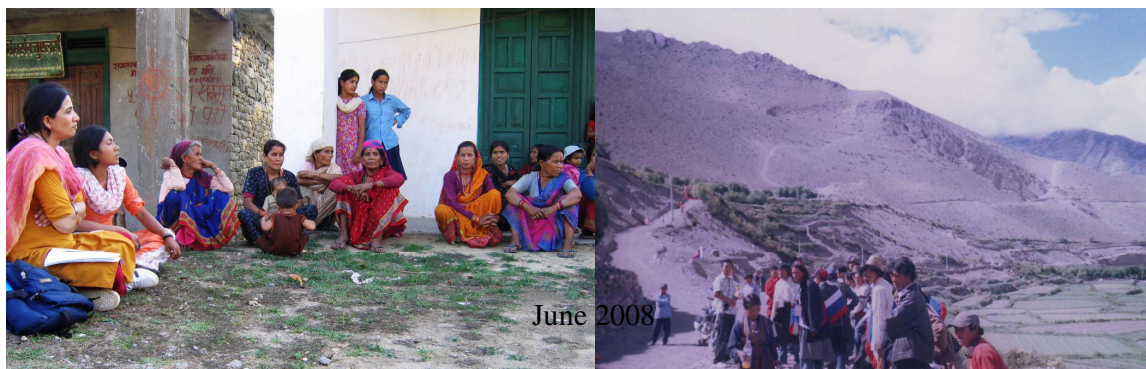
Website: www.forestaction.org

and



Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Association

(HIMAWANTI)- Nepal, G. P. O. Box: 12811 Lalitpur



Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to International Development Research Center (IDRC) for providing us the research grant to undertake a research on “Decentralization and Promotion of Women’s Rights in Nepal: Exploring Constraints, Opportunities and Intervention Avenues.” We thank ForestAction Nepal and HIMAWANTI Nepal for providing us opportunity to work in the project as researchers. The research team is grateful to all those who supported us while undertaking this study. There are many individuals and institutions/organizations that have made it possible for us to come this far by providing intellectual inputs, information, etc., since the time we began this study about two years ago. Particularly the project inception workshop’s participants from across the national level government and non-government organizations deserve appreciation for their contribution in providing critical insights at the beginning of the project. District branches of HIMAWANTI Nepal including their members and staff deserve special acknowledgement for providing support (information, logistic, etc.) during the field research. Our assistant researchers Ms. Nirmala Sannyashi, Mr. Dipendra Bikram Sijapati, Mr. Gokul Sharma and Ms. Pragati Sharma have to be commended for their hard work and relentless efforts in gathering the data as well as for enduring the hardships in the field.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to all those who participated in the discussions and interviews at different stages of our work. We are grateful to all the men and women; CFUGs; VDCs, DDCs and Municipality; water users associations; community schools including parents, teachers and management committee members in the study sites for providing access to their records and valuable time and insights to complete the research. Without their support, the study could not have been completed. Special thanks are also due to other stakeholders such as District Forest Office, District Irrigation Office, District Education Office, District Agricultural Development Office, District Development Committee, Woman Development Office, FECOFUN and different NGOs working in the districts under study. We are also thankful to Dr. Hemant Ojha and Dr. Naya Sharma Paudel for reading the earlier drafts of this report and for providing critical comments and suggestions. Our colleagues at the ForestAction Mr. Mani Ram Banjade, Ms. Kamala Sharma, Mr. Amrit Adhikari, Ms. Sujata Tamang also deserve special thanks for their help and support at various stages of preparing this report. Last but not the least, we are also thankful to the ForestAction’s office assistants Mr. Lalit Thapa and Mrs. Laxmi Thapa for all their efforts in creating a good working environment for the research team in the office.

Acronyms

ACAP	Annapurana Area Conservation Project
ADDCN	Association of District Development Committees of Nepal
AMIS	Agency Managed Irrigation System
CA	Constituent Assembly
CAMC	Conservation Area Management committee
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women
CF	Community Forest
CFUG	Community Forest User Group
DADO	District Agricultural Development Office
DC	District Council
DDC	District Development Committee
DDES	Development of District Education Supervisor
DEO	District Education Officer
DFO	District Forest Officer
DIO	District Irrigation Office
EC	Executive Committee
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forest Users-Nepal
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FMIS	Farmer Managed Irrigation System
FMSC	Forest Management Sub Committee
GoN	Government of Nepal
GPSE	Gender, Poverty and Social Equity
HIMAWANTI	Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Association
HMGN	His-Majesty Government of Nepal
IULA	International Union of Local Government Authorities
LDO	Local Development Officer
LDTC	Local Development Training Centre
LG	Local Government
LSGA	Local Self Governance Act
MC	Municipal Council
MFSC	Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation
MGEP	Mainstreaming Gender Equity Programme
MLD	Ministry of Local Development
MoLJ	Ministry of Law and Justice
MPFS	Master Plan for the Forestry
MuAN	Municipal Association of Nepal
NAVIN	National VDC Federation in Nepal
NGO	Non Government Organization
NPC	National Planning Commission
NRs	Nepalese Rupees
PTA	Parent Teacher Association

SMC	School Management Committee
VC	Village Council
VDC	Village Development Committee
WC	Ward Committee
WDO	Women Development Office/Officer
WFP	World Food Program
WUA	Water users association

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Executive summary

Nepal has made a number of initiatives in the field of decentralisation over the past two decades on both “sectoral” levels as well as in the overall “local governance” in the country. This research examines the effectiveness of women’s participation in the context of state decentralisation process in Nepal. In particular, the study examines four different spheres of decentralisation, viz., community forestry (involving local groups in the management of national forests); irrigation management (involving farmer groups in the governance of irrigation systems); community school (involving local communities in the governance of school level education); and local governance (with elected political bodies at village and district levels).

The study seeks to understand women’s role as social and political actors. The focus of the research has been on the gendered social relations that shape women’s agency in the governance of public resources and services. This study analyzes the depth and breadth of participation through which women exercise their agency in various policy and socio-cultural contexts of decentralization. The study has also identified some processes and strategies that enhance positive impact of decentralization on women in Nepal.

This research adopted a combination of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study sites were divided into five clusters in order to capture the diversities of geography, ethnicity and culture—located from east to west, north to south and covering Tarai, hills and mountains regions of Nepal. A total of 10 Village Development Committees, 11 Community Forest User Groups, 9 Community Schools and 10 Farmers Managed Irrigations System (FMIS) were studied from six districts (see Map 1).

The sectoral case studies present a range of findings with reference to gender, social structures, processes and strategies of decentralization, and the level of impact on women in general. By comparing and pooling evidences and insights from the four spheres of decentralization named above, we explore viable measures needed to empower and transform the agency of women, as well as to create desirable institutional conditions, political alliances and support structures that ensure women’s active participation in decentralization and governance.

Based on the analysis of four cases of decentralised sectors named above, we arrive at some insightful conclusions. Promotion of women's rights in decentralised spheres is determined through the interplay of structure and agency. Structure encompasses the access to diverse forms of capitals in the community—economic, social, cultural and symbolic. In our study area women's access to capitals differed on the basis of socio-economic contexts and the length (time period) of intervention of the decentralised programs. It appears that if the women at household level were free and independent, they were active in exercising their agency in the public domain such as committees and/or groups in the CF, CS, FMIS and VDCs.

Within the context of structure, we must mention that the historically constituted and culturally internalised schemes which shape people’s perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours become manifested in the day to day interactions within the community or society.

The findings of this study make it evident that policy and legal instruments of the state have provided opportunities for women to participate in various spheres/sectors including local governance. However, their actual participation appears to be only at the level of numeric representation since both men and women in the study sites tended to think of women’s participation in terms of physical presence and attendance in the meetings and/or assemblies and not necessarily for giving/taking a role of influencing the decision making process. In general women appear to be reluctant to raise their voice in a mixed group while they appear to be more ready to articulate their voices in women only groups such as Saving and Credit Groups or women managed community forest groups. This was also true in the case of FGDs conducted by

the research team while collecting data in the field—i.e., women spoke more freely in women only FGDs than in mixed-group interviews.

The policy provisions in relation to women's inclusion in the decentralised spheres were found to be more instrumentalist (i.e., to accomplish activities designed by the development projects) and less transformative. The analysis of all four decentralised areas shows that the number of women representation in different committees as per the provisions in the policies and legislations are rarely represented in required number. If represented, it does not exceed the required number. Where the policy has not stipulated about the women's representation, there are no or very low representation of women in the committees. The emphasis is given only for a tokenistic participation of women and there is very little emphasis on qualitative representation.

The institutions in the local level decentralisation are set up with the patriarchal and masculine mind sets that appear to permeate into other economic, political and social institutions. In general, the institutions at local level favour the masculine/patriarchal mindsets and behaviour that exclude women to be involved in decision making process.

Requiring the representation of women on committee or ensuring that women are consulted can be regarded as necessary but not a sufficient condition for promoting women's role in decision making and enhancing their agency. When viewed from the angle of accountability structure, women's inclusion and gender issues seem to have received due attention. Similarly, as suggested by the empirical information, education emerges as a necessary condition but not necessarily a sufficient condition for effecting change in the structure in the Nepali social context and in women's agency. This is attested by the fact that even well educated men and women in the rural communities were found unable and unwilling to challenge the prevailing conservative socio-cultural norms and values which hinder the process of gender justice.

Symbolic capital such as networks or social relations, family connections to economic and social standing at the local level also seemed to be important in advancing women's agency. On the basis of the findings and conclusions, this report also outlines some policy implication in relations to decentralisation and gender equality. Nine policy recommendations can be made as follows:

- i.) Proper implementation of policy should be in place as the implementation of the policy appears to be very weak.
- ii.) Social norms, values and practices need to be democratised through proper policy instruments and their implementations.
- iii.) Emphasis should be given to changing the power relationship in the domestic and private domain
- iv.) Appropriate accountability structure and systems need to be developed in order to reinforce the policy intention for women empowerment.
- v.) The diversity among the women in various social groups and context must be recognised.
- vi.) Identity appears to be important for women to exercise their rights, so they must be recognised as independent actors of society.
- vii.) Rules of interactions in public spaces must be reformed/changed in order to enable women in exercising their agency.
- viii.) Ample individual freedom and security must be guaranteed for women to come in the public domain.
- ix.) The national political process should take measures to redress persistent disparities in command over resources and the voices of women.

Chapter One

Introduction, Conceptual Framework, and Methods

Introduction

Decentralisation is usually defined as the transfer of powers from central government to lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy (Crook and Manor 1998; Agrawal and Ribot 1999). Administrative decentralisation, which is also known as de-concentration, refers to the transfer of governance authorities from central level to local level or to other local authorities who are upwardly accountable to the central authority or government. In contrast, political or democratic decentralisation refers to the transfer of authority to representatives or downwardly accountable actors, such as elected local governments (Ribot 2005). Democratic decentralisation means that representatives and any other accountable local actors should have an autonomous, discretionary decision making sphere with the power and resources so as to make decision that are significant to the lives of local people, especially poor women and marginalised groups. Democratic decentralisation is often used as the yardstick against which the power relations between different categories of people are measured. Larson (2005) asserts that decentralisation is a tool for promoting development and is aimed at increasing efficiency, equity and democracy. While efficiency refers to lowering the cost of development, equity and democracy refer to justice to local people by increasing participation and accountability (Larson 2005). Accountability is important in exercising democratic practices and is inherently in-built with the power relationship. Accountability without power is empty (there is no responsiveness) and power without accountability is dangerous (there is no check on the exercise of power) (Ribot 2005).

Decentralisation is primarily viewed as a political process (Agrawal et al 2005). It has been regarded as a key strategy to poverty reduction and good governance in Nepal with constitutional commitment to benefit citizen with the fruits of democracy through decentralisation and participation in the governance of the country (MoLJ, 1990: article 25:4). Enhancing women's capability to exercise their citizenry rights is one of the key policy goals of decentralisation (HMG/N, 2002), given the huge disparity that exists between men and women in terms of access to resources, gendered division of labour and their participation in public decision-making process. In this context this research seeks to explore this crucial link between decentralisation as a policy intervention and enhanced women's rights as desired outcomes.

Although there were established indigenous systems of decentralised governance before the formation of strong central Nepali state (see Agrawal et al., 1999), the state sponsored decentralisation processes began during the Panchayat Era (1960-90). More than 14 commissions, committees and task forces were formed to study and recommend decentralisation policies. Among others, Decentralisation Act 1982 and Decentralization Bylaws 1984, are probably the most significant instruments crafted during this period. However, decentralisation process during the Panchayat era focused narrowly in administrative decentralisation (Agrawal, 1999:45) and remained reluctant to provide any meaningful role to the local government bodies, private sector and civil society in the actual governance process.

Emphasis on the need for decentralisation grew after the inception of multiparty democracy in 1990. As per the spirit of the new democratic constitution, democratising the state and enhancing people's participation in every sphere of governance were recognised as the main political agenda of the democratic era. Local Self Governance Act, 1999 is a key step in this direction. It transfers some political, administrative and financial authority to the local

governments such as District Development Committees (DDCs) and Village Development Committees (VDCs) and municipalities. Decentralisation initiatives were also taken in various spheres of resource management and public service delivery. Notable initiatives under sectoral decentralisation include: the concept and practice of community forestry which now accords legal rights to local users to manage and utilize forest resources; farmer managed irrigation systems (FMIS) and water users associations (WUA) promoting farmer participation in water resources management; the concept of community school which allows local people to manage school level educational services, and so on.

Participation of women within these initiatives has remained a constant concern. Establishment of Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, formation of Women's Division within Ministry of Local Development, and 'Gender Focal Points' (GFP) in sectoral ministries, and the establishment of National Commission for Women are some of the notable initiatives in this direction (Shrestha, 2002:72). Similarly, ratification of women related international agreements such as Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and embracing '12 points of Women Empowerment' in the National Plan of Action under the Critical Areas of Concerns of Beijing Platform of Action (BPFA) are also important steps taken by the Government of Nepal (MoF 2007). The action plan was further redefined in the light of the Beijing-Plus-Five report which was subsequently approved by the government in September 2004.

The government of Nepal has introduced Gender Responsive Budget¹ (GRB) allocation concept since 2005 and established a Gender Responsive Budget Committee (GRBC) in 2006 under the Ministry of Finance. Budget is an instrument of macro-economic policy and can be instrumental in reducing the gender inequality (MoF 2007). Nevertheless, co-operation across government agencies, non governmental sector and across the policy process, which can be a key component in realising a gender sensitive budget has been lacking.

Similarly, provision of quotas for women in various decentralized bodies, human resources development strategies to enhance their capability, incentive mechanisms in industrial sector to employ women and provisions for increasing women's access to legal protection have been appreciated (HMGN, 2005). Moreover, in 2006, the Parliament of Nepal proclaimed² that there shall be at least 33 percent women in every apparatus of the government.

Despite these initiatives to empower women, the practice so far shows little progress. Women in Nepal still lag behind men in terms of access to and control over economic resources, and generally lack decision-making power both within the household as well in public sphere (HMGN, 2005). Women's participation in political institutions has remained dismally low, particularly at higher levels. For example, in the 1999 parliamentary election, women candidates constituted only 6% while there were only 3% women MPs (HMGN, 2005:30). But more recently there are signs of change—since in the recent Constituent Assembly Election (CA, April 2008) a total of 191 women³ (33.22%) out of the 575 CA members have been elected (Election Commission 2008).

While 38% of the country's population remains under the poverty line, the corresponding figure for women and children is reported to be 80% (Shrestha, 2002:72). Women have constituted 62% of total unpaid family labour and only 18% among wage earners with almost no progress

¹ Gender budgeting is one of the most important tools for advancing gender equality and empowering women, and can be used effectively to address inequality (MoF, 2007).

² The declaration also has made a provision of acquiring citizenships in the name of mothers. The interim constitution of has stipulated 33% quota for women in all spheres of state machinery. In general, the declaration aims to bring an end to discriminations against women. However, women rights activists argue that there are still 139 types of discrimination in the current policy and legislations of the state.

³ The election of more than 33% women in the CA suggests that the government of Nepal is trying to fulfil its own policy commitments on improving women's participation in the public spheres.

since 1991 (HMGN, 2005:30). In respect to land ownership and its utilisation, women lag far behind the men. Of total households, merely 10.83% women are owners of land with houses, while in the case of agricultural land their ownership is hardly 4.4%. Moreover, of the total land owning women, 81% own less than one hectare of land (NPC 2002).

There is a huge challenge in narrowing the literacy differential between the sexes among adults (HMGN, 2005:30). Polygamy and child marriage is outlawed but continues in practice. Similarly violence against women is widespread including sexual abuse within the household and the family. Thousands of women become rape victims and almost 40% of them tend to be under the age of 19—forcing them to social and psychological problems as well as sexual and reproductive disorders including HIV/AIDs (NDHS, 2001). Girl trafficking into foreign sex market is another severe problem with more than 200,000 young girls reported to have been trafficked to India (IIDS and UNIFEM, 2004). While the legal instruments to prevent such evil practices and to empower women are in place, the implementing agencies do not seem to show adequate seriousness in enforcing the existing politics and legislations. The GFP of sectoral ministries are not given any active role in engendering the budgeting process on the basis of the national and international commitments made by the government for gender equality and women's empowerment in their respective fields.

Much of the enthusiasm for decentralisation has come from the assumption that it will empower marginal sections of the society, particularly women to participate in development and governance process. However the link between decentralisation process and enhancement of women's right is not straightforward. Numerous studies have identified women as a specific social group who are usually excluded from social and political process of the nation (March 2002; The World Bank 2001, Cameron 1998; Bennett 1983). Despite anecdotal reflections, there is no systematic and comprehensive study on the impact of decentralization on women. There are limited reflections, understanding and evidence on how women have been constrained in the actual practice of exercising agency. Construction of women's homogenized identity and seeing them as passive recipients of development schemes irrespective of their affinity to diverse caste/ethnic groups, class, religion, etc., has been one of the major weaknesses. Homogenization has led to oversimplification of the complex structures of power where women are not viewed as separate social groups in society but are considered to be one single group across ethnicity, caste and religion. Gender as a dimension of social stratification and a barrier to democratic participation holds important analytical and practical significance in this context.

The limited impact of decentralization on enhancing women's rights can be attributed to poor understanding of Nepal's complex social structure and the ways it constrains women in exercising their political agency. The Nepali society has for a long time been ruled by a group of feudal elites (dominated by males) perpetuated along dynastic and familial lines that condition people to accept the highly hierarchical and patriarchal socio-cultural institutions and practices. Particularly the weak and vulnerable social groups such as indigenous communities, Dalits, poor and landless among others have been the victims of this process. These are the sources of differentiation within women and can be attributed to differential impacts of decentralisation process. The idea and practice of decentralization appear to lose sight on the more subtle constraints that inhibit the agency of women. This indicates a need for understanding the dynamic links between women's agency and the inherent social, cultural and political structures through which women exercise their rights in the decentralized spheres of governance. This research identifies these subtle and invisible constraints and explores avenues for interventions. By informing decentralisation policy process and social movements with these insights, this research will help better address issues of women's rights in various spheres of decentralisation.

While the social status and role of women in Nepal is a well-studied area (Acharya and Bennett 1981; Bennett 1983; Cameron 1998), their exercise of political agency within the process of decentralisation reform is little explored. The available literature treats discrimination against

women as being separate from the process of decentralisation. In-depth analytical studies focusing on how the dialectical tension between social structure and women's political agency mediate the outcomes of decentralisation intervention are lacking. This study was designed to build up insights and knowledge in this area that would help bring women's right issues at the centre stage of the decentralisation process.

The study was carried out in four spheres of decentralisation, viz., local governance, community forestry, community school and farmer managed irrigation system. Forms of decentralisation and gender specificity in each sphere are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Selected Spheres of Decentralisation and Their Specific Characteristics

S.N.	Spheres of decentralisation	Forms of decentralisation	Gender specificities
1	Local governance	Authorities are transferred to elected political bodies at district level and village/municipalities	Largely shaped by the male dominated party politics
2	Community forest management	Autonomous user groups with exclusive rights to access, parts of national forests handed over to local communities	Women participate in every day resource use but not usually in decision making
3	Community school	Management of some primary and secondary schools is given to the locally formed committees	Primary source of discrimination against women
4	Farmer managed irrigation	Farmers are given responsibilities with management of irrigation system	Property rights rest largely with male, and women take only supportive role in this productive system

Theoretical foundations and conceptual framework of the research

The research conceptualizes women's rights and well-being as outcomes of decentralization intervention are actually mediated by the dialectical interactions between women's agency and the social structure in which women are situated (Figure 1 summarizes the key concepts of the research). The central focus of the study is on understanding the actual practices and/or exercise of women's rights within the arenas of decentralization. To assess women's actual status of participation in various fields of decentralisation, we use typologies of participation (Agrawal, 2001) which provide a measure of intensity and quality. Although there are some variations in naming particular type of participation, they provide a framework ranging from tokenistic participation to highly active and interactive one. As the radical ideal, unconstrained deliberation (following deliberative democracy perspective as discussed in Chamber 1996) has been invoked to critique the actual practice of participation.

Once the status of participation is established, the next logical question is to explain the observed levels. Following Giddens and Bourdieu, the political practice of women in decentralized sphere is determined through the dialectical interplay of *structure* and *agency*. While decentralization policies expect that creating extra space will enhance women's rights, the outcome is indeed shaped by structured gender relations of power (*structure*) and the "doxic" and "discursive" *agency* of women⁴.

Structure encompasses the whole regime of access to diverse forms of capitals in the society—economic, social, cultural, and symbolic. In order to explain structural conditions of women's participation, we use Bourdieu's idea of the structure of social space⁵ and the regimes of access

⁴ A central characteristic of the modern gender order is that it constitutes a field of open political struggle. In this struggle, women exist not only as objects but also as social subjects, agents who act in their own rights and in defence of their own interests (Krais B. 2006).

⁵ "...the social world can be represented as a space (with several dimensions) constructed on the basis of principles of differentiation or distribution by the set of properties active within the social universe in questions, i.e., capable

to different types of capitals (Bourdieu 1985). In Nepal, women's capabilities are shaped by the access regimes of a range of capitals such as property rights (economic capital), identities of women (symbolic capital), gendered division of labours (economic, cultural, symbolic), and access to public spaces/domain (symbolic and cultural). The capital framework is considered useful in understanding social differentiations (Savage et al. 2005), including gender relations. Analysis of access regime of these capitals helps to understand and explain the critical constraints and opportunities for women in order to fully participate in various fields of decentralisation. The effect of class, ethnicity and religion on women's capability will be assessed through their effects on the regimes of access to the four types of capitals. Use of this framework would also avoid homogenised identities such as 'the Nepalese Women' and will locate them on their specific socio-economic and politico-cultural positions⁶.

Likewise, the *agency* of women encompasses historically constituted and culturally internalized schemes of perceptions, thoughts and motivations, which form the *doxic core* of the human agency. Our conception, following Bourdieu⁷ (2001), is that women's agency cannot be explained solely by the notion of free will or conscious agency. Indeed, discursive/conscious⁸ agency of women is inscribed within this doxic core, which shapes how women exercise their rights within the spheres of decentralization. This means, for instance, that women tend to view day to day practices of male domination as natural⁹ because of internalized schemes of perceptions, thought and motivations, which are part of *doxa*. Figure 1 provides a schematic representation of the dialectics between structure and agency, within which decentralization processes are situated.

of conferring strength, power within that universe, on their holder. Agents and groups of agents are thus defined by their relative position within that space" (Bourdieu 1985).

⁶ "The position of a given agent within the social space can thus be defined by the positions he/she occupies in the different fields, that is, in the distribution of powers that are active within each of them. These are, principally, economic capital (in different kinds), cultural capital and social capital as well as symbolic capital, commonly called prestige, reputation, renown, etc., which is the form in which the different forms of capitals are perceived and recognised as legitimate".

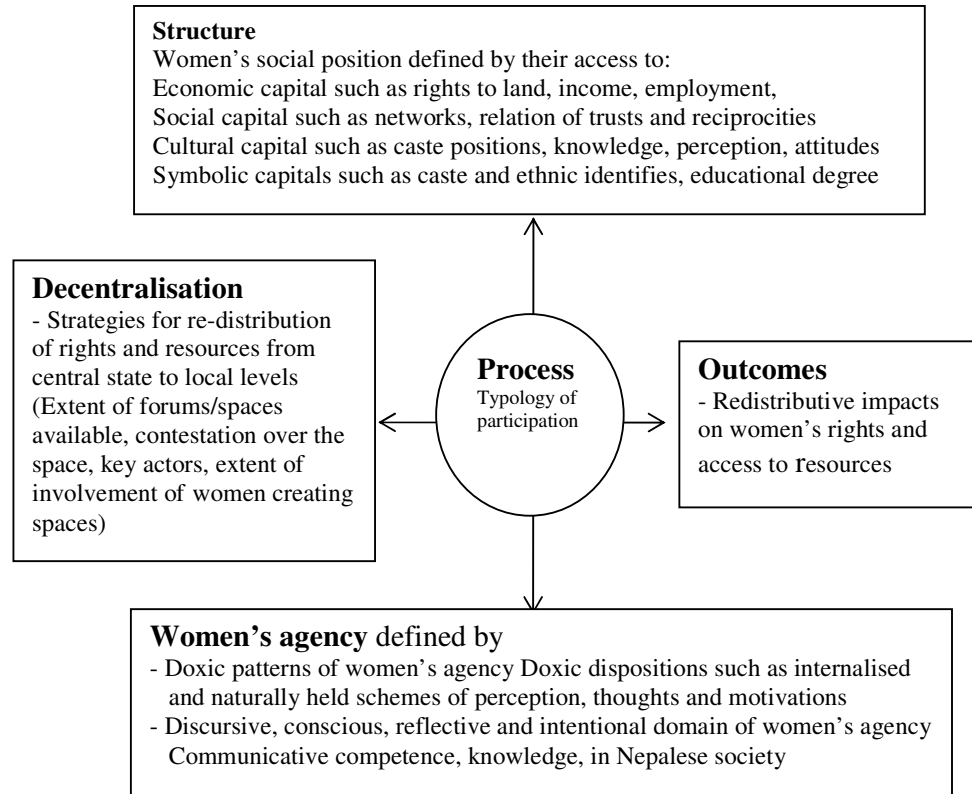
A similar explanation for the capacity to exercise power has provided by Goetz (2007) "... the capacity of people to exercise effective voice in the public arena depends greatly upon their power in other institutional arenas, particularly the family, the market, civil and political society" (P 46).

⁷ Bourdieu emphasizes that gender is a construct that differentiates according to both antagonistic and complementary principles, and operates as a highly complex, differentiated and vital symbolic order. Bourdieu put forward the concept of masculine domination and symbolic violence. According to him domination means the somatisation of social relationship. Symbolic violence is exercised only through an act of knowledge and practical recognition which takes place below the level of the consciousness and will and which gives all its manifestations-injunction, suggestions, seduction, threats, reproaches, orders or calls to order-their hypnotic power (Bourdieu 2001, 42).

⁸ The power of social change comes not from society but from within the subject, who is able, through his/her inner forces, to break the shackles imposed by society.

⁹ Domination also means that the dominated to a large extent share the worldview cast from the vantage points of dominants and form a self image correspondingly. Thus, men's views of women, their positing of the masculine as the universal and feminine as the particular, and the dichotomies and classification schemes that emerge out of this view also provide the basis for women ways of thinking and perceiving (Krais 2006).

Figure 1: Decentralization intervention mediated by structure and agency interface



This research takes a case study strategy taking four cases from four different spheres of decentralisation. The selected spheres of decentralisation (Table 1) are conceptualised as *social fields* which encompasses cross-scale interactions and processes (Bourdieu 1984; Martin 2003). The concept of field provides boundaries for research areas in social science to explain regularities in social practices. Fields are relatively independent and relational structures of social setting within which social practices occur according to internalised rules of the game. For instance, if we take the case of community forestry, conception of field allows exploring the links between local processes of community participation in forest management and non-local processes through which the agenda of community forestry are promoted or contested.

A number of academics, feminist scholars and women rights activists have identified constrains of women empowerment and advocated for the need to have conducive policies, strategies and practices on gender justice. Mukhopadhyay (2007) argues that the main reason for failure of gender mainstreaming initiatives is its de-politicization and indicates that the initiatives appear to be more instrumentalist in orientation. She argues "*a central problem has been the difficulty of finding a fit between the technical project of mainstreaming gender equality in policy, programme and projects, and the political project of challenging inequality and promoting women rights* (2007:2)". She contends that the reality of power relations in framing the relations between men and women demands the political nature of the project and draws attentions to the areas where movements for rights are being waged. White (1996) argues that both the participation and gender as the political issues are translated into a technical problem which the development enterprise can accommodate with barely a falter in its pace.

Goetz (2007) links current thinking on gender justice to debates on citizenships, entitlements, rights, and law and development. She outlines the starting points of contemporary discussions on gender justice as: a) political philosophy discussions of human agency, autonomy, rights and

capabilities b) political science discussions involving democratisation, citizenship and constitutionalism, and c) discussions in the field of law about judicial reform and practical matters of access to justice. She analyses gender justice into three conceptions. First, women are different social categories than other sets of disempowered people. Gender cuts across all social categories, producing differences of interests. Second, relationship between men and women in the family and community are a key site of gender-specific injustice, and therefore, any strategy to advance gender justice must focus on power relations in the domestic or private sphere. Third, the outcomes from the patriarchal mindsets and social relations in the private sphere are not contained only there, but infuse into economic, social and political institutions.

Feminist scholars argue that oppressed women themselves may not propose a version of gender justice that challenges male privilege because they have been socialised into acceptance of their situation (Goetz, 2007) that equates Bourdieu's (2001) concept of symbolic violence that the dominated groups accept the worldview of dominant groups. Since the family and community norms and values constrain in exercising women's agency, feminist political philosophers have debated the minimum economic, social, even psychological conditions under which women might be able to refuse or renegotiate the social arrangements under which they live (O'Neill 2000).

The women's rights movement has also been influenced by the contemporary rights-based approach to development practice that evolved after the 1990s wave of rights movement around the world. This approach acknowledges that power relations affect the outcomes of policies and that a rule of law and basic accountability is needed in order to enable people to make the most of their basic rights to resources and skills realised.

Goetz (2007) posits that the debate of gender justice brings into discussion the minimum standards or levels of resource access and enjoyment by women, the cultural bias embedded in notions of choice, agency and autonomy, the type of public policy to address the injustice and the locus of responsibility for addressing gender injustice. Reeves and Baden (2000) have also argued that since men and women have different needs, preferences and interest that the equality of outcomes demands for different treatment of men and women. The principles of justice must take into account the human differences that limit women's capabilities to benefit from equal opportunities. The issue of equal outcomes as opposed to equal opportunities also relates to discussions about substantive versus procedural democracy and about the distinctions between economic and social rights civil and procedural rights (Goetz 2007).

Box 1: Conceptual Framework

- a) The persistence and profound influence of sub-state human communities within which gendered norms are generated.
- b) The nature of both formal and implicit contracts within these communities that determines the extent to which power-holders must answer to less powerful members.
- c) The phenomenon of patriarchal 'capture' of authoritative roles and significant resources in rule-making institutions, as well as of rights.
- d) The subtle institutionalisation of male bias in the systems for adjudicating disputes or punishing offenders.

Source: Goetz 2007: 31-32.

Another element of gender justice is accountability. The power holders in all levels from household, community, market to state can be held to account so that action that limit women's access to resources or capacity to make choices on the ground of gender is prevented or punished (Goetz 2007). The social institutions that produce rules and adjudicate disputes between women and men institutionalise biases against women. Goetz elaborates the conceptual framework as summarised in Box 1.

Moreover, the state and older institutions not only limit the capabilities of women to claim rights, but also deny the legitimacy of constitutional notion of equal rights- even where women claim those rights. The older, more established systems of social organisation deny the state any remit in matters relating to injustices between women and men. They also profoundly penetrate state institutions by supplying powerful informal norms and prejudices in the decisions of state actors. These norms and the behaviours they endorse make state agencies and actors at best reluctant advocates of women's rights, and sometimes even direct perpetrators of gender based injustice (Goetz, 2007)¹⁰.

Women rights movements arise from the perspectives of identity politics including other groups such as ethnicity, madhesi, dalit, etc, that has largely impacted on the recent political movement of Nepal. The rights model of political activism has traditionally been based on the assumption and assertion of collective identities whether they be gendered, ethnic, religious or national identities. Women's political movements are focused on activism centred upon improving the rights of women.

Methods and Processes of Research

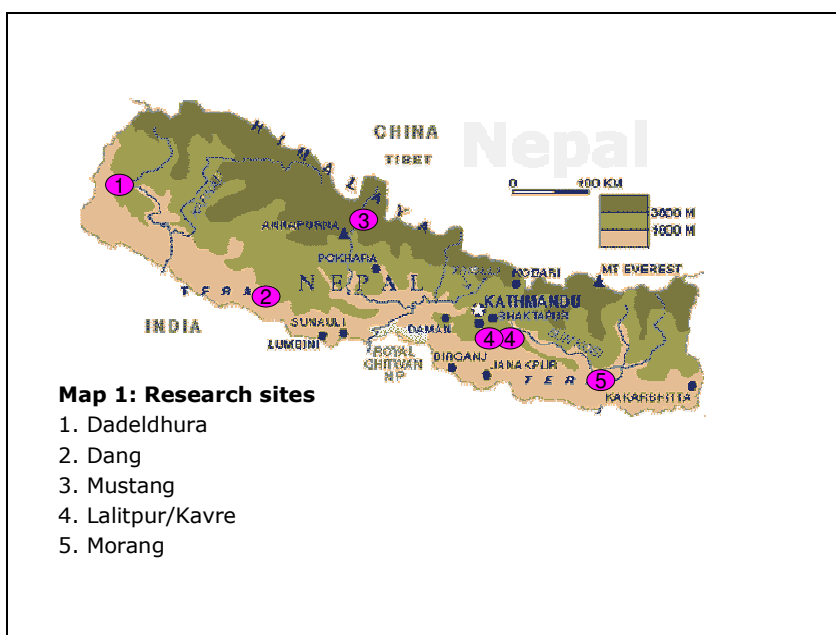
We located the research on the fundamental sociological problems of structure and agency (see the theoretical foundation and conceptual framework section of this report). Conceptual framework and research tools were agreed upon by June 2006 through a series of interactions among the researchers and research assistants. Review of pertinent literature on gender, decentralization and development became useful in this process. We started with commonly debated and yet fundamental questions (which greatly enrich our conceptual framework): 'Does decentralisation enhance women's right in public decision making? If yes, under what conditions and with what social movement and policy strategies? By 'condition' we mean a range of social factors that mediate decentralization – such as gender relations of power and regimes of access to different types of resources or capitals including cultural and symbolic (elaborated in conceptual framework).

Collection of data and other contextual information for the case studies began in January 2007. Surveys as well as participatory techniques were used to collect primary information at all levels, and the information obtained was validated through triangulation. A considerable amount of time was spent living in the study sites which has helped to obtain reasonably reliable information.

Samples/sites- overview of case studies

The research sites were divided into five clusters in order to capture the diversities of geography, ethnicity and culture—located from east to west, north to south and covering Tarai, hills and mountains regions of Nepal. A total of 10 Village Development Committees, 11 Community Forest User Groups, 9 Community Schools and 10 Farmers Managed Irrigations System (FMIS) were studied from six districts (see Map 1).

¹⁰ Examples of this can be drawn from Mukhiya system, CF, Community school, etc., in Nepal.



Participation of women, particularly those who were working in decentralised bodies was an essential part of this research. The ideas and questions for research were identified through repetitive interactions between the research team and a wide range of policy actors and women rights activists. Specifically, participation of ForestAction staff in the following recent events was also crucial in defining the scope of the research:

- National level conference of grassroots people and natural resources (of which ForestAction and HIMAWANTI were part of the consortium of collaborating organizations)
- Participation of ForestAction staff in a multi-stakeholder interactive process in Morang district on identifying institutional arrangement for the management of Terai forests. The details of the sites are given in the table below:

Women representatives in different fields of decentralisation were involved during various steps of the research project - inception meetings, preliminary reflective workshops, and final output dissemination workshop. Participation of local women respondents as key informants and interviewees were the kernel of evidence generation and research validation.

Table 2: Number of Focus Group Discussions, Sample Surveys and Interviews for Study Sites

Spheres of Study	Name of Groups	FGDs			Sample Survey		Key Informant Interviews	
		Women	Men	Mixed	Men	Women	Men	Women
Local Governments	Mastamandu	2	4	2	36	16	3	2
	Jogbudha	3	4	2	40	12	4	2
	Urlabari	0	5	4	33	16	3	3
	Letang	0	0	3	27	14	3	3
	Kagbeni	1	1	2	35	12	3	1
	Marpha	1	1	2	25	22	3	1
	Banepa	3	3	3	21	30	3	3
	Lamatar	2	1	2	30	20	2	2
	Gadawa	7	6	4	22	25	4	5
	Sisaniya	2	1	3	22	24	2	2
	Sub Total	21	27	27	291	191	30	24
FMIS	Bhuwa Chisang	0	2	5	21	20	4	2
	Bakraha Bhingamari	0	1	1	27	23	3	1
	Tukucha	3	1	4	27	23	3	1
	Tehrabise Raj Kulo	1	0	2	23	27	2	1
	Kakani	1	1	0	4	2	2	1
	Ghuomi	2	1	0	24	25	3	1
	KaloPani Praganna	0	3	4	27	24	3	1
	Dangali Chap	0	1	4	28	22	4	1
	Sakayal	1	5	1	26	24	3	2
	Pantura	3	1	2	27	24	3	2
	Sub Total	11	16	23	234	214	30	13
CFUG	Kamalpur	0	0	3	20	29	1	3
	Chautari	1	1	1	29	19	2	0
	Mathillo Patle	1	1	0	26	24	3	1
	Pandey	0	1	3	10	14	3	1
	Bengdhunga	0	1	1	4	12	2	2
	Kagbeni	1	1	1	11	5	1	1
	Kaloban	1	0	0	3	6	1	1
	Dangsera	3	1	0	22	25	4	1
	Tham	1	0	2	23	24	3	1
	Nashawa	1	0	4	21	26	4	4
	Sarbodaya	3	3	3	26	23	4	4
	Sub Total	12	9	18	195	207	28	19
Community Managed Schools	Shanti Bhagbati	0	0	1	23	15	3	2
	Bhanu	0	0	3	21	25	2	3
	Chaitanya	1	1	2	22	25	4	1
	Shringeri	1	0	3	23	25	3	2
	Janashanti	2	1	3	8	10	2	1
	Chhairo	0	1	1	4	5	2	1
	Siddhanath	1	3	1	30	17	3	2
	Samaiji	1	0	3	22	26	3	2
	Sarbadaya	1	0	4	21	20	3	0
	Sub Total	7	6	21	174	168	25	14
Grand Total		51	58	89	894	780	113	70

Source: Field Survey 2007.

Tools and techniques for data/information collection

This project followed the principle of triangulation (in data collection as well as in presentation of the findings) in order to ensure the validity of the empirical data/information. The instruments for field study (data collection tools like survey questionnaire, check-list for interviews, forms for collecting secondary data, etc.) were developed by organising a workshop among the research team members. Surveys were carried out to obtain data on individual (women and men) experiences and perceptions on areas specific to their fields of engagement. Case studies, field

observations, and interviews (key informants and focus group discussions, etc.) have provided in-depth contextual and qualitative information on the sectors.

As stated above, this research combined both qualitative and quantitative methods in data collection and analysis. Qualitative methods were very useful to understand everyday practice, institutional processes and the process of participation (Silverman, 1993; Hamel et al., 1993; Nachimas and Nachimas, 1996; Chambers, 1997; May, 1997; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). Qualitative data on women and men representatives' experiences as members and office bearers in various local organisations, their own and others meanings of participation and the constraints and opportunities they have realised form the core data for this research.

The researchers studied everyday life experiences of ordinary men and women, particularly those who are involved in various activities within the process of decentralisation. The researchers' skills, sensitivity and integrity proved to be extremely useful for the validity and reliability of the research, when the fieldwork was a major basis for this study (Patton, 1990; Hedrick et al., 1993; Yin, 1994). Furthermore, any interaction with people can only be understood when researchers listen and watch carefully, speak less and allow people to speak more, be open, and think about what to hear and see, and document systematically (Patton, 1990; Chambers, 1997). A considerable amount of time (about one month in each study site) was spent living with the people, which helped to obtain reasonably reliable information. Some specific tools and techniques that were used to collect information are briefly described below.

1. Sample Survey

The sample survey was undertaken in each of the decentralization sphere selected for the study (see Tables 2 and 3). The sample sites for the study were selected purposively based on technical feasibility and the relevance of the sites for the present research context. The data generated by means of the sample survey allowed us to discover the extent of women's and men's participation in activities including decision making processes as well as their perceptions on prevailing constraints and opportunities for the decentralization processes to become beneficial to all. A total of 1674 individuals (894 men and 780 women) were included in the survey from the four sectors under study.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by District and Sex for Sectors under Study

Districts	Sex	VDC	CFUG	CS	FMIS	Total
Morang	Male	60	49	44	48	201 (12.0)
	Female	30	48	40	43	161 (9.6)
Kabhre/Lalitpur	Male	51	40	45	50	186 (11.1)
	Female	50	50	50	50	200 (11.9)
Mustang	Male	60	14	12	28	114 (6.8)
	Female	34	11	15	27	87 (5.2)
Dang	Male	44	47	21	55	167 (10.0)
	Female	49	49	20	46	164 (9.8)
Dadeldhura	Male	76	45	52	53	226 (13.5)
	Female	28	49	43	48	168 (10.1)
Total (for Sectors)		482 (28.8)	402 (24.0)	342 (20.4)	448 (26.8)	1674 (100.0)

Source: Field Survey 2007.

Our initial plan was to include equal proportion of the total sample of 2000 individuals for gender as well as the sectors and the districts under study. The total sample now comes to 1674 (short by 326 of the proposed size). The data summarised in Table 3 show that the smallest proportion of sample included in the actual survey was for community school among the sectors while it was for Mustang from among the districts. The main reason for the smaller sample for the school can be explained by the fact that we were able to cover only 9 community schools in the study as opposed to our original plan to include ten of them. Among the districts under study, Mustang has smallest population size and therefore the groups (in VDC, CFUG, School and FMIS) tend to include relatively smaller number of households and people.

The study sample was selected so as to represent the different caste/ethnic groups (particularly those that stand out as numerically predominant or have significant presence in the districts under study). The assumption behind this is that the role and status of women tend to vary by caste/ethnic backgrounds in Nepal (see Acharya and Bennett 1981; Bennett 1983).

Table 4: Distribution of sample by caste/ethnic groups for sectors

Caste/ Ethnicity	VDC		CFUG		CS		FMIS		Total %
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Brahmin	13	18	28	32	12	25	37	38	12.1
Chhetri	47	92	42	28	46	54	49	65	25.3
Dalit	22	34	38	36	39	29	48	27	16.3
Gurung	13	34	4	9	7	6	14	5	5.5
Magar	4	5	5	1	6	4	14	6	2.7
Newar	25	34	5	2	19	15	14	26	8.4
Thakali	18	21	0	1	2	1	9	22	4.4
Tharu	24	19	12	14	16	11	22	31	8.9
Rai/Limbu	4	11	18	14	9	8	2	5	4.2
Others	21	23	55	58	12	21	5	9	12.2
Total	191	291	207	195	168	174	214	234	1674

Source: Field survey 2007. **Note:** Others include Bhujel, Jhangad, Kumal, Muslim, Raute, Satar, Tamang, Teli and Yadav.

Of all the caste/ethnic groups, Brahmin and Chhetri were met in all research sites except Mustang while Dalits were present in all of the districts. Some of the groups were met in one district only. For instance, in the present study the Thakali people were included in the sample from Mustang district (their original homeland) only while Tharu were from Dang (one of the 5-6 districts where they are found in significant proportion). The survey data summarised in Table 4 show that more than 37% of the sample includes Brahmin and Chhetri while Dalits constitute little over 16% of the total sample. The remaining sample includes a number of ethnic groups including an endangered group like Raute.

2. Key Informant Interviews

Interviews are often considered to be powerful ways to understand social phenomena (Patton, 1990; Fontana and Frey, 1994; Flick, 1998). This study followed semi-structured and open-ended interview techniques. These interviews were conducted in different forms and situations and were organised individually, as well as in small groups at different levels. Attention was given to generate data from key informants including opinion leaders. The total number of key informants interviewed in all the study sites from the four sectors was 183 individuals (113 men and 70 women).

3. Observation

Observation of places, people and their activities, and social and collective events were intensively carried out. These observations in some cases were pre-planned. In some cases, the field researchers/assistants performed the role of participant observers. The information obtained from observation were cross checked with that from other sources to help illuminate the discrepancies between what people said in the interviews and what they actually do (Pettigrew, 1990). Moreover, observations were made during the interview to capture the body language, gesture and situation of the participants.

4. Focus group discussions

Taking decentralisation and participation as a key theme in all four spheres of decentralisation under study, focus group discussions were organized at different institutions to identify and understand the various facets of policy and institutional process in reference to women's participation. An average of five participants (both mixed and separate groups of male and female) who are actively involved in various organisational activities under these decentralisation processes were selected for this purpose. Participants with specific interests, expertise and direct affinity with decentralisation process were selected for this purpose. A total

of 51 women only, 58 men only and 89 mixed-sex FGD were conducted in the study sites for all four decentralised sectors under study.

5. Secondary information analysis

Key sources of secondary information for this research include: documentation available at the Central Bureau of Statistics and relevant line agencies, policy documents related to gender and decentralisation in various sectors, field reports of various projects, unpublished organizational records and minutes of relevant meetings and workshops. The written records available in the study sites with the concerned groups were also reviewed in order to extract data/information considered relevant for the study.

Chapter Two

Findings, Discussions and Conclusions

The primary goal of this research was to examine women's participation in public decision-making within the context of state decentralization reforms in Nepal. The study sought to understand women's role as social actors and the social relations of gender that shape women's agency in the governance of public resources and services. This chapter will critically look at the depth and scope of participation through which women exercise their agency. Having done this, the chapter will also outline the processes and strategies—based on the empirical findings—that are believed to enhance the benefits of decentralization for women in Nepal. As stated already, this study has examined cases from four different sectors that attempt to capture the diversity in terms of geographical or spatial facets as well as the social and cultural features (see Chapter One above and the Sectoral Case Studies in the Annex). In this chapter, we present emergent patterns as suggested by the empirical data/information, conclusions and policy issues for improving women's agency within the given structural realities of the Nepali society. In doing this, we will first analyse the status of women's participation in the decentralization processes. More specifically, we examine the nature (depth and breadth) of women's participation in the public space. This will be followed by a discussion of the constraints and opportunities that hinder women's exercise of their agency in public spheres. Changes in the accountability structures over time will also be critically noted. Finally, the chapter will present a list of strategies for reforms in policy and/or their implementation that may potentially contribute to enhance women's position in decentralization and governance as well as to steer the Nepali state and society towards achieving gender justice.

Guijt and Shah (1999) argue that while a handful of women may sometimes be consulted, rarely does a thorough understanding of the complexity of gender relations help structure the process, the analysis and the resulting community plans. It is suggested here that gender relations are characterised by both cooperation and conflict, and that their hierarchical character in any given context is maintained or changed through a process of (implicit or explicit) contestation or bargaining between actors with differential access to economic, political and social power (Agrawal 1998).

In order to examine the nature of women's participation in the public sphere, it would be essential to spell out some of the key provisions in this regard in the policies and legal instruments of the country. We will briefly mention the general as well as sector specific arrangements in order to provide a picture of the space created by the state for inclusive development and gender sensitive governance practice in the country.

Nature of Policy and Legal Instruments

Decentralization in Nepal during the past few decades appears to have been pursued primarily as an effective and efficient means to improve the development performance in the country. Although the principle of decentralization can be said to have existed for a long time, more active efforts to put the principle into practice appear to have been made since the 1970s only. The beginning of community forestry program in the mid-1970s (that is, in the form of Panchayat Forest and Panchayat Protected Forest programs) wherein the local government bodies were considered as the key actors for bringing efficiency to state's efforts towards conservation goals can be cited as an example. At a more wider level (i.e., general rather than a sector specific sphere), the enactment of Decentralization Act 1982 and Decentralization Bylaws 1984 stand out as the earliest attempts of the Nepali state to adopt decentralization as the modus operandi for governance and management of resources. Another interesting thing to note about the process of decentralization in Nepal is that an emphasis on increasing people's participation

stands out as the main concern over the years. The idea of decentralization as “the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, and raising and allocation of resources from the central government and its agencies” (Rondinelli et al., cited in Agrawal et al., 1999:14) to those agencies and organizations down the line appears muted. A true devolution of authority, power and resources from the powerful central level political actors down to the less powerful political actors at the district or local levels remains an ideal.

A quick review of the policy and legal instruments on decentralization in general as well as those pertaining to sectoral operating principles (see sectoral reports for details on the existing policy and legal instruments on decentralization) suggests that promoting people’s participation is often equated with decentralization (which may also demand devolution of authority, power, resources, etc.). If we agree to put up with this argument, it becomes easier for us to talk about people’s participation as one form of decentralization—although the definition of ‘people’ itself may have been refined over the years to make it more and more inclusive. For instance, satisfactory definition of “the people” in “peoples’ participation” in the early days of community forestry (1970s) may have been the engagement of local leaders in forestry activities. However, over the years, the term is used to mean inclusion of women, poor and dalit as well at least in the forestry sector’s work at the district and local levels. A similar process of the widening of the net of ‘participation’ appears to be underway in the irrigation and education sectors covered by this study—both of which seem to have adopted ‘people’s participation’ and then ‘women’s participation’ only in the 1990s. Thus, we see that there are more women involved in the conservation and management of forest resources in the districts than is the case for the management of schools or water resources (see sectoral case studies in the annex).

Status of Participation: Women’s Inclusion or Rights?

This study has examined the nature of women’s participation (depth and breadth) in practice within the communities and groups in the villages in the context of the space opened by the decentralization process. Many men and women have openly acknowledged (see the sectoral reports) that women are there in different committees today primarily because of the policy provisions and instructions from the district level agencies that a certain percentage of committee members must be women. The presence of women in committees and groups in the sample households from the four sectors looks impressive (see Table 5).

Table 5: Distribution of Population in the Sample Households by Membership in Committees for Sectors

Sectors	Female (n=4917)		Male (n=4914)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
VDC	114 (2.4)	1357 (27.6)	167 (3.4)	1290 (26.2)
CF	162 (3.3)	971 (19.7)	91 (1.9)	1093 (22.2)
CS	151 (3.1)	877 (17.8)	92 (1.9)	857 (17.4)
FMIS	231 (4.7)	1054 (21.4)	160 (3.3)	1164 (23.7)
Total	658 (13.4)	4259 (86.6)	510 (10.4)	4404 (89.6)

Source: Field survey 2007. Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage.

In general, of the total population in the sample households in the study sites/sectors, the number of women (13.4%) reported to be included in various types of committees and/or groups is higher than that for men (10.4). The proportion of women reported to be in the committees is higher for all sectors except in the local governance/VDCs and it is perhaps suggesting that politics remains the primarily men’s domain (see Table 5). Given the sample size of 1674 households in all study sectors, the total number of men and women reported to be present in the committees (1168) must be considered very impressive. If we assume that any given household had only one individual represented in the committees, not less than 69.8% of the households have their representation in one or the other type of committee sponsored or formed under the auspices of various agencies.

While the total number of women across the sectors looks impressive, the survey data also make it evident that women's participation in actual decision making role may not be a reality. This is indicated by the data presented in Table 6 which shows that except for one chairperson in VDC, most of the key positions in all sectors were occupied by men. Majority of the women respondents in the sample survey who reported that they were committee members, were found to be merely members in the executive committees (i.e., they are not office bearers) across all sectors in all study sites (see Table 6).

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents by membership status and sex for sectors

Position	VDC		CFUG		CS		FMIS		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Chairperson	1	63	2	7	0	9	0	6	88
Vice-chairperson	1	6	4	4	1	0	0	4	20
Secretary	0	1	3	3	0	3	1	5	16
Joint secretary	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	3
Treasurer	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	5	10
Member	62	70	18	18	14	18	17	22	239
Advisor	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	3
Total	64	141	28	37	15	32	19	43	379

Source: Field survey 2007

Women's mere presence in meetings or similar public gatherings and/or work sites is often cited as their 'participation'. Another form of women's participation that is being highlighted or emphasized today is the inclusion of women in the committees (of various kinds of groups). Whether women actually get to take part in decision-making, have access to and control over critical resources, etc., is a question that has yet to gain relevance (in the villages as well as in the discourses of government or non-government agencies that are involved in 'development' activities in the country). This came out clearly in the FGDs and other types of interviews—men as well as women revealed that the women committee members mostly listen to the discussions led by men in the committee and legitimise their decisions by signing the minute books after the meetings close. Another interesting finding that came from the FGDs is that some women from elite family backgrounds in the villages tend to be present in several committees—filling the women's quota casting doubts once again whether most of the women do have access to decision making forums of the local level development initiatives. We also asked the respondents as to who was actually involved in the decision making processes in their groups or committees. The results presented in Table 7 reveal that women's agency remains relatively weak in spite of their numbers being higher than that of men in committees (see Tables 5 and 6 above). A significant proportion of both men and women respondents agreed that men are the primary decision makers in the local communities.

Table 7: Decision Makers Recognized by the Respondents by Gender for Sectors

Decision makers	VDC (n=482)		CFUG (n=402)		CS (n=342)		FMIS (n=448)		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Men	63	139	72	94	41	65	47	107	628 (37.5)
Women	13	4	18	17	5	1	0	0	58 (3.5)
Both	3	7	16	17	10	15	21	49	138 (8.2)
Don't know	112	141	101	67	112	93	146	78	850 (50.8)
Total	191	291	207	195	168	174	214	234	1674

Source: Field survey 2007

Of the total sample of 1674 individuals, 37.5% percent stated that men are the decision makers while only 3.5% (and none in the FMIS sample) think that women too are involved in decision making. The proportion of respondents who felt that both men and women had a say in decision

making is only 8.2% while those responded by saying ‘don’t know’ is more than 50%. The survey data seem to suggest that actually even many of the men in the local communities may not be involved in decision making (since majority of them have reported that they do not know who was making decisions).

The participation of women in public sphere opened by means of policy and legislative instruments thus far must certainly be considered a positive change. Notwithstanding this we must point out that as suggested by the finding of this study, the policy stipulations are taking a blanket approach—of creating room for women in general. The fact that women can belong to a number of heterogeneous groups—based on caste/ethnicity, class, religion, their position in the family, age, education, etc., remains overlooked. Similarly, elite men’s domination in the public sphere supported by their privileged position in the existing structure of the society becomes evident.

The policy and legal instruments in the four spheres of decentralization also have been designed with the purpose of ‘providing space’ to the women. It is the thought of ‘including women’ that is evident in the policy stipulations and the way those instruments have been put into practice. Women are included by the central or district line agencies as well as the villagers in the committees—but instrumentalism seems to be the primary driving force. The space for women does not necessarily come out of the ethical principle that acknowledges and admires gender justice. Inclusion of women also does not seem to be guided by the idea that they can make significant contribution to the decision making process in general or to the quality of decisions made by the committees in question.

Do women feel that transformation is an issue and that it is the need of the day? If yes, what have they done to effect social transformations in their own villages or societies in order to improve women’s space, dignity, etc.? Once again, such questions remain open for debate. We met women in some research sites (particularly in Morang and Lalitpur districts) who argued that they were determined to bring about changes in the social structure—including the norms and values prevalent in the society. In contrast, women in some other societies seemed determined to give continuity to some local customs and practices in the name of maintaining tradition and beliefs even though they may have been oppressive or at least promoting exclusion of women’s own self (e.g., the practice of Chhaupadi in Dadeldhura, the strong idea among women in Mustang that local socio-political organisations should be the domain of men).

In order to understand the depth of participation in decision making, we also asked the respondents whether their opinions or voice raised in the meetings or assemblies were heeded by others. Only 31.0% respondents perceived that their voices and concerns were given attention by their fellow members. Of this, 71.1% were men while only 28.9% of this group of respondents (n=519) were women (see Table 8 for details). Once again, the survey data support the statement made repeatedly by women in the FGDs in most of the study sites that women’s voices are not given much importance by men even when they speak up. Although only 7.0% of the respondents reported that they were not listened to, the proportion of those reporting ‘don’t know’ is quite high (62.0%)—which can be taken as a polite way of saying that people did not feel that their fellow villagers paid attention to their opinions expressed in the decision making forums.

Table 8: Perception of Respondents about Being Heard/Listened to by Others

Perception	VDC		CFUG		CS		FMIS		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Heard	45	125	49	91	34	57	22	96	519 (31.0)
Not heard	28	29	13	17	3	8	12	7	117 (7.0)
Don't know	118	137	145	87	131	109	180	131	1038 (62.0)
Total	191	291	207	195	168	174	214	234	1674

Source: Field survey 2007. Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage.

Constraints for Women's Participation

Women are being enlisted in public forums but their work loads at homes remain unchanged. This paradox appears to be responsible for inhibiting the women in the villages from asserting and/or exercising their agency in the real sense. Even until a decade ago the need for women's participation in decision making process and forums at the community level within the context of decentralisation in many sectors was a non-issue. This is not so any more. Gender equity and the need for the representation or participation of women in groups and committees in the villages have become a primary agenda of development as well as politics in Nepal¹¹. However, as already hinted above, a meaningful and effective participation of women (i.e., an enhanced agency) is not a reality yet. Given this, it would be worthwhile to identify some of the constraints considered critical by local people which hinder women's effective participation in decision making.

As a consequence of the prevailing systems of male capture of and a bias in the rule making institutions, there is very limited provision for membership rights and enhancement of the capabilities of women. This has constrained the exercise of agency and citizenship rights by village women in the state or circumscribed roles in the family and community. In this regard, we are in agreement with Cornwall (2003) who suggested that women's empowerment should focus more on issues of power, voice, agency and rights. The mere representation of women in terms of some stipulated proportion/numbers in the public sphere should not be considered as sufficient for enhancing their agency and rights.

In our field research we learned that a number of hindrances were directly or indirectly responsible for suppressing or controlling women's agency in the communities. One such constraint could be the issue of awareness on relevant policies or lack of such awareness.

Table 9: Awareness about Policy on Women Inclusion by District

Districts	Policy Awareness	VDC		CFUG		CS		FMIS		Total
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Morang	Yes	24	48	18	15	8	9	22	25	169
	No	6	12	30	34	32	35	21	23	193
Kabhre/Lalitpur	Yes	38	44	9	9	20	23	9	22	174
	No	12	7	41	31	30	22	41	28	212
Mustang	Yes	11	32	2	0	5	5	6	10	71
	No	23	28	9	14	10	7	21	18	130
Dang	Yes	38	35	17	18	12	10	18	22	170
	No	11	9	32	29	8	11	28	33	161
Dadeldhura	Yes	17	56	11	10	5	14	17	24	154
	No	11	20	38	35	38	38	31	29	240
Total		191	291	207	195	168	174	214	234	1674

Source: Field survey 2007

There are many men and women who are still not aware of the policy provisions in relation to women's inclusion in local governance, resources management as well as in the service sectors (see Table 9). In each of the districts, except in Dang, majority of the respondents in the survey reported that they were not aware of such policies. This suggests that the information flow mechanism for creating policy awareness from the centre to the local level could be ineffective. If this is the case, it stands as a critical hindrance that needs to be corrected. Not knowing policy provisions by itself can be a hindrance for enhancing women's agency and role in decision making forums and processes in the public sphere.

¹¹ Most recently the government and political parties have been making arrangements to include at least 33% women in the Constituent Assembly. The recent election results show that 33.4% of the members in the CA (including both first past the poll and those inducted on the basis of proportional representation quotas of the political parties) are women. Many of the newly elected women CA members, irrespective of their party affiliations, have vowed to stand together in ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women in the new constitution (see The Kathmandu Post, June 4, 2008).

A significant proportion of the respondents in the survey suggest that patriarchal social structure (39.8%) and women's lack of education and awareness (36.0%) are the principal hindrances inhibiting women's participation in public decision making (see Table 10). Poor communication skills among women (perhaps resulting from their limited interactions with people outside their family and peers) and poor economic condition (which perhaps keeps them busy at work in order to make a living) are the other important constraints reported in the survey.

Table 10: Perceived Hindrances for Women's Participation for Sectors

Perceived Hindrances	Sectors and Sex								Total
	VDC		CFUG		CS		FMIS		
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Patriarchal Social structure	74	135	96	83	56	56	89	82	667 (39.8)
Lack of education/awareness	89	104	56	65	71	71	65	83	603 (36.0)
Hesitation/language problem	23	49	22	17	13	16	13	13	171 (10.2)
Poor economic condition	0	0	11	5	7	15	20	27	85 (5.1)
Don't know	5	3	22	25	21	16	27	29	148 (8.8)
Total	191	291	207	195	168	174	214	234	1674

Source: Field survey 2007

The other hindrances pointed out by local people in the surveys as well as the other forms of interviews included heavy work load of women in the households, social norms restricting their free movement, lack of public speaking skills, and unwillingness of the men as well as senior women in the families to let women participate in public forums. For instance, a number of women interviewed as committee members of one or the other of the four sectors under study concurred that their participation or membership in such committees had resulted in additional workload for themselves. They were quick in stating that they would have to finish the regular household chores either before going to the meetings or do it after returning from there.

Besides these, there are a number of other factors which are directly related to the social, economic, cultural and symbolic capitals (see Figure 1) just as most of those mentioned above. Women's social and economic dependence on a male relative in the household, her identity being subordinated to men in the family, and the societal norms and values defined by the patriarchal culture in Nepal have been the inconspicuous but salient barriers to letting most of the Nepali women stand in par with the men in the household, community and beyond.

Measures to Enhance Women Agency

The survey respondents were asked to suggest measures to mitigate the problems that stand on the way to empower women and enhance their agency. The suggestions are summarised in Table 11. A very significant proportion of respondents (45.0%) felt that providing access to education and training to the women can play a critical role in this regard. This was followed by the idea that women need to be supported by their own family members and community or society (suggested by 29.0% respondents) in order for them to participate in public spheres without any inhibitions. The others include measures like entrusting women with responsibility in the social or public works and creation of opportunities for becoming organized in groups (see Table 11).

Table 11: Measures to Enhance Women's Participation

Perceived Hindrances	Sectors and Sex								Total
	LSG		CFUG		CS		FMIS		
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Access to education/training	65	114	93	95	74	78	104	133	753 (45.0)
Support from family/society	92	109	58	51	51	50	40	30	486 (29.0)
Providing	30	64	18	15	12	12	3	6	158 (9.4)

responsibility									
Employment or involved in Groups	0	0	4	4	5	16	26	18	73 (4.4)
Don't know	4	4	34	30	26	18	41	47	204 (12.2)
Total	191	291	207	195	168	174	214	234	1674

Source: Field survey 2007.

What is notable from the information in Table 11 is that not all of the hindrances noted earlier in this paper are addressed. Both men and women respondents seem to talk about creating opportunities for women. The more critical hindrances related to the structure are only hinted at in a less direct manner. The need to reform any discriminatory social and cultural practices or policy and legislative instruments do not seem to draw the attention of local men or women in the sample survey. Women everywhere agreed that increased workload was a major issue—and this may be said to have been addressed indirectly when they talk of the need to secure support from the family.

Notwithstanding the problems and hindrances noted above, men and women in the study sites argued that things have improved and continue to do so in contemporary Nepali society. The question that begs an answer then is: what factors have been responsible for gradual improvements in gender relations, women's awareness about critical issues including their rights, etc., in recent years? Local people tended to attribute the positive change process to: media including radio or TV programs which broadcast information about women's rights, the implementation of informal education programs in the villages, and awareness raising programs sponsored by various agencies. The other factors mentioned frequently in the FGDs and interviews included the formation of groups, particularly those consisting of women only as office bearers and members, female children gradually being given access to education, and the state policies on positive discriminations in favour of women. A woman in Tukucha of Kabhrepalanchowk district asserted 'of course, promotions of women's rights did not begin from within the household and the villages' suggesting that external forces including movements beyond Nepal were critical in initiating the process of change.

People in the eastern part of the country appear to be more advanced than those in the west in terms of letting women participate in the public space. For instance in Morang, women argued that if they were given opportunities, they could accomplish any kind of work that only men have been doing so far. They contended that change is needed in the way women are viewed by the society. Generally people also agreed that the constraining environment is created at the household level to begin with—opportunities are not given easily to the women/females in households.

Conclusions

Promotion of women's rights in decentralised spheres is determined through the interplay of structure and agency. Structure encompasses the access to diverse forms of capitals in the community—economic, social, cultural and symbolic. In our study area women's access to capitals differed on the basis of socio-economic contexts and the length (time period) of intervention of the decentralised programs. It appears that if the women at household level are free and independent, they are active in exercising their agency in the public domain such as committees and/or groups in the CF, CS, FMIS and VDCs.

Within the context of structure, we must mention that the historically constituted and culturally internalised schemes which shape people's perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours become manifested in the day to day interactions within the community or society.

The findings of this study make it evident that policy and legal instruments of the state have provided spaces for women to participate in various spheres/sectors including local governance. However, their participation appears to be only at the level of numeric representation since both

men and women in the study sites tended to think of women's participation in terms of physical presence and attendance in the meetings and/or assemblies and not necessarily for giving/taking a role of influencing the decision making process. In general women appear to be reluctant to raise their voice in a mixed group while they appear to be more ready to articulate their voices in women only groups such as Saving and Credit Groups or women managed community forest groups. This was also true in the case of FGDs conducted by the research team while collecting data in the field—i.e., women spoke more freely in women only FGDs than in mixed-group interviews.

The policy provisions in relation to women's inclusion in the decentralised spheres were found to be more instrumentalist (i.e., to accomplish activities designed by the development projects) and less transformative. The analysis of all four decentralised areas shows that the number of women representation in different committees as per the provisions in the policies and legislations are rarely represented in required number. If represented, it does not exceed the required number. Where the policy has not stipulated about the women representation, there are no or very low representation of women in the committees. The emphasis is given only for a tokenistic participation of women and very less emphasis on qualitative representation.

The institutions in the local level decentralisation are set up with the patriarchal and masculine doxa that appear to permeate other economic, political and social institutions. The institutions at local level favour the masculine/patriarchal mindsets and behaviour that exclude women to be involved in decision making processes.

Requiring the representation of women on committee or ensuring that women are consulted can be regarded as necessary but not a sufficient condition for promoting women's role in decision making and enhancing their agency. When viewed from the angle of accountability structure, women's inclusion and gender issues seem to have received due attention. The GPSE working group at the MoFSC, provision of gender budgeting in different ministries, creation of gender focal points in the line agencies from the central level to the district level, and enactment of appropriate legal instruments are enough to indicate that the state is serious about institutionalizing gender based accountability structure. However, the problem seems to lie in making the existing accountability structure effective and functional.

Similarly, as suggested by the empirical information, education emerges as a necessary condition but not necessarily a sufficient condition for effecting change in the structure in the Nepali social context and in women's agency. This is attested by the fact that even well educated men and women in the rural communities (e.g., teachers in Jogbudha) were found unable and unwilling to challenge the prevailing conservative socio-cultural norms and values which hinder the process of gender justice.

Symbolic capital such as networks or social relations, family connections to economic and social standing at the local level also seemed to be important in advancing women's agency. Our findings corroborate the argument made by Goetz (2007) that the capacity of women to exercise effective voice in the public arena depends, to a large extent, upon their power in other institutional arenas, particularly the family, community and civil and political organisations.

Policy recommendations

To achieve gender equality, development strategies must transform legal and regulatory framework, markets and organisations into institutions based on the principles of equal rights, equal opportunities, and equal voices for men and women. Indeed, there is tremendous scope for policy to transform institutions so that they support the principle of gender equality (World Bank 2001). On the basis of the discussion of empirical findings presented above, we now make some policy recommendations.

1. Emphasis to be given in improving proper implementation of the policy

Reflecting on the policy provisions for women, the intentions of policy seem to be conducive for exercising their agency in public domain. However, the implementation of policies appears to be very weak. All the national and international instruments related to gender appear to be not working because of the lack of appropriate institutional set-up. Given this, the relevant institutions need to be restructured in line with the progressive policy provisions. Systematic efforts to increase the capacity of implementing agencies are also not in place neither are there efforts for changing the mindsets of patriarchy inclined agents. An engineer at a district irrigation office justified his work by saying: "Although policy has made a provision of 33% of women representation in Executive Committee, women appeared to be incompetent to work in the irrigation committee, and therefore an all men committee was formed".

2. Democratize the social and cultural norms and values including practices

The social and cultural, norms, value systems and practices in all districts under study appear to be extremely constraining to promote women rights at the local level. The cultural norms and value systems systematically exclude the women both from the public and household domains. For example in Dadeldhura, women and girls could not attend public meeting during menstrual period. Such social and cultural restrictions on women for exercising their rights are examples of symbolic violence on women. Similarly, in Mustang, the *Mukhia* system has a systematic element of exclusion—women are not invited to participate in public meetings and they can not become a Mukhiya or a member of his committee. The policies related to women's empowerment need to challenge such undemocratic practices. Some of the damaging and harmful practices could be outlawed by means of appropriate policy or legislative instruments by the state.

3. Focus on power relationship in the domestic or private domain

Evidence shows that relationship between men and women in the family and community are a key site of gender specific injustice, and therefore any strategy to advance women rights must focus on power relations in the domestic or private context. In particular, while most of the institutions, programs and events encourage women to be in the committees, there is no effort to ensure that their workloads do not increase as a consequence of their participation in public development activities. Policy and legislative instruments should (by means of affirmative action) direct the attention of concerned agencies to enhance the capabilities of girls and women not only at group level but also at the family and household levels.

4. Develop and reinforce the accountability structures and systems

The findings of this study indicate that the present level of accountability structures and systems appear to be more instrumental in reinforcing the prevailing male biases in development programs. Since there is a lack of incentive structures, the present level of accountability seems to be operating within non compliance. That is, those who should be accountable to provide services may or may not fulfill their assigned responsibilities since there is no reward for behaving in an accountable way nor any punishment for ignoring one's given responsibilities.

5. Do not treat women as homogenous group

The present policies related to women empowerment in the respective sectors treat women as a homogenous group, despite the fact that women are heterogeneous at least in terms of class, caste and ethnicity. Every women's access to capital (social, economic, cultural and symbolic) tends to be different depending on what socio-cultural group they come from and the political-economic landscape. Also the policies have overlooked the fact that women can be a separate social group just like ethnicity or dalit while at the same time being present across all other social and economic categories of people. Policies that are sensitive socially and from a gender perspective should be formed so as to recognize the differentiation and promote the rights of women in all social groups.

6. Focus on recognizing women as political actors (establish their identity)

None of the policies have emphasized the need for recognizing woman's identity as a person by herself. In practice, women are rarely considered as parents and often they are not invited by the local school to their periodic functions or meetings in that capacity. Often, they are not reckoned by their own names but are generally referred as the 'relative' of a man in her family.

7. Reconfigure the rules of interactions in public spaces, enabling once silenced participants to exercise voice and agency

The rules of interactions in the public spheres (user groups in all sectors of decentralization) are more formal and andocentric—where women are likely to have no experience and competencies. Such a situation may be forcing women to remain silent in the public meetings/gatherings. There is a need to reach out beyond the usual aspects to democratic decision making. In particular, the challenge now is to change the rules of the game so that they become gender sensitive and thereby encourage the women to come forward and take leadership roles in par with men.

8. Construct the conditions required for free and rational individual choice

Women seem to be extremely dependent on their male relatives in their respective households. This dependency is expressed in public spheres when women become unable to give their personal opinions on issues related to contribution of resources from their households. The finding of this study that women come to assemblies and or meetings but remain silent most of the time is attributed to their lack of individual choice in household matters (except for educated and economically independent women who are doing relatively well in terms of exercising their agency). Promoting gender equality in access to productive resources and earning capacity can be a way out.

9. Take measures to redress persistent disparities in command over resources and the voices of the weak ones

Now that the constituent assembly is in place and is ready to draft a new constitution along the principles of federal democracy, appropriate measures must be taken by the political leader including more than 33% of the women CA members.

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3 Annexes: Sectoral Case Studies

3.1 How Effective is the Community Forestry in Recognizing Women as Empowered Agencies?

Harisharan Luintel and Netra Prasad Timsina

Introduction

This report analyses women's participation in community forestry (CF) within the context of decentralization process in Nepal. It seeks to understand women's role as social actors, as well as the social relations of gender that shape women's agency in the governance of community forestry. Special focus is on analyzing the depth and scope of participation through which women exercise their agency in various policy and socio-cultural contexts of CF. This report provides critical reflections on the current strategies and practices of CF, and then deepens the processes of democratic governance that are sensitive to the conditions, concerns and needs of various categories of women in CF.

In particular, this report analyzes the status in terms of depth and breadth of women's participation in CF processes under different contexts. It will also analyze the constraints and opportunities for women to exercise their agency in decision making. This report discusses on strategies for policies, institutions and social movement that contribute to enhancing women's position in CF governance. It will also critically assess the changing accountability structures brought by forestry decentralization policies and practices in Nepal.

Women and National Forestry Policy and Program Contexts

Planned development in Nepal began since 1950s with the establishment of National Planning Commission (NPC). The commission introduced the concept of five-year national development plans to administer the development programs in a planned and systematic way. The concept of decentralization was introduced with the Rural Development Programs particularly in seeking the support of local people in centrally designed development program. The spheres of decentralization were agriculture, forestry and rural development. Later, in 1980s, the Decentralization Act 1982 and Decentralization Rules 1984 were formulated which have provided legal foundation in promoting user group concept in providing resource management responsibilities to local communities. These act and regulations so far have proven to be most effective approaches to development and management of natural resources and have set the tone for legislative development for decentralization in Nepal (Awasthi 2006).

The decentralization processes in forestry sector began with the fifth five-year plan i.e, mid 1970s in the form of participatory forest management particularly Panchayat Forest and Panchayat Protected Forest which later amended to community forestry and largely supported by bilateral and multi-lateral projects and agencies. Forestry projects were one of the first pilot programs of decentralization process in Nepal. The reasons for a need to decentralize forestry activities were two: first, the theory of Himalayan degradation and environmental crisis prompted to think about the involvement of local people in controlling degradation and second, shift in development paradigm from top down to participatory approach that also included agriculture and forestry as field for experiment and learning. The community forestry sector appears to be a rich field in terms of successful decentralized community development program in Nepal and to some extent in the Asia region.

Sixth five-year plan had recognized women's participation as an important indicator for the development of the country (Sharma 2004). The seventh plan (1985-90) has given a high priority to uplift women in the society with the specific objectives to provide opportunities for their development (considering them as huge reservoir of labor force), make them efficient to participate in the development field, and make them self reliant and productive by using their skill and ingenuity. In relation to the conservation, the plan was focused on meeting basic needs of the people while maintaining ecological integrity. The need for 'bottom up' planning and a participatory approach to implementation of forestry activities were highlighted in the policy (HMG/N 1984). The Master Plan for the Forestry Sector (MPFS), a long-term policy instrument for the forestry sector, was prepared in 1989. Women participation was sought to be increased in the field of conservation, development and growth of forest. The MPFS has explicitly stated that

there should be at least 33% women members' participation in the community forestry program (MPFS 1989). Moreover, necessary amendments of the forest act also sought to increase women's participation in forestry activities. However, there was no specific provision to encourage the participation of women. For instance, the plan had made its target to produce 955 foresters during the plan period but there was not a clear way to encourage and produce adequate women foresters (HMG/N 1985).

Although the concept of public participation was intensified in the development of forestry sector through the eighth plan (1992-97), there was no clear strategy for the women empowerment and women rights promotion. Credits, technical know how, entrepreneurship, training and market services were considered as the vehicle to increase the involvement of women in the government, semi-government and non-government sectors (HMG/N 1992). The ninth plan (1997-2002) had made some inclusive provisions to increase women's participation in forest management. However, there were lack of adequate strategies to empower women and promote women's rights in the management and conservation of forest resource through different development programs in the country. The tenth plan (2002-2007) aimed at intensifying the participatory approach to conservation and development. The specific objectives of the plan includes increasing average income of poor, women and other disadvantaged groups of the society through the implementation of participatory forest management programs. The plan also has made a provision of providing priority to women in all programs to improve their livelihood through the protection and management of forests. It has stated that priority shall be given to minimize the existing gap between men and women in sharing of workload and in control over the resources by reducing women's domestic roles and by increasing their effective participation in productive and community spheres. All policies, programs and activities related to human resource development such as that of training, workshops, seminars and studies shall be made gender responsive and participation of women in such activities shall be increased at all levels. The concept of sub-group within Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) shall be introduced and promoted to ensure increased access and control over forest resources by women. In order to improve existing condition and position of women in communities, women representation shall be increased in forestry sector development program including planning, decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation by recognizing and addressing strategic and practical gender needs (HMG/N 2002).

Section 43 of Forest Act 1993 states that forest user group shall be an autonomous and corporate body having perpetual secession. Every CFUG must have its own separate seal; it is entitled to acquire, use, sell, transfer or otherwise dispose of movable or immovable property and may be sued in its own name (HMG/N 1993). The act and the CF program allow CFUGs develop their own rules of benefits and opportunities distribution and thus determine distribution outcomes locally. However, the Act has not made any explicit, exclusive and special provisions for the inclusion of women (Gautam 2004). Similarly, other forestry sectors' policies and acts do not have consistency in their provisions to explicitly encourage of women's participation and their issues. For instance, by realizing women as the real managers of the natural resources, Nepal Bio-diversity Strategy 2002 has emphasized the women's role in the conservation of bio-diversity (NBS 2002). Similarly, Conservation Area Management Regulation 1996 has made a provision of conservation area management committee in which conservation officer shall select 5 members including women and disadvantaged groups. However, Soil Conservation and Watershed Act 1982 has not made any provisions for women (HMG/N 1982); National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act 1972 has not made any provisions for women in the Forest Management Users Committee (HMG/N 1972) and Buffer Zone Management Regulation 1996 has also not made any provisions for the empowerment of women (HMG/N 1995).

Guidelines of various forestry programs also do not have consistency in their provisions to explicit women's participation. For instance, the guidelines for community forestry development program 1996 have emphasized to include the female members in user committee (HMG/N

1996). Further, when the guideline is amended in 2001, it has emphasized to mention the name of one female and one male member as CFUG member from each household during the preparation of group's constitution and operational plan. The guidelines also emphasized that equal participation of male and female members in CFUG executive committee and also in the general assembly (HMG/N 2001). By realizing the lower participation of women, the guideline suggests for a thorough discussion at tole (hamlet) level in order to encompass the needs and interest of poor, women and destitute section of the community while preparing forest management plan or reviewing it (DoF, 2001; cited in Awasthi, 2006). Similarly, buffer zone management guideline 1999 has made a provision for at least 3 female members in the users committee (HMG/N 1999). The district forest coordination committee guidelines 2005 has made provision for a committee of 27 members of which 5 shall be female (HMG/N 2005). On the other hand, conservation area management guidelines 1999 has not made any provisions to include women (HMG/N 1999a). Other sectoral policies and acts such as Local Self Governance Act (1998) and Rules (1999) have also reinforced and strengthened the concept of community forest management and community-based forest enterprises by promoting the transfer of control over forests to the local people as both managers and beneficiaries with the support of the state and NGOs (HMG/N, 1997; cited in Timsina, 2005).

Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MFSC) has made its commitment to promote sustainable and equitable development through integrating gender, poverty and social equity (GPSE) in natural resource management and conservation. As a cornerstone, MFSC has established a Gender Equity Working Group to address gender dimension of community forestry with broad representation and with the objective to recognize the importance of inclusion of women in forestry sector. In the mean time, the MFSC is preparing the gender strategy for the forestry sector (MFSC, 2004). It has also created a forum to serve enhancing knowledge among organizations from government, bilateral forestry projects and civil society engaged in natural resource management in Nepal. It also aims to promote a learning environment by sharing information and experience, promoting learning through dialogue and debates and developing joint work. The MFSC has made a GPSE vision for 2020 which says "*Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation is a gender and social equity sensitive and socially inclusive organization, practicing good governance to ensure equitable access to, benefits from, and decision-making power over, forest resources and all stakeholders*" (Paudel, 2004). MFSC also has established a gender focal point as the strategy of monitoring all forestry programs to make them gender responsive. Similarly, some of the non-government organization have developed innovative CFUG governance system which is inclusive to the gender (Banjade et.al. 2004).

Description of research sites and methodology

Research sites

The research sites were selected purposively considering various factors including the relevance of the sites for the research context. The sites consist of Terai, Inner Terai, Mid hills and High hills as of geographical diversity. While majority of the sites lies in remote areas, some of the sites were also selected from peri-urban areas to understand the differences that are affected by the level of development and market opportunities. CFUGs were selected on the basis of their history of establishment in term of time period considering relatively long, medium and recent to analyze the process of institutionalizations. Also level of external support was considered as the selected CFUGs falls under the project areas and areas having without any external donor support. Similarly, ethnic diversity including the areas with indigenous and migrated population was taken as one of the criteria in selecting the CFUGs. CFUGs having women leadership were also selected. A total of 11 CFUGs from across the five development regions were taken as study sites. Name, address, geographic region, major ethnic groups and the special features of the study sites are given in the Table 1 below.

Table 1: Names and characteristics of studied CFUGs

S N	Name of CFUG	District	Geographic region	Ethnic groups	Features of the study site
1.	Mathillo Patle	Lalitpur	Valley/Hills	Tamang	Peri-urban with market opportunities in Kathmandu
2.	Pandey Gaun	Kavrepalan chowk	Hills	Mixed	Peri-urban, having the longest formal history as it was the first CFUG in Nepal, high input provided by project support
3.	Byang Dhungana	Kavrepalan chowk	Hills	Dalit	Peri-urban with majority dalit users, high input provided by project support
4.	Kamalpur	Morang	Terai	Mixed	Rural, having women leadership and was shift from men leadership, productive terai forest
5.	Chautari	Morang	Terai	Mixed	Rural, migrated community from hills, productive Terai forest, encroachment
6.	Sarbodaya	Dang	Inner Terai	Mixed with Tharu	Rural, productive inner Terai forest, social relations largely framed by landlord and tenants system
7.	Nashawa	Dang	Inner Terai		
8.	Tham	Dadeldhura	Hills	Mixed	Rural, highly discriminated society in terms of gender-such as <i>Chaupadi</i> system (women consider to be impure in menstruation and during delivering the child)
9.	Dangsera	Dadeldhura	Hills	Mixed	
10.	Kagbeni FMSC	Mustang	High Hills	Mixed	Society is mostly governed by traditional <i>Mukhia</i> system- a male dominated decision making system that largely exclude the women, though reducing prevalence of polyandry, <i>lama</i> and <i>Jhuma</i> systems
11.	Kalo Ban FMSC	Mustang	High Hills	Mixed	

Methodology

This research has adopted a participatory approach in investigating the realities at local level. A number of diverse social groups such as men and women, Dalit, ethnic and minority groups were involved in the research process (Table 2) with a range of occupations (Table 3) and educational background (Table 4).

Table 2: Caste and ethnicity of respondents

SN	Caste/ethnicity	Female	Male	Total
1	Bhujel	1	1	2
2	Brahmin	28	32	60
3	Chaudhary	12	14	26
4	Chhetri	42	28	70
5	Dalit	38	36	74
6	Gurung	4	9	13
7	Kumal	6	1	7
8	Magar	5	1	6
9	Muslim	7	11	18
10	Newar	5	2	7
11	Rai/Limbu	18	14	32
12	Raute	7	3	10
13	Tamang	25	31	56
14	Teli	2	-	2
15	Thakali	-	1	1
16	Yadav	7	11	18
Total		207	195	402

Source: Field survey, 2007

Table 3: Occupation and sources of income of the respondents

SN	Occupation	Female	Male	Total
1	Agriculture	151	138	288
3	Business	5	6	11
4	Carpentry	-	2	2
5	Disable	-	1	1
6	Goldsmith	-	3	3
7	Household chores	33	5	38
8	Ironsmith	-	2	2
9	Mason	-	3	3
10	Migrant labor	-	2	2
11	Social service (Mukhiya)	-	1	1
12	Pension	-	1	1
13	Service	5	19	24
14	Student	4	1	5
15	Tailor	1	3	4
16	Wage labor	6	10	16
Total		207	195	402

Source: Field survey, 2007

Similarly, support agencies and policy makers particularly those who are involved in the community forestry were the major group of people consulted in this study. Their concerns, voices, experiences and perspectives on the community forestry were the most important part of evidence generation and study validation. Therefore, both primary and secondary data were collected for the study. Secondary data were collected from the wide range of documents such as national plans, journals, reports, books and other printed materials documented and/or published by different organizations ranges from National Planning Commission, Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation, Department of Forest, Non-Government Organizations, District Forest Offices, Bilateral Forestry projects, Federation of Community Forestry Users, CFUGs, etc. Similarly, primary data were collected by using a range of research methods including household survey, individual key informant survey, observation of groups' activities, focus group discussions, workshops, interactions and analysis of documents such as meeting minutes and plans. All the interactions were focused for in-depth contextual and qualitative ethnographic information on the subject in question. The details of focus group discussions and household surveys are given in the Table 5 below.

Table 4: Educational background of the respondents by gender

SN	Educational attainment	Female	Male	Total
1	Illiterate	88	45	133
2	Literate	57	51	108
3	Primary	21	37	58
4	Secondary	37	53	90
5	Higher education	4	9	13
6	Total	207	195	402

Source: Field survey 2007

Table 5. Field sites and details on FGDs, Individual Surveys and Key Informant Interviews

SN	Name of CFUGs	No. of FGDs			Sample Survey		No. of Key Informant Interviews	
		Women	Men	Mix	Men	Women	Men	Women
1	Kamalpur	0	0	3	20	29	1	3
2	Chautari	1	1	1	29	19	2	0
3	Mathillo Patle	1	1	0	26	24	3	1
4	Pandey	0	1	3	10	14	3	1
5	Bengdhunga	0	1	1	4	12	2	2

6	Kagbeni	1	1	1	11	5	1	1
7	Kaloban	1	0	0	3	6	1	1
8	Dangsera	3	1	0	22	25	4	1
9	Tham	1	0	2	23	24	3	1
10	Nashawa	1	0	4	21	26	4	4
11	Sarbodaya	3	3	3	26	23	4	4
Total		12	9	18	195	207	28	19

Source: Field survey, 2007

A survey method was used to obtain data on individual experiences and perceptions on areas specific to their fields of engagement on CF and gender relations of power. The individual level data consists of respondents' participation in different committees, participation in meetings and assemblies, types of discussion agenda tabled by the respondent in the meetings and assemblies. Moreover, respondents' views on opportunities and constraints created for women by the community forestry program were also collected. Likewise, household level data consists of demographic information, major occupation, education, division of labor and the socio-cultural relations among the members of the household. Similarly, taking decentralization and participation as a key theme, focus group discussions were organized at different levels to identify and understand the perceptions and feelings of people to policy and institutional process in reference to women's participation in community forestry. Both mixed and separate groups of male and female were taken for focus group discussions. These discussions were also useful to cross-check the information collected from the household survey.

The instruments for field study including data collection tools such as survey questionnaire, check-list for interviews, forms for collecting secondary data, etc. were developed by organizing series of workshops and interactions among the concerned stakeholders, researchers and research assistants. Observation of places, people and their activities, and social and collective events were intensively carried out by the researchers and research assistants.

This study has followed the principle of triangulation in data collection by using a wide range of methods as well as in presentation of the findings in order to ensure the validity of the empirical data/information. This research has combined both qualitative and quantitative methods in data collection and analysis. Data were organized, analyzed and synthesized in the form of tables and narratives in the report. Small unique cases such as saying of local respondents were written in the *italics* in the text to augment the findings and bolster the emerging arguments and patterns.

Issues and discussions

Following are some of the prominent issues regarding the women's right promotion in the context of community forestry in Nepal.

Policy Space for women and Efforts for Exercising Their Agencies

Generally, CF policies processes have been concentrated on and around the formulation of policies and institutions rather than the promotion of forums through which marginalized groups especially women can better negotiate their interests. However, CF processes such as third national workshop on CF (1998) identified four pillars - social justice, equity, gender balance and good governance in order to increase the active participation of women in forestry sector (Kanel, 2004). Women participation in CF development processes at local level has been increased once the policy and legislations were in place. For instance, in Tham CFUG, Mashtamandu, Dadeldhura, the participants in the focus group discussion indicated that women have been included in the CFUG executive committee not because they are active and have claimed rights to become members, but because of the provisions of women representation made in the policies, legislation and guidelines at the national level and CFUG constitutional provision at local level. Women members said that *"we have been asked by the male members to be the members in the CFUG executive committee and hence we joined the committee"*. The researchers asked the women members as to why they were not active in the committees. They

responded "as we do not have time to regularly attend the meetings. We accept the agenda put forwarded by the men members". In the same question, the men from Mathillo Patle CFUG, Lamatar, Lalitpur, responded that women do not have knowledge and capacity to participate in the meeting of CFUG.

Now, CF policy guidelines have provided space to the women in the CF processes at the local level such as listing their name as household head (previously only men's name were in the list of household head) in the CFUG constitution and forest operational plan, being member in the CFUG executive committee, participate general assembly etc. Against the legal provision of 33% women's participation in the CFUG executive committee, only 20% to 27 % women's representation was in practice in many districts with some exceptions (Shrestha 2004). This situation reveals that only the policy and legislations are not sufficient condition for the effective participation of women in decision making forum. Even among the women who appear to have participated in the CF processes in the research sites were from the elite families. Women from the poor, marginalized, indigenous (such as *Raute*) communities and single women who are basically forest dependent are still far behind from the participation in the formal, legal and legitimate CF processes at local, district, regional and national levels. This is partly due to the fact that the institutions, processes, methods and practice guidelines have been prepared and implemented in such a way that these best fits for men but less for women. The evidences show (Table 6) that 73 percent of the women and men respondents of this research do not have any idea about the policy and legal provision related to the rights of women.

Table 6: Awareness about women related government policy by gender

SN	Policy awareness	Female	Male	Total
1	33 percent women reservation in CFUG committee	17 (8%)	27 (14%)	44
2	Citizenship by the name of mother	23 (11%)	13 (6.5%)	36
3	Equal right of men and women	17 (8%)	13 (6.5%)	30
4	None	150 (73%)	142 (73%)	292
Total		207	195	402

Source: Field survey, 2007

Since most of the CFUG processes particularly assembly and meeting are formal in nature (such as sitting on dash, chairpersonship, announcer, etc.) which constrain in exercising the women agency. Such formal setting makes the majority of women uncomfortable and consequently they could not express their interests properly. In such situation, they only physically participate the meeting. Nevertheless, the researchers found that women appeared more active and engaged in the process of discussion when the environment of the meeting is informal. In such case they appear to be more vocal and articulate their interests, concerns and perspectives. Similarly, the participation of women is found to be more meaningful in women-only CFUG than the mixed CGUG. Therefore, there is an increasing trend to form women-only CFUG all over the country.

As part of women's campaign, the first women-only CFUG was formed in Kavreplanchowk district in 1990 with the support of donor funded forestry project. This trend went on increasing in the following years all over the country particularly where donor funded CF projects were in place. Currently there are 789 women-only groups out of 14,389 CFUGs in the country (CFD 2007). While viewing from the geographical perspective, the numbers of women-only CFUGs in Mid-Hills are 68%, in Terai are 18%, and in High-Himal are 14% (Kanel, 2006). It must be noted that there are nearly 35,000 women at leadership positions in the CFUGs (Gautam, 2004; CFD, 2007). Women have formed women-only CFUGs primarily with an aim to re-configure the power relationships among the CF actors within and beyond the CFUG. As most of the rural Nepali women feel more comfortable in discussing and working in the women-only groups in public domain, they find women-only CFUGs comfortable to participate in discussions related to CF. In the long run, women also expect that they will equip themselves with information, leadership skills and confidence through women-only CFUG.

However, there are mixed experiences and learning in the real field regarding the assumption that creating women-only CFUGs would help to develop a critical mass which in the long run would empower them to reduce the gender gap that exist currently in the society. According to Rai and Buchy (2004), creating women only spaces is seen as the best strategy to avoid the weight of patriarchal power in order to increase women's involvement in community forestry. However, poor, indigenous, marginalized and single women are still incapable to participate effectively and empower themselves even in the CF processes; we cannot imagine visible positive impact on reducing gender gaps on those women's life. Mainly women from land rich and so called high caste households dominate most of the formal and informal decision making processes at the local level. For example, Rai and Buchy (2004) reports high caste women occupy 10 out of 11 seats in the Pahiyo women-only CFUG committee of Rukum district. Often, these elite women have some strategic interest to establish the link with the powerful government agencies and local elites for personal interest. In Dang district, many women-only CFUGs have been established with such interest as well as to secure the [additional] forest tenure for the particular village where mixed CFUG has been already established.

Developing women-only groups, though not an end itself to address gender dimension, have brought new insights and opportunities (Gautam 2004). Such institutions may reproduce existing relations of inequality between men and women. Thus, unless efforts are made to address class, caste and gender based exclusion at community level, formation of women-only space in CF could be counter-productive by isolating women and marginalizing them further (Cornwall 2003; Rai and Buchy 2004). Field observation and discussion indicate that women-only CFUGs lack information and exposure and thus are far behind in capacities and confidence building for forest management and utilization compared to the mixed CFUGs (Pandey 1993). Moreover, women only CFUGs are generally provided with relatively small and marginal land as community forests. These CFUGs have access to only half the size of per household forest compared to mixed CFUGs, i.e, average 0.34 ha. for women only CFUGs and 0.73 ha. for mixed CFUGs (CFD, 2004). Gender relations affect women's capability to claim for good quality and large-sized forest, as they cannot bargain with forest officials who are mostly men. In Morang, the domination of men in decision making even in the women-only CFUG is common phenomenon. After the formation of women-only CFUGs in Dang, mixed CFUGs have discouraged the women who are in the executive committee of women-only CFUG to represent and participate in the executive committee of mixed CFUGs. This restriction tends to limit women's rights and capability not only to manage and benefit from better forest management but also to meet both practical need of women and strategic gender interests. The following Table 7 gives a quantitative glimpse of efforts made by users both men and women to empower women through various means.

In the studied CFUGs majority (82%) of interviewed men and women have not done anything to empower women in the CF processes. Table 7 also shows that very few respondents make an effort to mobilize the resources for women development and establish micro enterprise for women. However, attention has been paid for raising literacy level of women.

Table 7: Efforts made by users to empower women

SN	Type of efforts	Female	Male	Total
1	Inspire women to participate in adult literacy classes	28	35	62
2	Mobilize budget for women empowerment	3	4	4
3	Establish micro enterprise for women	2	1	1
4	Nothing	175	153	328
5	Total	207	195	402

Source: Field survey 2007

Gender Relations of Power within Forestry Decentralization Context

Since the last few years, women participation in CF is in increasing trend. They have been widely involved from the *tole* levels not only on CF related issues, but also on other social and political issues. Collective efforts of external agencies and local government often enabled CFUG members particularly women to exercise their agency and therefore they have become politically empowered and have been facilitating some social movements that liberate women to some extent from domination and subordination. Women-led social movements in Nawalparasi district organized widows to empower them to wear red cloths (in Hindu religion, women are restricted to wear colorful clothes after the death of husbands). Similarly, one physically impaired woman in Gadhwara VDC of Dang district has taken the lead role of a successful local social movement to ban the alcohol trade and consumption at the village level. Similarly, in Kamalpur CFUG in Morang, women launched campaign against alcoholism and playing card with an aim to reduce domestic violence against women which generally occur in the name of alcoholism. Alcoholism of men as the cause of domestic violence was also found in Mathillo Patle CFUG in Lalitpur.

The women members of Kamalpur CFUG in Morang district proudly shared an interesting story about the handing over of the forest that *"the forest was handed over only when the women-only CFUG was formed in 2004 and the group was able to persuade the District Forest Officials to handing over the forest to local users"*. Moreover, the majority of women were selected in elections committee to conduct the fair and free election of the user committee which they successfully conducted in a democratic way. However, women had to do hard work to make their agency more effective in both cases.

Although the constitution of Nepal 1991 has given equality on the basis of gender, women of Nepalese community are always under the rules of men. All the decision related to their home and families are dominated by their male counterparts (Gautam, 2004). Because of male domination in family, female is dominated in decision making process for natural resource management such as CF. In many cases women are yet to be recognized as the social and political actors and responsibilities are often given to them for the task that has gendered division of labor. In most of the studied cases women were given training and responsibilities mainly for the work which have been traditionally considered as only women work such as sewing training, village health volunteer, women literacy etc. On the other hand, men are assigned overall political, social and economic decision making. Some of the women users in Dangsera CFUG, Dadeldhura even raised the issue of identity and acceptance of women in the society. They said that while all the men members are recognized by their names in the CFUG executive committee, women members are recognized by their husbands' names only. It is found that the Chairperson of the 11 members CFUG executive committee hardly knows the name of women members in his committee. Women are less recognized as active actors of decision making process and mostly they are included if there is mandatory provision for women participation. In Mathillo Patle CFUG in Lalitpur, a 63 year old woman said, *"I came to know that I have been the member of the CFUG executive committee of this CFUG two months after they appointed me as member."*

In some cases, the state authorities also suspect the capability of women in managing forest. It is evident from the fact that the women of Mathillo Patle CFUG said *"we went to District Forest Officer to ask him that we want to take responsibility of forest management as all men ignored the forest protection and management. But the DFO told us to get an approval from men as women cannot be trusted for managing the forest"*. Similarly a common thinking of men that prevail in Nepalese society in different forms and intensity is not only to blame women as forest destroyer but also undermine their capacity to manage forest. A man of Pandey Gaon CFUG said *"women participation in CF is needed as they are the forest destroyers. If they are taught in*

right way to harvest the forest products, forests will be protected. They do not have capacities in taking important decision in relation to forest management". From the case of Dang district, it was noticed that the women are not given authority for handling the transactions that involve huge amount of cash such as selling timber, selecting contractors etc. even in the women-only CFUG.

In public meetings such as in the general body meetings of CFUGs, different social norms often require women to sit on the floor while men sit on cots or chairs. Moreover, if everyone sits on a ground, women including CFUG executive committee members tend to sit at the back or on one side from where they are less effective in raising their concerns. Similarly, in many cases it was found that the presence of senior male family members in the meetings and assemblies makes women hesitant in attending meetings, or speaking up, or publicly putting their parallel views.

In many places in the country, traditional values and norms of society/community supersede the formal state level policies and legal instrument that prevent and/or dominate the women in the public sphere. In one of the study sites i.e., in Mustang district, *Mukhiya* system is prevalent. Under this system a village head is selected periodically (mostly yearly) who is always a man and can influence the life of community members through the local level intervention in not only in the development sectors but also in the overall social, economic, cultural and political aspects of the village. Though there are Forest Management Sub Committee (FMSC) under Conservation Area Management Committee which is formally responsible for local forest use and management, the *Mukhiya* largely decides about the forestry and conservation activities. Although conservation policy has a provision to include women in FMSC, the field study shows that influence of women in the FMSC appears to be almost nil. Under this system, *Mukhiya* has a control to all other committees formed by the development projects and government and non governmental organizations. In Kalo Ban FMSC in Marpha VDC, all committee members are men although the chairperson said that there is one women member in the committee who is studying in grade 9 in the local school. Maila Gauchan - one of the male members said "*Annapurna Conservation Area Project asked us to nominate at least one woman in the committee and hence we nominated Asha Maya Pariayar- from dalit community*". The research team approached her to confirm whether she is the members of the committee as there were no minutes and other records available with the committee. The girl did not have any idea about the committee membership. In the course of our group discussion, we came to know that another women named Mangali B.K. was also the member of the executive committee. In Kagbeni FMSC, there were no women members in the committee. Almost all the decisions are taken by men as the reflection of *Mukhia* system based on the traditional norms and values that often undermine the legal provision related to women participation. Even development actions and services provided by the nation and the donors can be implemented in Mustang only when the *Mukhiya* permits. The overall observation of the research team is that women of Mustang district have very less opportunities to be involved in public sphere activities. The *Mukhia* system that excluded women from public decision making process for the last many centuries still continues. However, it was observed that women possess more power and dignity in the private domain of household level including decision making in economic activities.

It is not only the case of Mustang, but in most of the places it is male who participate in meetings and assemblies. If male member is not present at home only than women participate in the public forums. For instance, a Tamang woman of Mathillo Patle CFUG of Lamatar expressed, "*in most of the houses, menfolk don't allow women to participate in meetings or trainings, if they participate against the will of male house members, there is possibility to occur quarrel among the male and female household members*. She also added, '*if sometimes women participate in the meetings other males asked women as is your husband not at home (ghar ma tero budho chaina ra)*'" Contrary to her saying, we found that some of the women don't

participate in meetings and assemblies willingly, rather they send other elderly women of the family to attend the meeting in the absence of male members. One of the Yadav women in Dang expressed that, *"we are not informed about meetings and assemblies. Most of the time my husband attends. Even if I go, what to do, I have problem in understanding Nepalilanguage. We can't communicate well in Nepali."* Table 8 shows the reason of absence of women in general assemblies, meetings and the training.

The information presented in Table 8 shows that majority of the women have not reflected the reason about the absence of women in the public forums. However, some have noted that they are too busy with the household chores followed by gap in the

Table 8: Views of respondents on the reason of absence of women in assemblies, meetings and training

SN	Reason of absence	Female	Male	Total
1	Involvement in household chores	42	12	54
2	Communication gap	21	13	34
3	Away from the village	4	8	12
4	No reason/nothing	140	162	302
Total		207	195	402

Source: Field survey 2007

communication as the hindering factors for women's participation. Both men and women also mentioned that traditional gendered division of labor at household as well as community levels is one of the main hindrances for women participation in public forums. We also noticed by observing the dominating and blaming behavior of elite men to the women during the general assembly in Dangsera CFUG, in Dadeldhura. An elderly man told the women *"you are the destroyer of forest, if you do not stay in the meeting, how you will know how to manage the forest resources?"* It was the spontaneous response of an old man to the women when they were returning home from the assembly venue. Women were in pressure to do household chores as the assembly was started after three and half hours late (4:30 pm) than the planned time (1 pm). The time was not suitable to the women as school children return home at 4 pm. And also women have to do household chores in the evening. However, exceptionally, in some assemblies there is more participation of women than men. The main reason is to decide about the resource use of community forest which is directly related to women's working life. It is women who are involved in most of the day to day forest product collection and utilization activities such as collecting fodder, fallen dried leaves for animal bedding and fuel wood for cooking.

Women's Participation in Community Forestry Processes

Participation is the interlocked concept of power, authority, control and responsibility (O'Reilly, 1997). Participation of women and poor in the CF development processes is the most affecting factors to derive success of the program. True involvement of women can only be achieved by their active participation in all stages of CF development (Kharel, 1993). Effective participation of women is assumed to meet strategic interests of women by empowering them with access to information, skills and confidence and thus enhancing their social position in the long run (Rai and Buchy, 2004). Without women's effective participation in all aspects there will be serious adverse consequences for social equity and program efficiency, and women will be further disempowered (Agrawal, 1997).

A study from Dolakha district concludes that female representation in CFUG executive committee has increased by 2% and by the same degree male representation has decreased between the periods of 1999/2000-2003/2004.

The trend of women participation in community forestry seems to be increasing over time. An analysis of minutes of assemblies and meetings of these 11 CFUGs studied shows that women representation including *Dalit* has increased over time (Table 9 and Table 10).

Table 9: Increasing trend of women representation in the CFUGs EC overtime

SN	CFUGs	CFUG EC at the time of formation		CFUG EC in between first and current EC		Current CFUG EC	
		Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
1	Dangsera	4	6	11	2	5	6
2	Tham	0	9	2	9	2	9
3	Byangdhunga	NA	NA	1	5	5	6
4	Mathillo Patle	0	8	1	10	2	9
5	Pandey	NA	NA	NA	NA	2	5
6	Kagbeni FMSC	0	9	0	9	0	9
7	Kalo Ban FMSC	NA	NA	NA	NA	1	6
8	Sarbodaya	0	11	5	9	5	6
9	Nashawa	4	11	4	11	5	10
10	Kamalpur	5	14	0	15	11	4
11	Chautari	2	9	0	10	5	8
Total		15	77	24	80	43	78

Source: Field survey, 2007

Table 9 shows that the women's participation in the CFUG executive committee has increased almost by 3 folds from the time of formation to the current situation.

Table 10: Increasing trend of Dalits representation in the CFUGs EC overtime

SN	CFUGs	CFUG EC at the time of formation			CFUG EC in between first and current EC			Current CFUG EC		
		B/C	Janajati	Dalit	B/C	Janajati	Dalit	B/C	Janajati	Dalit
1	Dangsera	7	2	1	8	2	3	8	3	0
2	Tham	7	0	2	8	0	3	8	0	3
3	Byangdhunga	NA	NA	NA	0	0	6	0	0	11
4	Mathillo Patle	0	8	0	0	11	0	0	11	0
5	Pandey	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	6	0	1
6	Kagbeni FMSC	0	9	0	0	9	0	0	9	0
7	Kalo Ban FMSC	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0	5	2
8	Sarbodaya	5	6	0	2	10	2	7	3	1
9	Nashawa	10	5	0	10	5	0	10	3	2
10	Kamalpur	2	16	1	2	13	0	2	11	2
11	Chautari	6	5	0	6	3	1	8	4	1
Total		37	51	4	36	53	15	49	49	23

Source: Field survey, 2007

Table 10 shows that the Dalit's participation in the CFUG executive committee has increased almost by 6 folds from the time of formation to the current situation.

However, there are still insufficient participation of women, *Dalits* and ethnic minority groups. Analysis of the participation of respondents in general assembly by gender shows that only 55 percent women participated in general assembly of CFUGs whereas 78 percent men participated. In executive committee of CFUGs, most women were found to be nominated by the interest of powerful men but not by the interest of women themselves. Among the surveyed CFUG executive committee women members, all were found to be nominated with consensus (Table 11).

The women in group discussion have given the reasons for the increment of participation as follows: *"there are two reasons for the increasing trend of our participation: first, we are more interested to be involved in the decision making process of forest management and second, our husbands have gone to foreign countries for work and hence we have to participate in meetings and assemblies"*. Moreover, the policy provision of women representation at different levels had made mandatory and it has impacted in increasing the participation of women members at CFUGs level.

Table 11: Selection criteria of women members in CFUG Executive committee

SN	Criteria of selection	Number	Percentage	Total
1	Elected	0	0	0
2	Nominated and consensus	28	100%	28

Source: Field survey, 2007

Though women are included in the executive committee, only few women are in the vital posts. Table 12 shows the post occupied by the respondents by sex in the EC.

Table 12: CFUG Membership status and sex of respondents

SN	Position	Female	Male	Total
1	Chairperson	2	7	9
2	Vice-chairperson	4	4	8
3	Secretary	3	3	6
4	Joint secretary	0	2	2
5	Treasurer	1	2	3
6	Member	18	18	36
7	General member	179	158	337
8	Member of advisory committee	0	1	1
Total		207	195	402

Source: Field survey 2007

Table 12 shows that except in the post of vice-chairperson, secretary and member in all the post the number of men is higher than the women. Though women occupied some vital post but still they are dependent on male for decision-making due to lack of education and awareness as mentioned by women and men themselves. Ms. Sharan Kumari B.K, vice-chairperson of Kamalpur CFUG, in a FGD, expressed, *"though at present we women are engaged in vital posts, we still lag behind compared to men. The main reason is lack of education and awareness. If women would get chance to participate in different meetings and trainings frequently then they would be aware and would be active."* Similarly, Chamkala Poudyal a 52 years old ex CFUG secretary of Nashawa CFUG expressed her views as, *"Since I am illiterate, no one used to hear my voices in the meetings and assemblies. It is male who decided every matter and ignored me and other women members and ultimately forced me to resign from the post."* In Dangsera CFUG of Dadeldhura, we found that a higher caste woman is nominated as vice-chairperson, but she mentioned that she is not able to play active role in decision-making as there is high dominance of male in the CFUG executive committee.

In a FGD in Letang VDC of Morang, a male local leader expressed, *"From the long past, social and cultural practices have not opened the door for women to participate in the public decision-making processes. Even now, rural women are not in a position to seek their rights. It is not only the case of women, but even most of the poor and marginalized men are also unaware about decentralization in general and community forestry in particular."* The Table 13 below shows the opinions of the respondents about the extent people listened to women.

Table 13: Respondents perceptions about hearing to their views

SN	Views on whether others listen or not	Female	Male	Total
1	Heard	49	91	140
2	Don't heard	13	17	30
3	Don't know	145	87	232
Total		207	195	402

Source: Field survey 2007

The data summarized in Table 13 show that most of the women have not reflected or do not know that whether other people both men and women listen to their voice in the public forums. However many men said that women are also heard in the public meetings. From the observation of different public meetings including mixed FGD during the research processes, the researchers noticed that women's voices are rarely heard in a true sense during the public meetings.

Due to policy provision women get space in public forums and are trying their best to cope with the situation. Most of the women and men expressed that if there would not be policy for women inclusion, women would not come themselves. Similarly, though women and marginalized are included in the community, they don't possess decisive power. It is the higher caste elites men who decide in the CF processes. Due to dominance of traditional systems in the social practice in the communities, marginalized people including women and *Dalits* are becoming more marginalized especially when they have been humiliated due to the prevalence of traditional social practice such as untouchability, *Chhaupadi* etc. Instead of encouraging women's participation, they are being discouraged by not only words and but also deeds. For instance, in the executive committee of Dangsera CFUG in Dadeldhura, '*Raute*', -the nomads of Nepal (recently started settled life) are also included. However, in the assembly, the treasurer, who belongs to Brahmin community said "*Raute women are very inactive and they do not know anything about the community forestry and thus there is no point to include in the committee.*" Many other men and women supported his views while one old *Raute* women replied in a sad voice, "*We don't have any voice here, everywhere, in the CFUGs, irrigation committee and even in the recently settled land.*" However, some of the marginalized community members have been started to listen particularly after the commencement of the political conflict in the country. A Dalit CFUG committee member of Tham CFUG, Dadeldhura, expressed "*it is due to political conflict, now a days, we have started to table proposals and also get responses to our questions, though still we are not allowed to eat or drink together!*"

Community forestry has recognized household as the member of community forestry and recently both husband and wife of a household has been recognized as the heads of the household as against of the normal practice of recognizing only men as the head of household. In most of the CFUGs studied, they have made constitutional provision as mandatory to write the name of both men and women of a particular household as the heads of the household. This has resulted in an increase in the number of women participation in attending meetings, workshops and assemblies of CFUGs. A group of women reported during focus group discussion: "*our name did not use to appear in constitution and operational plan of CFUG before, but recently our names have been included in the constitution as the members of the community forestry. It was possible only when District Forest Office asked the CFUG committee to include the name of women from the households.*" Particularly, those women whose husband have gone outside of their villages for employment or those who are single regularly attend the meeting of CFUG.

Since majority of the women of the studied CFUGs are illiterate, they can not read the meeting minute and they have to get help from others to understand the same. This situation while compounded with men's over domination in the meetings reduced women's interest in the meetings. Therefore, a trend is developed in which most of the women users come into the meeting and/or assembly, someone help them to sign on the register and immediately they returned back home. Moreover, in some case, the general assemblies and meetings of CFUGs often appear to be burden for some women. A woman user said that "*my husband is not at home and I left my children their own. I came to attend the meeting supposed to be held in time. But the meeting has been postponed for two hours and I am still waiting. I could not wait any more and I have to go to my home to take care of my children.*"

In many cases, women have to bear the cost of participation more than men as the former have to be engaged in household work. Men rarely perform their duty in supporting their women for the household work. Women attend the meeting by putting an extra effort at household level work. It makes women overburdened by the responsibility of community forestry as CFUG executive committee members given to them. In most cases, women are in the committee only because without women representation, the committee will have no legal validity. The researchers asked a questions to the women members that why they are not actively participating in the executive committee meeting and general assemblies. They responded "*as we do not have time to regularly attend the meeting and hence we accept the agendas put forwarded by the men members*".

There are many social, cultural, economic and political factors that affect the participation of women in public decision making forums including community forestry. Gender discrimination varies across ethnic or caste groups. In ethnic groups such as *Tharu, Chaudhary, Rai, Limbu, and Tamang* appear to be relatively less discriminated than *Bahun, Chhetri* and *Dalits*. However, most of the women in leadership positions in the studied mixed CFUGs come from the higher caste particularly from *Brahmin* and *Chhetri*.

The degree of recognition of women as an agency of society depends on the configuration of structure, norms and values of the community where they live. For example, *Chaupadi* in Dadeldhura district exists in its extreme form that women in menstruation cycle are forced to live in harsh and unhealthy condition with low quality food and shelter. Often they are forced to be outside of home in small unsecured hut for at least 4 days and nights during menstruation cycle. While in other places, particularly in eastern part of the study areas, women need not live in such harsh conditions during such cycles. Values and norms appear to be flexible in these part of the study area. These types of socio-cultural values greatly affect the participation of women in the CFUG processes.

Traditional systems, values and norms also operate in different degrees although Nepali society operates within the larger framework of patriarchal value system. For example, in Mustang district, *Mukhia* system largely operates for major decision making process of political, social and economic spheres of society. But women have no role to participate in such a valuable process of decision making as only men can become the *Mukhia* and women are not invited to village assembly. This informal system often supersedes state's formal policy and legal instrument although these aimed at protect the rights of women.

Market is another factor that determines the independency of women. As Nepal is divided into urban and rural areas, our study in the peri-urban sites particularly in Upper Patle CFUGs has indicated that women have engaged in self employment activities largely in producing local alcohol as the market of Lalitpur and Kathmandu have high demand for the products. Women of these areas appear to be relatively economically independent than other areas. However, due to their subsistence livelihood business they are less likely to be able to manage time to participate in the CFUG meetings and assemblies unless their men support them which is often unlikely.

Though women are primary users of forest and are involved in collection and utilization of forest products, their active participation in decision making is low or negligible in almost all study sites. Although CFUG follow the participatory process, active participation of women who constitute a large portion of CFUG is still lacking. This has attributed partly to distrust to women and partly the disinterest of women in the process (Winrock, 2002). Our study shows that women in CFUG executive committee have not been given full responsibility for major decision making processes (Table 14).

Table 14: Responsibilities of the executive committee members by district and gender

SN	Types of responsibilities	Morang		Kabhre		Lalitpur		Mustang		Dang		Dadeldhura		Female Total
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
1	Managing disputes	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	3	3
2	Managing meetings and assemblies	4	4	0	0	3	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	5
3	Mobilization of resources	2	2	3	3	3	1	2	0	2	4	4	2	12
4	Women development related	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3	2	0	1	5
Total		10	8	3	4	6	2	5	1	9	7	4	6	65/25

Source: Field survey, 2007

It can be seen from the Table 10 that there are very few decisions and responsibilities given to men and women regarding women development agenda in almost all studied CFUGs. Only 38% responsibilities are given to the women to decide in the CFUG in which most are related to the resource mobilization.

Full commitment to participation of women was found to be lacking on the part of the department of forest and its staff (Lama, 1999). It is partly due to the fact that Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation and its departments have only 3% women staff (MFSC and HURDEC 2006).

Women's Influence in Community Forestry Decision Making Processes

Realizing the fact that active participation of women in decision making is crucial for effective management of community forestry and equitable benefit sharing among the users (Malla, 2001), the legal framework have emphasized on CFUGs' democratic decision-making process especially through the empowerment of women by providing them space in decision making forums. In spirit of legal framework, community forestry guideline has made provisions to include at least 33% women in CFUG executive committees. However, in the national context women account for only 24% of CFUG executive committee members which still doesn't ensure equitable participation in decision making and sharing of benefits (Shrestha, 2004). However, in our research sites (11 CFUGs), some 43% women appear to be represented in executive committee of CFUGs. FECOFUN also has made a compulsory provision to include 50% women on its executive committee at all levels (Timsina, 2002). However, there are no institutionalized monitoring system is in place that can provide adequate information about the contribution of and benefit to women (Lamsal, 1997).

After the implementation of community forestry guidelines, women have actively participated in decision making process in community forest management including experience sharing, dialogue, discussion and reflection (Shrestha and Britt, 1998). But Lama (1999) reported that though the participation of women was high, their influence in decision making

Table 15: Types of proposal tabled by women respondents in the general assembly

SN	Proposal Tabled	Number of women
1	Conflict management	5
2	Resource mobilization	41
3	Women empowerment related	5
4	Arrangement of meetings/ workshop	0
5	Above four	3
6	Women empowerment / resource mobilization / arrangement of meetings / workshop	1
7	Conflict management/women empowerment/ arrangement of meetings/ workshop	1
8	None	59
9	Total	115

Source: Field survey, 2007.

was mostly negligible. Often, the women were included in the committee as if the show case that those who are in the committee do not have any influence in decision making process in our research sites. However, women from the wealthy and upper caste household have more opportunities to influence than poor and *Dalit* women. The evidences show that the women participated in assembly has tabled a number of proposals, sample of which are given in Table 15 below.

Among surveyed women, only 55% have been found to be participated in the general assembly of the CFUG. However, more than 50 % women have not tabled any proposal for the decision. Among the proposal tabled by the women, most of these proposal (80%) are about the forest resource collection and mobilization.

In almost all study sites, women have actively participated in the management of natural resources of relatively low economic value, such as fodder, fuel wood collection and livestock grazing, and activities that are labor intensive or labor consuming at household level. Firewood and fodder are daily needs, which create a persistent pressure on women and therefore they are especially concerned with the availability of these products. Moreover, they are the most important key persons and appropriate manager of management and utilization of these resources. However, they are getting less consideration or often their participation is considered less important in decision making processes of CFUGs. They seldom are invited and involved in crucial decision making. On the other hand, in most of the research sites, women's participation in CF has been increased only in terms of labor contribution. This case is also especially true among Brahmin and Chhetri communities, and many women are unaware of their own potential they could gain by participating in decision making meetings (Rana and Chhetri 1995). In this context, there is not only far possibility to involve women in other crucial decision making processes particularly in timber management and trade where relatively huge amount of budget is involved but also possibility of biased decision favoring men only in all aspects of CF. In Dang district, one of the woman-only CFUG's chairperson complained *"I could not decide and implement to select the contractor to sell the timber due to influence of men at the village."* She told that men wanted to control the decisions particularly where there is involvement of relatively larger size of forest resources and financial resources. She further said that *"men think that the women are usually less capable than men due to their illiteracy and socio-cultural constraints and they can not make any helpful suggestions for the holistic development of CF."* This view presented by the male members matches what Agrawal (2001) said that 'women's illiteracy is commonly underlined to justify a disdain for their opinions'.

Among the few women who represent CFUG, most of them are passive listeners i.e., they could not speak up. Even if they speak sometimes, their real voices are not heard properly. Most of the women from the research sites have little say in CFUG decision-making. Even though there are some instances where women have formed an entire executive committee, in reality most committees and almost all aspect of CF are still dominated by men. In one of the study site in Dadeldhura district, two *Raute* (an indigenous minority group) women were the CFUG executive committee members but they said that their voices in the decision making process have never been heard. Some of the so called higher caste men and women told that *"these Raute women do not have any idea and knowledge about the CFUG and therefore they should not be involved in the CFUG executive committee. They are in the committee due to the influence of external development actors such as district forest officials."* It is really interesting because *Raute* is one of the purely forest dependent ethnic communities of the country and other people blame them that they do not know about the forest management activities. Since *Raute* are not in mainstream in overall development process in the region, their indigenous knowledge and capacity have also been undermined by the other communities. The case is one of the prominent evidence that the participation of minority ethnic group in Nepal's community forestry process is still in questions.

One of the main reasons behind passive role of women in public decision making is not only patriarchal social structure but also level of education and awareness of women. In one of the studied CFUGs in Morang, one Brahmin educated man dominates the decision making process of CFUG although there are majority of women including chairperson in the executive committee have been elected. It was funny to hear that after every opinion of women and other men he used to interrupt and say, *"I am making it clear."* Similarly, the chairperson of Tham CFUG of Dadeldhura expressed his views about women participation as, *"in forestry sector compared to other sectors, women's participation is high. Women's role in protecting the forest is appreciative than that of men. But women's decision making role is almost nil. Main problem is lack of education among both women and men."* Table 16 shows the decision making role as viewed by men and women respondents.

Table 16: Role in decision making as viewed by the respondents

SN	Gender of Respondents	Views on role in decision making				Total
		Female	Male	Both	Don't know	
1	Female	18	72	16	101	207
2	Male	17	94	17	67	195
Total		35	166	33	168	402

Source: Field survey 2007

The data in Table 16 suggest that it is men who play dominant role in decision making. Although, community forestry sector is the pioneer to apply the policy of decentralization and make provision of inclusion of women, there are still many loopholes that prevent women to participate in the decision-making processes. A middle-aged Tamang woman of Mathillo Patle CFUG, said *"I always tabled proposals in assemblies and meetings, but no men listen to me. Men ignored my proposals"*. It was also noticed that some men in the assemblies comments her as *she cannot change anything in the village as she is woman*. As opposed to her opinion a female executive committee member of the same CFUG mentioned that women don't show their interest to participate in the public forum particularly decision-making processes. She also added that women only shout instead of hearing and add hindrances to them to be heard. In her opinion, women should show their unity, interest, commitment and act accordingly to influence the decision-making processes in such a way that the thorn at forest sharpens its tip. Similarly, a middle-aged widow and literate woman sees the reason behind women backwardness as women's less interest and commitment to take the responsibility at the community level. From the above discussion, we can imagine different types of hindrances for the true participation of women in public decision making processes. Table 17 shows the hindrances for women to participate in public decision making forum as viewed by the respondents.

Table 17: Types of hindrances for women participation in decision making process

S N	Types of hindrances	District and gender												Total
		Morang		Kabhre		Lalitpu r		Mustang		Dang		Dadeldhura		
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
1	Patriarchal social structure	18	19	6	12	18	11	4	4	17	29	20	21	179
2	Lack of education/aware ness	17	17	4	6	6	7	7	3	14	12	17	11	121
3	Hesitation/langu age problem	3	4	1	6	3	4	1	1	6	1	3	6	39
4	Poverty	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	6	2	5	16
5	None	11	8	0	2	2	2	2	3	7	1	3	6	47
Total		49	48	11	26	29	24	14	11	47	49	45	49	402

Source: Field survey 2007

The data in Table 17 clearly show that many men and women believe that patriarchal social structure and lack of education are the main hindrances that prevent women to be a part of community decision-making processes. However, some believe that their own hesitation and the communication problem particularly unable to understand and speak Nepali language properly.

Women's Access to Information, Benefit and Opportunity Sharing

Equitable benefit sharing and decision making process are fundamental factors in the sustainable development of CF (Bhatia, 1999). Gender equality in benefit sharing requires serious consideration because it plays a vital role for successful implementation of activities directly associated with the natural resource management (IUCN, 2004). Therefore, it is crucial to analyze the power relation and process of inclusion for equitable benefit sharing in natural resources management (Beck and Nesmith, 2001).

Women are typically found to bear disproportionately higher cost and obtain lower benefits than men do. Even women work 15 hrs per day while men work 7.8 hrs. per day. In the national scenario, women contribute 50%, men 44% and children 6% in the total income of household (Sharma, 2004). A study done in Eastern hills of Nepal concluded that women perform 84% of fodder collection for which on an average they spend 26 days per year for gathering fodder and bedding materials as compared to 21 days by male counterparts. On an average, 5.75 hrs./day is spent on cooking, cleaning and washing by women whereas men are found rarely involved in these household activities. Women collect water 5 to 6 times a day for cooking, drinking, cleaning kitchenware and preparing animal feed (Bajracharya, 1993). A study of Gaukhureshwor CFUG, Kavrepalanchowk District has identified a net saving of 3.6 hrs. per family per day after the formation of the CFUG (Roy, 2002). As a positive impact of Leasehold forest, women have saved 2.5 hrs. per day in the collection of forest products (Douglas and Cameron, 2000). A case study from the CF in Nawalparasi district concludes that 25 female participated out of 107 in the CF study tour (Bhattarai, 2005). Leasehold Forestry Multipurpose Co-operative Organizations are established to strengthen the users of leasehold forestry. 47% members of the organization are female. 51% of the saving is created by female and the 49% of the loan flow is received by the female (Kanel, 2006).

CF program, in reality, has not taken adequate account of the aspiration of women who are supposed to be one of the main beneficiaries of the program. Though the attendance of women in the meeting and decision making forums has been increasing, they are often not aware of their group rules and regulations and therefore they are not able to claim the benefits from, and opportunities created by, CF. Table 18 shows that over 90% women do not have got opportunities to get exposure beyond CFUG in relation to the CF activities.

Moreover, there is lack of benefit and opportunity sharing mechanisms for women. Majority of the benefit and opportunity sharing activities and processes are formal in nature and many women feel discomfort in participating in such formal processes. The domination of men in the CFUG executive committee also prevented external opportunities to reach to the women in most of the research sites because these men grab all such opportunities. Almost all women's [potential] contributions

Table 18: Types of organizations visited by the respondents

SN	Types of organization visited	Male	Female	Total
1	Village Level	2	7	9
2	District Level	12	10	22
3	National Level	-	-	-
4	Village/District Level	3	3	6
5	Village/National Level	1	0	1
6	Village/District/National Level	2	0	2
7	None	175	187	362
8	Total	195	207	402

Source: Field survey, 2007

remain unrecognized and unremunerated in terms of benefits and opportunities sharing. Due to women's increasingly exclusion from the key sources of livelihoods i.e., CF, they are being more vulnerable to shocks. Most of the women in the studied sites said that *"we are responsible to household chores and cannot afford time to attend the meeting, assemblies, training and other capacity building activities as they are generally far away from our home and also in many cases men want to grab such opportunities, we are not able to be benefited from the opportunities."* Majority of Tharu, Madhesis, Kumal and Muslim women in Dang district said that *"we have been deprived in capturing the benefits from the community forestry processes due to our inability to understand and speak Nepali language. There is no provision of writing in our vernacular languages in the formal documents of CFUGs such as meeting minutes, groups' constitution, forest operational plan and other documents. We all are being the ignorant witness of every decision and the activities of the CFUG"*. Often all the studied CFUGs have cultural stigma that women's voice in the public domain is considered as unacceptable and thus they are discouraged to speak. Argumentation for or against particular agenda by women is hardly acceptable in the society and therefore they are very much disempowered to put forward their agenda and concern particularly in the mixed groups.

Though majority of the people still haven't internalized the notion of decentralization and necessity of the participation of women in different public decision making forum, many people even in remote areas of country began to say orally that women should be provided opportunity to participate in public decision making processes. It is partly due to the awareness raised by different development organizations and media and partly due to awareness raised as a [by-] product of political conflict. Different people have made different suggestions to increase the women's participation and voices in the public decision-making processes. Table 19 shows the opinions of the respondents about how to mitigate the hindrances of women participation in decision making forum.

Table 19: Suggestion to mitigate hindrances for women participation by district and sex

SN	Views	District and sex												Total
		Morang		Kabhre		Lalitpur		Mustang		Dang		Dadeldhura		
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
1	Access in education/training	18	20	8	17	15	10	7	6	22	22	25	18	188
2	Inspiration from family/society	13	14	2	2	8	8	3	1	14	16	11	17	109
3	Providing responsibility	4	3	1	4	2	4	1	1	2	2	5	4	33
4	Employment opportunity and organizing women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	4	8
5	Don't know	14	11	0	3	4	2	3	3	7	9	2	6	64
Total		49	48	11	26	29	24	14	11	47	49	45	49	402

Source: Field survey 2007

Most of the respondents interviewed, mentioned that policy alone is not enough to make women participation easier. Women should be provided with awareness training about what is inclusion and why their participation is necessary. Not only this, but many respondents also suggest that both men and women should be provided combined training so as to empower both women and men to transform the patriarchal social values. Above all women need inspiration from the family and society. It is because, still in Nepali society, women are not free to move by their own will. If they move or participate in any such activities there arise family turmoil and women are seen with a negative eye. There are some instances that CF process has not impacted positively to some of the women members. Paudel (1999) argues that women have been negatively affected and their standards of living have decreased since the formation of CFUGs. Timilsina (2002) also argues that women are further marginalized by the mobilization of CFUG

fund which is also partly true in our research sites as the CFUG leaders want to increase the size of fund by raising the interest rate for the loan takers who are generally the poor and women. There are many such cases due to which women don't want to participate in the public forums. Box 1 contains the story of a woman whose relation with her husband became weak after her participation in different public forums.

Box 1. Fate of a women for being active in public forums

A middle-aged Thapa women is a general member of Dangsera CFUG of Dadeldhura. She is also women health volunteer in the village. She is involved in other 13 different committees in the village. She expressed men posses more power in our society. Women are ignorant and innocent. Due to the provision of policy only women are included in the committees in the village, but all the powers are in the hand of men. Women are blamed being participated in different committees as characterless here in our village and district as well. Those women who can bear, they carry on their duties. But most of the women are innocent and can't hear people gossiping about them and do not want to imagine family violence, so they stop participating in public activities. She gives example of herself. *I am involved in different committees. People including my own husband gossip about me as characterless. I used to run a tea stall. But every day I was accused of having sexual relation with the customers. As a result I stop that business. Now a day I don't have good relation with my husband. He doesn't speak with me. He is suffering from psychological problem. Since I am strong enough I haven't stopped participating in public forums. But innocent women can't bear such tortures and do not participate such forums. At last she asked us with heavy heart, "every one talks about women's rights, can you tell me where these rights are hidden? These rights have to be sent here and particularly elderly people should be informed about what these rights are?"*

Conclusion

This report has analyzed the status of women in community forestry in Nepal where local communities have been given the responsibilities for managing local forests as part of forestry decentralization in Nepal. It seeks to understand women's role as social actors, as well as the social relations of gender that shape women's agency in the governance of community forestry. By taking 11 CFUGs' case studies in seven districts across all geographic and development regions and triangulating the information through different techniques, the study specifically discussed and analyzed i) national policy and forestry program context, ii) policy space for women and their efforts for exercising their agencies, iii) gender relations of power in relation to the forestry decentralization context, iv) participation of women in the CF processes, v) women's influence in CF decision making processes, and vi) women's access to benefit and opportunity sharing. The analysis revolved around the structure and agency related factors that facilitate or constrain women's role in CF processes.

Though the local people had involved in forest management from the long past, formal process of their participation in the participatory forestry started from the fifth five-year plan period in Nepal. However, women's space in community forestry processes has been made clear when the MPFS was prepared in 1989. Consequently, procedural guidelines of CF and the social practices have given priority to women to be involved in the whole process of CF development. Recently, MFSC has demonstrated its commitment towards gender equity in natural resource management through making its gender, poverty and social equity vision and a working group towards achieving the vision. However, policy seems to be uninformed of the complexity of gender dynamics, and takes a mechanistic approach - such as specifying percentage of representation in the CFUG executive committee, and overlooked the importance of addressing socio-cultural dimensions of gender relations of power. Similarly, traditional values and norms of society/community (*Mukhiya system*) supersede the formal state level policies and legal instrument that undermines the importance of women participations.

Despite the legal requirement that at least one-third woman should take part in the CFUG executive committee to voice their concerns as well as empower their own agency, often the true participation of women is limited only to physical presence. The participation of women in

Nepal's CF still largely appear to be instrumental for enhancing the conservation and management of forest not as transformative movement albeit it has more than 25 years of decentralized history. The case study demonstrated that the effectiveness of women voice appeared to be very low despite their representation in decision making body. Compared to harvesting and forest management activities, women participate far less in meetings and assemblies, indicating they have less access to decision making and control and that they follow rules imposed by men. Often responsibilities are given to women particularly who are in the CFUG executive committee for the task that has gendered division of labor. It was noticed that only the policy, legislations and the education are not sufficient condition for the effective participation of women in decision making forum but equally important is to democratize the socio-cultural practices of the communities. Most of the traditional practices are shaped by patriarchal social structure such as *Chhaupadi* system which prevents women to participate in the public meeting including CFUG meeting and assembly resulting alienation of women to be involved in the decision-making and benefit sharing opportunity. However, almost all studied CFUGs have not paid any attention to transform their socio-cultural practices of the community even in the mixed and diverse communities in terms of ethnicity, culture and religion. Without transformation of social-cultural practices, decentralization of forest management at the community level seems not to be adequate in exercising women agency in decision making process.

Though, recently, women's name has been started to be written in the users' list by recognizing women as household head which has increased women participation in community forestry activities in general, their presence in the meeting and the assemblies is constrained by the socio-cultural role at the private/household domain. Their traditional responsibilities of household work have not been shared by men and they are engrossed with their traditional role for their survival in the society and have to borne extra burden for involving in community forestry. This has resulted women's low competence on deliberation in the public domain activities. Moreover, Nepali formal language incompetence among most of the ethnic and indigenous [women] communities further constrain their deliberative competence in the CF processes. Even the women are in executive committee are constrained by their own socio-culturally, economically and educationally disempowered agency which is shaped by masculine hegemony in the overall social practices. Some of the reasons for not being developed the capabilities, critical consciousness and confidence of women to enable them to claim rights to enhance accountability lies with the tradition and doxa in which Nepali society operates. Studied showed that the women representatives in the CFUG executive committee are generally nominated by men which facilitate further legitimization of masculine hegemony in the CF processes. Moreover, formal processes of assembly and meeting constrain women in exercising their own agency. Though informal processes appear to be more favorable in expressing the voices by women, no single CFUG is paying attention towards transforming their formal processes of meetings and assemblies.

Nevertheless, level of women participation varies, and it is not always low. Greater participation of women both in terms of quantity and quality has been observed in areas where women's agency is relatively independent at the household level; women-only CFUGs are operating successfully; and CF program actors clearly targeted gender related goals. Moreover, where women had greater access to financial assets through various activities such as income generation and savings and credit, the family appreciates the women's participation in public domain. However, women's mobility is often restricted at local level for such activities only. Even in such cases, women have to bear the greater costs or burdens including household chores. It indicates that addressing gender in one development domain may lead to increased gender inequality in another domain of social life.

Collective efforts of women, with or without external support, have enabled women to exercise their agency. As part of their effort, women-only CFUGs have emerged since more than a

decade. However, women's participation in forest management decision making still remains marginal despite their increased involvement in forestry activities through women-only CFUG. Women are not given responsibility and authority for handling the transactions that involve huge amount of resources particularly cash by the men considering women as incapable to handle such activities. This has resulted in the disempowerment of women and worsening power relationship between men and women. This situation may lead women to lose their interest on CF which may mean a serious setback to the program as they contribute a major share of the hard work necessary for forest management.

Unless there is transformation in the socio-cultural values, norms and practices at the level of broader society, the rhetoric of gender equity propagated by sectoral and development agencies not only pays lip service but also slowly and gradually reinforces masculine domination in the society. Even ethnic minority, indigenous, *madhesis*, *muslims* and *dalits* women are further marginalized due to added socio-cultural interactional effect. However, the field data of this research indicate that women agency in Nepal's CF has potential to be turned into movements to defend the rights of women gradually.

Some women have taken women-only CFUGs are the part of women's movements which are identity-based political movements and thus raise crucial questions about political agency of women in the community. As sexuality, ethnicity, age, class, able-bodiedness, geographical location and historical time period are some of the factors that construct women's life differently, studied CFUGs has been found to be differentiated according to the level of variation in these parameters that determine the degree of gender discrimination.

It seems from the study that just extension of rights to women is not enough; it does not produce equal political participation even when they have matching level of human capital; and extending equal rights to women does not appear to be sufficient in exercising their agencies. Rather affirmative actions or reverse discrimination policies require compensating for historical exclusion of women in the society. Gender justice and democratic practices are important for women to be recognized as active political actors of decision making process as it implies to the access to and control over forest resources. This concept is largely reflected in the decision making process in CFUG that decisions are mostly taken by men and are not sensitive to women either it be in case of deciding time of meeting or appointing women in CFUG executive committee without informing them. Nevertheless, the decentralization processes in forest management has also began to board on women as accountability structure are being placed to provide the spaces for women in decision making process.

CF alone cannot improve gender relations; the overall socio-cultural, institutional and policy processes have to address gender-specific issues. CF in Nepal as an effort to strengthen the decentralization process succeeded in creating spaces to the women to be more visible in the process. However, the visibility of women becomes meaningful only when it is exclusively supported by the externally sponsored programs. Apart from addressing the practical gender needs, community forestry is yet to address the strategic gender needs. Bringing women in the community forestry alone is not sufficient to break the traditionally rooted gender relations of power in the society.

Policy Implication

Following a couple of policy implication can be derived from the paper.

Addressing gender issues at community level seems to be inadequate to realize the intended outcome and impact not only in the social and cultural aspect but also in the institutional and policy aspects of natural resource governance. Since most of the strategic and operational gender needs are directly and/or indirectly linked with the private domain of women agency particularly at household level, developing capability of the agencies to address gender needs should also be

focused at the household level. Present level of intervention which is particularly focused on the public domain is not adequate

Though the strategic policy level document and the very operational level policy document have provisions about the women's involvement and participation in the forest resource governance process, act and legislation that give legal legitimacy of such provisions are lacking. Therefore, such legal instruments need to be reviewed in such a way that the strategic policy provisions have to be consistently incorporated at all level of policy documents from act to the guidelines, directives and decisions. Moreover, these provisions with their spirit need to penetrate to the community level group constitution, the operational plan, decisions and the day to day practices.

Gender issues have been seen as technical and instrumental issues in the context of participatory natural resource governance. These perspectives need to be transformed and the gender issues need to be taken as political issues. The rights based approach to address the gender needs is essential and therefore perspectives of the wide range of actors including policy makers need to be transformed.

Most of the formal institutions either state-owned or community-owned involving in the natural resource management and gender development are externally sponsored. Therefore, the initiatives taken by these sets of institutions are limited to the formal sets of procedures and not owned by the community people on their daily practice. There is an urgent need to address socio-culturally rooted gender issue through transforming these formal institutions to more organic institutions and practices that are influential to socio-cultural practice.

The current level of efforts from the state and civil sectors needs to address the gender issues are primarily focused on women ignoring the patriarchal social structure. Now, the time has come to recognize the patriarchal practices and value and also there is need to focus on both men and women agencies to address socio-culturally rooted gender issue. Study shows that still lots of efforts are needed to make women participation fruitful and effective. Particularly, capacity building and empowerment programs might be useful in this regards.

Acknowledgement

We at the ForestAction Nepal would like to express our sincere appreciation to International Development Research Center for providing us an funding opportunity to conduct a research on "Decentralization and Promotion of Women's Rights in Nepal: Exploring Constraints, Opportunities and Intervention Avenues." The research team is grateful to all those who supported us while undertaking this research. We would like to express our sincere thanks to all those who participated in the discussions and interviews at different stages of our work.

We thank ForestAction Nepal team for providing us opportunity to work in the project as researchers. We are thankful to the research team of ForestAction particularly Dr. Ram Bahadur Chhetri, Ms. Basundanra Bhattarai and Ms. Radhika Regmi for planning the overall research including providing critical insight of the field visit to various districts.

HIMAWANTI Nepal deserves special acknowledgement for partnering this research particularly in the field processes. We are very thankful to the district level HIMAWANTI, their members and staff for making all arrangements for field visit activities as well as for providing relevant information. Ms. Rama Ale Magar, Ms. Nirmala Sannyashi, Mr. Dipendra Bikram Sijapati, Mr. Gokul Sharma and Ms. Pragati Sharma specially deserve the acknowledgement for their relentless efforts in field work to collect data from across the country.

We are grateful to all the CFUGs under study for providing access to their records and valuable time and insights to complete the research. Without their support, the study could not have been completed. Special thanks are also due to other stakeholders such as District Forest Office, Woman Development Office, FECOFUN and different NGOs working in the districts.

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3.2 Decentralization and Women's Rights in the Community School Sector of Nepal: Status, Challenges and Opportunities

Basundhara Bhattarai

Introduction

This report presents the findings of a research conducted to examine women's participation in community-managed schools in Nepal. This study is part of a larger research project that analyzes women's participation in public decision-making within the context of decentralization reforms in Nepal.

The project, commissioned by IDRC Canada, examines women's participation in public decision-making within the context of state decentralisation reforms in Nepal. Special focus is on analyzing the depth and scope of participation through which women exercise their agency in various policy and socio-cultural contexts of decentralization, and then identify processes and strategies that enhance positive impact of decentralization on women. In addition, the research has also analyzed women's role as social actors, as well as the social relations of gender that shape women's agency in the governance of public resources and services.

Given the series of recent initiatives which Nepal has made over the past two decades on both "sectoral" decentralization and overall "local governance", the present study examines four different but carefully selected spheres of decentralisation on both strands. These include - community forestry (involving local groups in the management of national forests), irrigation management (involving farmer groups in the governance of irrigation systems), community school (involving local communities in the governance of school level education) and local governance (with elected political bodies at village and district levels). Out of the four selected spheres, Community School management is the focus of this report. As defined by the Education Act (2002) of Nepal government, Community schools are those schools whose management responsibility is handed over either to the school management committee, or to the local government bodies or to other local organizations for the purpose of improving the quality of education through the active involvement of local communities. These institutions are authorized to perform all management responsibilities of the respective community school. School Management Committee (SMC) is the executive body to manage community school.

Involvement of local communities in the management of primary and secondary level education is common in South Asia. Much of the enthusiasm of involving communities in the form of decentralisation has come from the assumption that it will empower marginal sections of the society, particularly women to participate in development and governance process of community school development. However the link between decentralisation process and enhancement of women's right is not straightforward. Numerous studies have identified women as a specific social group who are usually excluded from social and political process of the nation.

In Nepal, community management of school education has a long history. Community managed schools existed even before the state decided to manage school education in early 1970s. But then due to inherent limitations of the centralized management, the public expectation of the quality of education and access was not met. In the mean time, pressures for decentralization mounted, especially from the international donors, and communities again were given power and responsibility to manage schools since the beginning of the new Millennium (2002). However, the emphasis on decentralized education along with decentralization in different development sectors grew after the inception of multiparty democracy in 1990. Local Self Governance Act of 1999 is one of the key milestones to authorize local government bodies to manage and support the government managed schools in their respective territory (LSGA 1999). In Nepal, Community School program is implemented throughout the country. By 2007, there are 5919 of schools handed over to community management of which 2858 are secondary, 1772 are lower secondary and 2858 primary level.

This report presents the findings of 9 case studies and a survey conducted with 174 men and 168 women in the community managed schools. In the second section, an overview of the case study sites is presented followed by background knowledge of community school management in the

third section. Major research findings are presented in the fourth section, and discussions and recommendations/conclusions are presented in the fifth and sixth sections respectively.

Methodology

We selected nine schools, out of which eight are managed directly by the communities and one is managed by the Municipality. These schools were selected in such way that they could represent all development regions of the country in six different districts along with ecological zones- Terai, Mid hills and high mountains- covering verities of socio-cultural dimensions. The studied schools include: 1) Shanti Bhagvati Higher School, Morang 2) Bhanu Primary School, Morang 3) Chaitanya Secondary School, Kavre 4) Shringeri Lower Secondary School, Lalitpur 5) Sarbodaya Hogher Secondary School, Dang, 6) Sidhanath Higher Secondary School, Dadeldhura 7) Samaiji Primary School, Dadeldhura 8) Chhairo Primary School, Mustang and 9) Janashanti Secondary School, Mustang. See case study overview for specific details of each site

The study is complemented by both qualitative and quantitative data collected from the selected case study sites and backed by the review of the education policy development processes in different time horizons and also other relevant documents related to the school sector.

A survey was carried out with 342 individuals covering around 50 households in each of the nine schools studied. Out of 342 respondents, there were 168 women, 174 men (including 68 dalit persons – 29 men and 39 women) and women members of school management committees. A total of 47 members of School Management Committee (SMC) were interviewed (see Table 1). Apart from the quantitative data generated from the survey, narratives, stories and experiences of the interviewees have also been captured through interviews.

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents by Membership Status and Sex

SN	Position	Women	Men	Total
1	Chairperson	0	9	9
2	Vice-chairperson	1	0	1
3	Secretary	0	3	3
4	Joint secretary	0	1	1
5	Treasurer	0	1	1
6	Member	14	18	32
Total		15	32	47

In addition, key informants' interviews were also conducted. The key informants were selected on the basis of the knowledge and information they have. They were identified by consulting parents from the particular school catchment. Interviews often were useful in making broader understanding of the process of community school development in the particular area along with the collection of data on the perception of women's participation in school level governance processes.

Focus group discussion (FGD) was also the important tool used to collect the information. All together there were 36 focus group discussions carried out with 7 women only groups, 22 SMC groups, and 7 male only groups (including teacher groups) (See Table 2). The output from focus group discussions were especially useful in

Table 4. Details on FGDs , Individual Surveys and Key Informant Interviews

SN	Name of Schools	No. of FGDs			Sample Survey		No. of Key Informant Interviews	
		Women	Men	Mix	Men	Women	Men	Women
1	Shanti Bhagvati	0	0	1	23	15	3	2
2	Bhanu	0	0	3	21	25	2	3
3	Chaitanya	1	1	2	22	25	4	1
4	Shringeri	1	0	3	23	25	3	2
5	Janashanti	2	1	3	8	10	2	1
6	Chhairo	0	1	1	4	5	2	1
7	Siddhanath	1	3	1	30	17	3	2
8	Samaiji	1	0	3	22	26	3	2
9	Sarbadaya	1	0	4	21	20	3	0
Total		7	6	21	174	168	25	14

tracing the perception of men on the participation of women and perceptions and feeling of women themselves towards their own participation.

Observation was another important tool used by the researchers while in the field. Apart from specific interviews and discussion carried out with the specific groups/individuals at local level, informal processes were observed to enrich and verify the width and depth of the participation of women. It also served as an important tool to observe household and community level gender relation in empowering women.

Apart from empirical data collected from the research sites, published literatures related to educational laws, historical documents, research documents and reports were used as the source of secondary data source.

Information collected from the above-mentioned sources was analyzed using different tools. SPSS was used to analyze the quantitative data come from survey. Likewise, for the qualitative data, the information were grouped in the form of narratives and case stories and fitted to the agreed frame of the report.

Background

History of the decentralization off education in Nepal

In Nepal, educational institutions have existed for long. *Baidik* (scriptural) or Sanskrit, education was the foundation of modern education system of '*Gurukul*', '*Richikul*', '*Devkul*' and '*Pitrikul*'. Veda was the foundation of scriptural education (Sharma 2004). The original period of Nepalese cultural system was *Kirat* dynasty although there is no factual evidence about education (ibid. p.14-22).

In *Lichhavi* period, education was optional. So, common people were rarely educated. There were some systems of cultural education where Sanskrit was the prominent language in *Lichhavi* period (Sharma 2004). Same system was also followed in *Malla* dynasty. It was not compulsory to read and write but the education was taken as career development in this period (Sharma 2004). Education was generally under the division of caste and religion. Brahmin and Chhetry boys and men were the prominent caste groups to acquire education. Hindus who were of Arya dynasty were generally Sanskrit students whereas Buddhists who were on generally of Mongol dynasty were the pupils of Buddha (ibid. p.14-22). In this period education to the girl child was not a restriction by any kinds of state laws and religion but was not in practice (Pradhan 2006).

The establishment of formal school was started in Saha Regime after the unification of the state of Nepal in 1769. The then prime minister, Jang Bahadur Rana, after returning from a trip to London opened a school named Darbar School. Darbar School was the first English primary school in Nepalese history which was formally established in 1910 BS¹² (Sharma 2004 p.1-4). Narayanhity Sanskrit School was established in 1926 BS and was the first Sanskrit School in Nepal. Both Darbar School and Narayanhity Sanskrit School were opened during Jang Bahadur Rana's period.

Similarly, Buddhist approach to education was there at different *Gumbas*, *Bihar*, and *Bahal* of Nepal. 'Prakrit' and 'Pali' were the medium of Buddha education. In 1926 BS?, in the time of Juddha Samsher, Muslim School was opened which was also called 'Madharasa'. Madharasa schools were opened in various districts. Later on, vernacular school was opened by Jaya Prithivi Bahadur Singh in 1958 BS during Dev Samsher's rulling period (Sharma 2004 p. 70).

Basic education system was introduced during the ruling period of Padma Samsher in 2004 BS. There used to be various languages i.e., Sanskrit, English and Nepali as the medium of instruction. Finally, Nepali language was taken as the medium of education by Dev Samsher

¹² BS denotes Bikram Sampat and it is ahead then AD by 57 years.

during his ruling time and Gorkhapatra (a daily newspaper published by the government even today) publication was also started in Dev Samsheer's ruling period (Sharma 2000, p. 20-25).

Legal basis of decentralization in education

Historically the state was divided into seven divisional inspectors of schools in 1954 (2010 BS) and the Development of District Education Supervisor (DDES) was established in each district in 1962. District Development Supervisors used to work under the direction of zonal education officers. DDES used to examine high school as well as middle school, if zonal education officer gave authority to work.

The following are the main legal milestones of decentralization in education:

1. Education act, 1971
2. Education regulation, 1992
3. Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal, 1990
4. Local self governance act, 1999
5. Education Act 2002 and Regulation 2002

Education Act, 1971

Education Act, 2028 BS (1971 AD) is the prominent legal instrument in education sector. The Education Act, 2028 provides for the establishment of regional education directorates, districts education offices, school management committees and mentions a wide range of areas on which the government can frame regulations. Especially article-3, sub article 3/7, article-11, sub article 11/h, 11/q and article-12 are most important for decentralization which focuses on authority delegation in education. Article No-3 explains that anyone except government who wants to open school should submit their application to government office or to appointed officials with required details and district education committee had to recommend on behalf of the government. Sub article 3/7 describes that local government provides authority of permission and acceptance to open pre-primary school by their own resources. Article No. 11 says that district education committee will be organized under the presidentship of district development committee or authorized person to manage and supervise the schools from respective district. While reviewing the document the word women is not found throughout it.

Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal, 1990

Schedule No. 18 of the constitution of the kingdom of Nepal, 1990 guaranteed the rights of education. Each community who has settled in the territory of Nepal has to get their own mother tongue education of primary level. There are not gender disparity seemed in any schedule of constitution but in practices. Schedule no. 26, policy and principle of the state also explain the decentralization in education. Article 17 of the Interim constitution (2007) stipulates that “every citizen shall have the right to free education from the state up to secondary level as provided for in the law”.

Local Self Government Act, 1999

Local Self Government Act (LSGA), 1999 is also a major legal base for decentralization in education. Article No-25(d), 28(g), 93(g), 96(d) and 189(h) explains about education in LSGA, 1999. Article No-25(d) explains about village ward committee (VDC) whereas article no-28/g deals with VDC role in education. Article 25/d says that function of ward committee of VDC is to help to establish school and library in respective area of the wards. Similarly, article 28/g explains the function, rights and duties of VDCs on education. VDC shall grant permission to establish pre-primary school within the respective territory of the VDC and also manage the school by itself. In addition to this, it shall make provision to provide primary education in mother tongue of the respective children along with the responsibility of conducting formal and adult education and establishing library in the respective VDC territory. Similar provision is also made in the case Municipality in Article 93(g), 96(d), 93(g) and 96(d), 189(j) and 189 (j).

Unfortunately, in both VDC and Municipality there is no mention of anything specific about women and girl children and their educational development.

Gender and education in periodic development plan

Gender gap in education is huge in Nepal. In 2001, women's literacy was 42% compared to male literacy rate of 65.1 (MOES, 2005). Women's concerns have been noted as national development concerns since Sixth development plan (1980-1985). However, educational development endeavors has not been active on women's education accordingly until the promulgation of Education Act, 2002. In the mean time, Ninth plan (1997-2002) adopted the strategic policy of gender mainstreaming in all development sectors including education sector to attain gender equity in all aspects of development. The Tenth Plan (2003- 2007) has given continuation to the Ninth Plan. The education sector policy "Education for All" of the Tenth Plan (2003-2008) emphasizes on providing special provision to increase access of educational opportunities to women (NPC 2003). In order to achieve this goal, the plan has adopted strategies of innovative programs for women to access quality education and inclusive and integrated education system.

Education Act 2002 and Education Regulation 2002 (Seventh Amendment)

As provisioned in the seventh amendment of the Education Act 2002 (Article 11\L and Rule 22 of the corresponding Education Regulation 2002), interested local bodies, management committees or organizations can take over management responsibility of government managed schools to be managed by the communities (Education Act, 2002).

To take over the management responsibility of the school by the community, the following requirements are to be met from the applicant side: a) Two years management plan of the proposed community school, b) decision of school management committee if the school management committee is applying or decisions of the local bodies or the organizations in case local bodies or the organizations are applying. These organizations and local bodies who have taken the management responsibility of the schools are entitled to get block grant immediately after the handover of the school to the community¹³.

Community management of school – an overview

Regarding the composition of the school management committee (SMC), there is a mandatory provision in the Education Act, 2002 (Article 12) to include one woman in the school management committee (SMC). SMC is the key body for the management of respective community school. As defined by the same Act, the SMC consists of ten members and is authorized to make most of the management decisions about community school. The members of SMC come from different categories of people with a compulsory provision to have at least one woman from parent category. The composition of the SMC is as shown in Box 1.

Box 1: Details of School Management Committee Members

In total, there will be 10 members in School Management Committee (SMC).

- Four members from parent including a woman member
- Ward chair person of the respective Village Development Committee (VDC) or the Municipality where the school is located,
- One of the founding members of the school nominated by the SMC,
- One from local donor category (land donor or any other property to the school),
- An educational intellectual nominated by SMC
- A representative form the teachers and
- Head teachers of the school as member secretary

¹³ The one time grant (block grant) is provided to the community schools immediately after the handing over of the management responsibility of the school. One hundred thousand in case of primary level, two hundred thousand for lower secondary level and three hundred thousand for secondary level is handed over.

Once an application from the respective parties is received, the District Education Officer (DEO) or the directorate themselves or the officers deputed by them are to send for field supervision. Decisions regarding handover are made on the basis of available field reports whether to transfer the management responsibility either by the chief district officer (in case of primary school) or by the directorate (in case of middle secondary and secondary school). While granting management responsibility¹⁴, DEO or the directorate has to make agreement with the proposed institution that is going to take school management responsibility. Once handed over, DEO or the directorate has to inform the Education department and to the teacher *Kitabkhana* regarding the handing over of the school to the communities for their record keeping.

Overview of the Case Study sites

In this section, an overview of the nine studied schools and their surrounding socio-economic contexts is presented. The overview includes: physical location of the school, details of the students studying, socio-economic conditions of the area (see Table 3 for the summary characteristics). Out of the nine schools, eight are handed over to local community management; while the remaining one has already completed its process but yet to be handed over to the community (it is treated here as handed over school like other community schools). As shown in Table 3, out of the eight handed over community schools studied, four schools are from higher secondary (10+2) and secondary category (up to grade 10), one is lower secondary (up to grade 7) school and three are primary schools (up to grade 5). Out of the nine schools studied, two secondary and six primary schools are handed over to the community.

Samaiji Primary School, Mastamandu, Dadeldhura

Samaiji Primary School is located in ward no 9 of Mastamandu Village Development Committee of Dadeldhura district. Samaiji can be reached after two hours of walking from the Dadeldhura-Doti highway. The catchment area of the school covers 7, 8 and 9 wards. According to their school improvement plan of the school (2060-2065), there are 143 households residing in the catchment area. There were 235 students studying in the school at the time of the field study in March 2007. According to the head teacher, the enrolment rate of the children especially of the girls has been increased by 70%.

People of the area speak Doteli language, a local dialectics of Nepali. Main occupants of the area are Chhetry¹⁵ and dalit¹⁶ castes. Several specific groups of Chhetry are found in the area: Bista, Bohora, Shahi, Khadka and Deuba. Twso sub-caste groups - Damai and Sarki - belongs to Dalits. People of the area draw their livelihoods primarily from agriculture of which animal husbandry is a strong component. Women have long working hours as compared to men, as it is women who perform most of the household and farming related activities. Most of the male members of the households have migrated to India. Our study team found out that remaining few males spend most of their time playing cards and drinking alcohol in the local shops. Women' health is severely affected by poor nutrition and heavy workload. 'Chhaupadi' practice is common in the area¹⁷. Due to poor health, women at their thirties look similar to urban women

¹⁴ Roles and responsibility of the School Management Committee include: a) appointment of Head and community Teacher; b) Appointment of other community teacher and staff using school resources; c) Fix the Salary, allowances and other benefits for those appointed according to point b; d) Make contractual arrangement with the government and non-government organizations for the welfare of the school but the prior government approval is required in case of making any contract with the foreign parties; e) Make a plan and implement it as per the requirement of the school; f) Obey the roles, responsibilities and rights written in Article 25 of the Act except Schedule No (f), (g) and (h).

¹⁵ Chhetry are second from the top (after Brahmin) in the caste hierarchy of Hindu society. Traditionally, they are known as rulers and warriors.

¹⁶ Dalit includes those in the bottome echelon of the caste hierarchy. They are occupational and working class, and are so called "untouchables".

¹⁷ Chhaupadi is a practice followed by the women and girl of the area during monthly menstruation and child delivery period. During this period, women and girl not allowed to sleep at home rather spent night in cowshed and

at fifties in appearance. For more than 10 years World Food Program (WFP) is providing cooking oil to the mother of the school going daughters and snacks for all student.

Sidhanath Higher Secondary School, Jogbuda, Dadeldhura

Sidhanath Higher Secondary School is located in ward number one of Jogbuda VDC of Dadeldhura district. The school used to be a higher secondary school at the time of our field research and has recently been upgraded as multiple college at the time of writing this report. Only primary level of the school is handed over to community management. The school was established in 2027 as a primary school and the early days of the classes used to be without buildings. Instead of running classes under the open sky, it they were run at the bank of the local Rangun River. A local resident, Tej Bahadur Saud, donated some 300 Ropanies of land in 2027 BS in the name of the school which is a main source of income even at the time of the study. The primary level of the school was handed over to the community in 2060 BS. The catchments area of the school covers 2507 households and the total number of students is 5240.

Agriculture is the main occupation of the people of the area and most of the people follow Hindu religion. Out migration of male members of the households mainly to India is a common phenomenon in the area, indicating that women have to perform most of the households responsibilities as *de facto* household head and other communal responsibilities. The *Chhaupadi*¹⁸ system is practiced as common practice not only in the area but also throughout the far western region. The society as a whole is considered as a close society in terms of women's freedom and voices.

Additionally, the school runs classes for the blind children as well. School record shows that there are 27 teachers altogether including two female teachers. According to a survey carried out in 2057 BS in the school catchment, the total numbers of households were 2057 with a population of 17,733 consisting of 9041 male and 8692 female. From nursery to class 12, there are 5240 students studying in the school where 57 % are female and 42% are male. According to the locals, only after 2048, girl child started to attend the school though the school was established about 20 years back. Major hindering factor was that in early days Sanskrit used to be commonly taught language and teachers used to be from Brahmin caste in most of the cases which socially discouraged girl child to attend the school as they are considered as bodily polluted during their monthly menstruation. People said that if they had female teachers in the school by that time it would have encouraged girls to attend the school.

School record shows that from 2051 they have included at least one women member in the school management committee and interestingly the same women is representing until the time of this field work for this research (March 2007).

pecially made “Chhaou Ghar” (small shed). It is believed that this time they are bodily polluted hence not allowed entering the house and touching anybody including animals. Women in this period are not allowed to drink cow milk, if they do so it will harm to the body of the cow.

¹⁸ This is a local cultural tradition in which girls and women stay outside of home during the period of menstruation.

Table 5. General profile of the case study schools

SN	Name of the School	Political and geographic location	Year of Establishment	Year handed over	No of students	No of HHs covered	Remarks
1	Shanti Bhagavati Higher Secondary School, Letang Morang	VDC-Letang District- Morang Dev. Region- Eastern Geography- Terai	2009	2060	1782 Male- 833 Female- 948	5000	Secondary level is handed over to the community
2	Bhanu Primary School, Uurlabari, Morang	VDC- District- Morang Dev. Region- Geography- Terai	2041	2059	284	378	
3	Chaitanya Secondary School, Banepa, Kavre	Municipality- Banepa (urban area) District- Kavre Dev. Region- Central Geography- Mid hills	2017	2052	606 Male/female -	700	Only primary level is handed over to the Community
4	Shringeri Lower Secondary School, Lamatar, Lalitpur	VDC- Lamatar District- Lalitpur Dev. Region- Central Kathmandu Valley (village)	2052	2060	137	650	Only primary level is handed over to the community
5	Sarbodaya Higher Secondary School, Deukhuri, Dang	VDC- Sishania District- Dang Dev.region- mid western Inner Terai	2018	Not handed over yet ¹⁹	2115 (including +2)	1500	Any level not handed over to the community
6	Siddhanath Higher Secondary School, Jogbuda, Dadeldhura	VDC - Jogbuda District - Dadeldhura Dev. Region- Far western Higher middle hill and inner terai	2027	2061	5240 Male: 2991 Female: 2227	2750	Only Primary level is handed over to the Community
7	Samaijee Primary School, Mastamandu, Dadeldhura	VDC - Mastamandu, District - Dadeldhura Dev. Region- Far western Higher middle hill	2047	2061	804 Male- 399 & female405)	143	Primary level is headed over to the community

¹⁹ Community has already formed SMC and PTA as in other community managed schools but formal hand over is yet to be done. In this report we have treated the case like formally handed over as there are no major implications on the part of gender relation.

8	Chhairo Primary School, Chhairo, Mustang	VDC - Marpha-9 District - Mustang Dev. Region- Western High mountains/rain shadow area	2031 (informally run from 2020)	2059 (first CS in Mustang)	39 Male: 22 Female: 17	24	Primary level handed over to the community
9	Jansanti Secondary School Kagbeni, Mustang	VDC- Kagbeni District- Mustang Dev region- Western Mountainous region/rain shadow area	2020	2061	106 Male: 44 Female: 62	173	Secondary level handed over to the community

Source: Dipendra et al 2007. HH = Households; CS = xx; VDC= xx; No= number

Sarbodaya Higher Secondary School, Deukhuri, Dang

Sarbodaya Higher Secondary School is located at ward number five of the Sisania VDC of Dang district. The school was established in 2016 BS and got formal approval from the government in 2018 to start as primary school in the area. Now this school is running classes from one to 12 classes. Major ethnic group of the area is Choudhary, who constitute indigenous people of the Western Terai of Nepal called *Tharu*.

The main occupation of the people in this area is agriculture. In early days *Kamalari* practice was common in this *Tharu* community which hindered girl child to attend the school. Kamalari is a kind of local practice where girl children are sent to the local landlord or *Zamindar* as household helper and in return the family of the girl child gets some wages in cash or kind. After the democratic movement in 1990, people are not allowed formally to follow Kamalari which has encouraged school age girl child to go to the school. Plan International Nepal and Society Welfare Action Nepal are supporting community to abolish *Kamlari* practice and providing financial support to attend to the school going 45 girls in the study area.

The total numbers of students are 2,115 of which 65% are from *Chaudhary* ethnic group. Total number of households in the school catchment area is approximately 1700. There are 30 teachers including 3 females. Though the school has not yet been formally handed over to the community, they have formed SMC and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) line in other formally handed over schools.

Shringeri Lower Secondary School, Lamatar, Lalitpur

Department of Education of the government of Nepal identified Shringeri school as one of the 10 best community managed schools throughout the country. The school is located inside Kathmandu valley from where we also wanted to test our research methodology as it was easier for frequent visits for all research Team members. The school lies in ward number one of the Lamatar VDC of Lalitpur district and can be reached after an hour's bus ride from Guarko Ringroad point at the outer skirt of Patan city.

The school was established in 2049 as a private school by different name and later from 2053 the school got official approval from the government as government school. Ward number one, five, six and two are within the immediate command area of the school. Thakuri, Brahmin, Dalit and Newar are major castes groups of the school catchment area. Apart from government funding, the school is getting regular financial support from nearby Shuvtara Boarding School (one of the reputed boarding schools in the Kathmandu valley).

Only the primary level is handed over to the community in 2050 BS though the school is a lower secondary. As depicted in Table 1, there are seven female teachers out of 11 in total. The total number of students studying in the school are 137. There are nine members in school management committee (SMC) of which one is dalit woman. In PTA, there are seven female members out of total 14 members. Several NGOs - FEDO, CEPRED and DEPROSC – work in the area in educational issues including, working with dalit women parent in the school catchment area.

Chaitanya Secondary School Banepa, Kavre

Chaitanya is a unique example of community school managed by the municipality in an area pre-dominated by Newar community. Chaitanya is one of the two community schools managed by the municipality throughout the country²⁰.

²⁰ The major difference between the school managed by municipality and by the community is that the community managed school does all financial transaction with district education office as an immediate government line agency

The school was established in 2017 BS as a primary school at ward number 6 of Banepa Municipality of Kavrepalanchowk district (some 30 kilometers east of Kathmandu Valley). Though the school has been running up to secondary level education from 2043 (BS), only the primary level is managed by the municipality from 2052. The total number of students studying from class nursery to class 10 are 605. The total numbers of teachers are 18 out of which 8 are female teachers.

Since it is managed by municipality, it has two management committees at two levels: municipality level and community level. At the municipality level, there is a committee of 23 members, of which nine are the chairpersons and another nine members are the head teachers from the nine community schools found within the municipality area. The remaining three are the educational experts and one female member is nominated by the municipality and Mayer is the *de facto* chair of the committee. In total there are nine community schools managed by Banepa Municipality within its political territory including Chaitanya.

Apart from this committee at municipality level, there is SMC like in other schools managed by the community. The SMC has also included a woman as a compulsory requirement. The committee takes care of all community schools in close coordination with municipality.

Unlike other community-managed schools, a unique feature of Chaitanya school is that all financial transactions and other support services have to pass through the Municipality. The Municipality has special support program to the community schools of the area. It has provided 10 computers to each secondary school and two teachers are appointed by the Municipality with the condition of paying one year salary (and after this the respective schools have to manage themselves). In addition to this, every year municipality allocates 250 thousand rupees for scholarship to the students up to 12 classes for all nine community schools of the Municipality. In principle, the poor, talented, dalit and girl children get the first priority in scholarship. There is a scholarship evaluation committee in the municipality level but no women representation in the committee.

Janashanti Secondary School, Kagbeni Mustang

Janashanti Secondary School is one of the oldest schools in Mustang District which lies in ward no 7 of Kagbeni Village Development Committee (VDC) of Mustang District. In 2002, the total population of the VDC is 1224²¹ and the people depend on this school for educating their child. In 2059 BS, the total number of students in the school are 106 which consists 62 female and 44 male and out of which 43 students were found to be staying at hotels at the time of the field study in 2007. The hostel has made it easier for students from more distant villages from the VDC. Local female group called *Ama samuha* has contributed economically to construct and run the hostel in which there are 28 resident students. The school was established in 2020 BS.

There is one woman in the nine-member school management committee (SMC). The women member was selected in the committee since 1995 before handing over management of the school to the community. However, the obligatory provision was made in the education policy only from 2002.

The School is located in a high mountainous and the rain shadow area, which have had great influence in the livelihoods pattern and strategies of local livelihoods. People of the area are of

whereas in the case of schools managed by municipality, all financial and other supports are supposed to come through municipality. However in municipality managed school (in our study sample), apart from financial transaction, other activities are found to be run by school itself through the decisions of school management committee.

²¹ Village Development Profile 2002.

Tibetan origin and mostly follow Buddhism. The population is dominated by Gurung/Thakuri, one of the important ethnic groups of the region, where women have better socio-political status as compared to other research areas. The general conception in the area is that the Thakuri are the ruler and Gurungs are ruled; however Gurung dominate the population. There are also some families who follow polyandry. The area being one of the major tourist destinations of the country, the major source of income of the people is tourism followed by agriculture where they have irrigation facility. Out-migration of males and to some extent female is also common in the school area. A unique feature of the area is the presence of Mukhiya system in which the local Mukhiya make all the decisions, settles disputes and gives punishment to the culprits, notwithstanding the formal rules of the government.

Table 6: Sociopolitical and Geographic Features of the Research Sites

S N	Name of the School	Geography (access)	Ethnicity and culture	Main occupation	Specific features	Socio economic status of women	Economy
1	Shanti Bhagavati Higher Secondary School, Morang	Terai- low land, Easy access in terms of transportation ?? Kilometers away from Kathmandu	Religion- Christian, Buddhist Caste and ethnicity- mixed Language- Nepali, Rai, Limbu	Agriculture, Wage labor, business	No discrimination on the basis of the caste. Widows wear red tika and colourful clothes, which is not commonly practiced among Hindus	Sub-tropical climate,	Productive agriculture land, Subsistence economy
2	Bhanu Primary School, Uurlabari, Morang	Terai- low land, Easy access in terms of transportation ?? Kilometers away from Kathmandu	Religion- Christian, Buddhist Caste and ethnicity- mixed (with indigenous- Dhimal, Satar, Jhangad) Language- Nepali, Rai, Limbu	Agriculture, Wage labor, business	Widows wear red tika and colourful clothes, which is not commonly practiced among Hindus	Sub-tropical climate,	Productive agriculture land, Subsistence economy
3	Chaitanya Secondary School, Banepa, Kavre	Urban area, easy access to road transportation Around 30-40 kilometers from Capital city Kthmandu	Caste and ethnicity- Newar dominated Language- Newar	Agriculture, business, wage labor	School is managed by local body (Municipality)	Temperate climate, Both rain fed and irrigated land	Subsistence economy
4	Shringeri lower Secondary School, Lamatar, Lalitpur	Easy road access Nearest site- within Kathmandu Valley	Dominated by low caste Religion- Hindu	Agriculture, wage labor	Recorded as one of the best community managed school throughout the country by the government	Temperate climate, both rain fed and irrigated land	Subsistence economy
5	Sarbodaya Higher Secondary School, Deukhuri, Dang	Inner valley, Far from the capital city?? Kilometers from Kathmandu	Caste and ethnicity- Tharu dominated Language- Tharu Religion- Hindu	Agriculture, Animal husbandry	Kamlari practice is the hindering factor for girl child education	Inner –Terai, dominated by irrigated land	Productive land Subsistence economy
6	Siddhanath Higher Secondary School, Jogbuda, Dedeldhura	Around 800 Kilometers from Kathmandu, Seasonal road access from black road point	Brahmin/Chhetry, dalit religion-Hindu	Agriculture, animal husbandry	Chhaoupadi practice is common as one of the hindering factors for women's participation	Inner Terai, high male migration to India	Subsistence mostly maintained by remittance

7	Samaijee Primary School, Mastamandu, Dadeldhura	Around 800 Kilometers from Kathmandu, Two hours climbing up (walking) from the Highway.	Brahmin/Chhetry, dalit, Follow Hindu religion-	Agriculture, animal husbandry	Chhaoupadi practice is common as one of the hindering factors for women's participation World Food (WFP) is providing cooking oil to the parent of the girl child and snacks to all the school attending children	Mid hills, High male migration to India	Subsistence mostly maintained by remittance
8	Chhairo Primary School, Chhairo, Mustang	High mountains, Access only by air transportation Rain shadow area	Major caste group are Thakali, Gurung Mostly follow Buddhism	Business basically tourism, Agriculture, wage labor	Women groups are active in the name of Ama Samuha, Women are active in generating fund for the school, Some families from Poliandry marriage system	Male migration to other than India, High class people have send their children to Kathmandu and Pokhara, only the remaining parent send their children local community school	Business (tourism) , Subsistence agriculture, remittance
9	Janshanti Secondary School Kagbeni, Mustang	High mountains, Access only by air transportation Rain shadow area	Caste and ethnicity Thakali, Gurung Religion Buddhism	Basically tourism, Agriculture, wage labor	Women groups are active as Ama Samuha, They are active in generating fund for the school	Male migration to other than India, High class people have send their children to Kathmandu and Pokhara, only the remaining parent send their children local community school	Business (tourism) , remittance, Subsistence agriculture

Chhairo Primary School, Chhairo, Mustang

Chhairo Primary School is located in ward number 9 of Marpha VDC of Mustang District in the high mountains rain shadow area. Dalit, Chhetri, Brahmin and Thakali are the main residents of the school command area. There are 29 students studying in the school. Despite decentralization efforts, Mukhiya system is deeply rooted and Mukhiyas are the *de facto* ruler of the area as explained in the Janshanti school case.

The school was established in 2031 BS as a primary school. The school was handed over to the community in 2059 BS. This is the first community school in Mustang district. The SMC is composed of nine members including a woman.

Shanti Bhagavati Higher Secondary School, Uurlabari, Morang

The school is located in ward number six of Letang VDC of Morang district in the eastern region of the country and nearest big city centre in Biratnagar. The school was established in 2009 BS. Up to the secondary level of the school is handed over to the community though the school is running 12 class. The school was planning to run bachelor level study at the time of field work. There are 10 members in the school management committee including a woman member.

The total number of students are 1782 consisting of 948 female and 833 male. The highest number of students are from Bramin/Chhetri group followed by Rai, Limbu, dalit and Magar. Out of 28 teachers in the school, seven are female. Apart from the district education office, local VDC and community forestry groups have provided financial support to the school.

Bhanu Primary School, Uurlabari, Morang

Bhanu primary school is located in ward number five of Uurlabari VDC of Morang district. Major caste and ethnic groups residing in the school catchment area are Brahmin/Chhetri, Rai, limbu, Dhimal, dalit and Jhangad, Tharu, Bhujel, Tamang, Newar, Teli, Dhakar, Bangali and Magar. There are also three minority ethnic groups – Satar, Dhimal and Jhangand. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people. Satar, Jhand and Dhimal work as agricultural labor.

The school was established in 2041 BS as a primary school and handed over to the community in 2059. There is a female member in the SMC out of the nine members. There are 284 students studying in the school and the households covered are 378. Out of eight teachers in the school, 50% are female.

Findings

Findings of the study are organized according to the four conceptual blocks of the research (see main scientific report): a) status of **women participation** in community school management; b) **women's agency** in relation to participation in school management, c) the effect of **social structure** on women participation in community school; and d) the effectiveness of **policy** instruments in forging women's participation. After we briefly summarize the status of women participation, we then provide an explanation of the participation status by highlighting specific issues and constraints in relation to women's agency, social structure and policy (see conceptual framework outlined in the main scientific report for an explanation of how these analytical elements are interrelated).

Status of Women Participation in Community School

Participation in general assembly

As shown in Table 5, out of the 168 women respondents surveyed in six research sites 45 percent of the respondents said that they have participated in general parent assembly and almost 55 percent said that have not participated.

Table 7. District wise participation of women in parent assembly

SN	Name of the districts (sites)	Participation in assembly				Total
		Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage	
1	Morang	24	14.28	16	9.52	40
2	Kavre	4	2.38	21	12.50	25
3	Lalitpur	22	13.09	3	1.79	25
4	Mustang	4	2.38	11	6.55	15
5	Dang	3	1.79	17	4.97	20
6	Dadeldhura	19	11.31	24	14.28	43
7	Total	76	45.24	92	54.76	168

Source: Field survey 2007

Participation in school management committee

Out of the nine community schools studied we found that there is at least a woman in the SMC in all community-managed schools. Only in three schools the number of women in the SMCs has increased up to three. Not surprisingly, in all the studied groups, none of the key positions - chairperson and member secretary - are occupied by women. Though the policy does not prohibit women to be selected as chairperson and as a member secretary, we did not find any women holding these positions in our research sites. Since the head teacher of the respective school becomes the ex-officio member secretary of the SMC, it shows that none of the school is headed by women. Table 6 below shows the detail composition of School Management Committee. It shows that all the 15 interviewed women members were elected unopposed.

The following table shows the selection criteria of men and women in the committees

As shown in the Table 7, the average number of women participating in the SMC is around 16 percent, against the minimum 10 percent quota set by the government. The highest percentage (30%) of women is

Table 8. Selection Criteria in the SMC and PTA by Sex

SN	Criteria of Selection	Women	Men	Total
1	Elected	0	0	0
2	Nominated	0	2	2
3	Unopposed	15	30	45
Total		15	32	47

Source: Field survey 2007

found in Bhanu Primary School management committee, Morang. As shown in the same Table 7 the inclusion of non- parents in the SMC is also remarkable in some schools. The determining factor for the inclusion of more non-parents is directly correlated to the level of urbanization and availability of the private schools in and around the research sites. For instance, in Mustang district which is the remotest research site and is far from the city centers, there are no private schools available. This has forced the parents to send their children to local community schools even some households can afford the cost of private school if they are located in the district. Here the parents sending their children to community schools also hold almost all positions in SMC. In contrast, in the research sites closer to the urban areas, where private schools are available, local people who can afford have sent their children to private schools and also occupy the position in SMC.

Table 9: Composition of School Management Committee

S N	Name of the school	Total SMC members	Number of males	Number of females	Number of non-parent	Key position occupied by
1	Shanti Bhagavati Higher Secondary School	10	9	1	5*	Male
2	Bhanu Primary School	9	6	3	4	Male
3	Chaitanya Secondary School	9	8	1	3	Male
4	Shringeri Lower Secondary School	8	7	1	5	Male
5	Sarbodaya Higher Secondary School	8	6	2	2	Male

6	Siddhanath Higher Secondary School	9	7	2	2	Male
7	Samaiji Primary School	8	7	1	1	Male
8	Chhairo Primary School	9	8	1	0	Male
9	Janashanti Secondary School	9	8	1	0	Male

Unfortunately, the poor parents are the ones who send their children to local community schools but occupy no positions in the SMC. Even if they do, their presence is limited. This indicates that in urban areas, local male elites in the name of community schools are enjoying key positions and imposing their decisions to the poor parent. During focus group discussion, a group of women parents of Shanti Secondary School, Morang said:

SMC members who are mostly men and are from non-parents category increase the fees of the students every year. They don't take care whether the poor parents can afford the increased amount or not. It might be a low amount for them as they send their children to the private schools often many times expensive then the community schools.

Contrary to this, in remote schools of Mustang, the parents of the concerned schools are taking the lead in managing the school. Apparently women's participation was found to be high in generating money from organizing cultural and other groups. All the women in the area organized in the form of Ama Samuha. Annapurana Area Conservation Project (ACAP) is the key organization to form and support Ama Samuha under the broader framework of Conservation Area Management Committee (CAMC).

In the survey with 342 respondents (both male and female), we asked what are the key hindrances or constraints to women's participation. The data in Table 8 demonstrates that both men and women strongly believe that lack of education is the main constraint, followed by patriarchal social structure at both the household and community levels. Language barrier comes next. A significant proportion of both men and women do not even know that there are constraints to women participation, which indicates a situation of deep symbolic violence in gender imbalance.

Table 10: Views on hindrances for women participation in decision making by gender

SN	Hindrances	Gender				Total
		Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage	
1	Patriarchal social structure	56	16.37	56	16.37	112
2	Lack of education/awareness	71	20.76	71	20.76	142
3	Hesitation/language problem	16	4.68	13	3.80	29
4	Poor economic condition	15	4.39	7	2.05	22
5	Don't know	16	4.68	21	6.14	37
6	Total	174	50.88	168	49.12	342

Field survey 2007

Other constraints of women participation observed during focus groups discussion was that women were not recognized as parent to take part in school related affairs. Contrary to the usual practice to recognize male members as head of the respective households, the SMC of Samaiji Primary School has already started to write the letters or any notice to women's name as well recognizing that the women are also the head of the households.

The Effect of Social Structure in Women Participation

Factors external to, and dialectically related to, women's agency are considered part of social structure²². Socio-cultural rules²³, resources, and doxas²⁴ that are stored and enacted in social fields are primarily part of social structure. A number of observed constraints to women participation in school management can be understood in terms of these various aspects of social structure constraining or even constituting the agency of women. Table 9 summarizes key socio-structural factors affecting gender relations in educational governance.

Table 11: Socio-Structural Factors

Constraining factors	Gender Impact
1. Non-recognition of women in public domain (<i>Aimai-ketaketi</i>)	Discouraging to women.
2. Women's workload	Limited time to participate.
3. Unaccounted economic value of women's work	Pressurize women for more work than men.
4. Male-dominated household level decision systems	Women unable to participate effectively in SMC, PTA.
5. Chhaupadi	Access to participate in all kinds of educational practices (student, SMC) denied. Expulsion from household.
6. Dalit status of women	Discouragement to participation in public domain

Women are not recognized as parent

Female parent are not recognized as legitimate parents of their Children. Out of the nine community schools studied in eight schools women's name is not registered as a parent only in Samaiji Primary School, Dadeldhura has registered women parent in the parent list. In eight schools, as a normal practice, father's name is registered in the school as a parent of the respective child. In practice, women's name is not even known in the village, said head teacher of the Samaiji primary school. Women in general in the village are known by their male family members - their father, father in law, husband or as mother of their own children. In early age they are known from their father or elder brothers; later they are known by their husband and father in law and at latter stage of their life they are known by their sons and brother in laws. Women spend most of their life time in their husbands' house and yet are not often addressed by their own name. Sometimes they have to even remember what is their own name, said one of the female parents from Samaijii Primary School, Dadeldhra. These are the rules of constituting the women's identity that pre-structures the scope of the involvement of women's agency in any social field, including school management. This symbolic identity of women is similar across all economic classes but varies to some extent according to the ethnic groups.

The manifestation of this subordinated identity of women is visible in different practices of school governance. A clear example is related to women's participation as a parent. While parents are invited in school related activities, in most of the cases, the invitation letters to participate in the meetings are written in the name of male parent. In the case of our research sites in Dadeldhura, generally male members of the family have migrated to India for employment and women are the *de facto* household heads but the community school still continues to send letters in the name of the male parents who are absent from the village for several years. One of the mother parents, Ms Hari Devi Bhat, a parent of Sidhanath School said:

²² The concept of social structure carries different meanings in different sociological traditions. One of the most influential perspective is that of Giddens (1984) who claims that structure is composed of rules and resources employed by social agents, and structure is not external constraint but constitutive of the action of agents. This perspective is also reinforced by Bourdieu (1998) but in different languages – habitus (culturally pre-disposed agency in action) and field (a specific arena of social context in which social action is situated). We tried to capture the attributes of social structure from both Giddens and Bourdieu's (field) perspectives.

²³ According to Giddens, rules comprise of normative elements as well as rules of signification.

²⁴ According to Bourdieu, doxas are deeply held assumptions about practices in specific fields.

I am not the head of my house though my husband is out for employment for about eight years. When I go to school to admit the child, to pay dues or to do other related tasks about my childrens' education, the school administration first ask the name of my husband and write it in the appropriate register but they never ask my name and they even don't know my name. I am managing all requirements of the children (monthly fees, dresses, stationeries, food and medicine when they fall sick) but I am not the parent to be consulted or invited in school affairs. When they invite the parent to attend school meetings, they write the letter in the name of my husband. And when I visit school they ask me when my husband comes from India instead of talking with me.

The issue of recognition goes further in terms of readiness of male to listen to women members. Table 10 shows that the proportion of male perceiving that their voice is heard in the meeting is higher than that of female.

Table 12. Perception of Respondents about Being Heard/Listened to by Others

SN	Perception	Female	Male	Total
1	Heard	34	57	91
2	Not heard	3	8	11
3	Don't know	131	109	240
Total		168	174	342

Source: Field survey 2007

But in the case of Samaiji Primary School, they have started to write the invitation in the name of mother after they repeatedly found that nobody participated from the respective households. The head teacher of the school shared with the research team that since they have registered the name of the mother of the respective child it has become easier for them to write the invitation letter in women's name. The reason behind registering also women's name as parent is because of the World Food Program (WFP) where cooking oil is distributed to the mother of the school going girl child. Apart from cooking oil for female parent, the school also gets flour for making day snacks for all the school children. To get the oil and flour female parent has to bear the added responsibility of carrying these items from the nearby road head point (approximately two hours walking)

Women are nominated by the male members

Both for SMC and PTA, it is a common practice to nominate women often in the absence of respective women in all studied schools. The members selected by this process are found to be unaware about their roles and in some worse scenarios they even don't know which committee they represent. Ms Kalu Thapa, one of the female members of the PTA of Siddhanath School, Dadeldhura told us the following story about the process of her nomination as follows:

I am one of the women members in PTA but I didn't know how and when was I nominate; I only knew it when I received an invitation letter to participate in the first meeting of the PTA. In the letter it was written that "Ms Kalu Thapa, you are requested to participate in PTA meeting in the following date and venue as we have nominated you as one of the members of PTA. Please forgive us for nominating you in your absence."

Another women from same school, does not even know that the name of committee she belong to. According to Ms Kalu Thapa, inclusion of few women in the committee is not the solution to raise the voices of women rather the women become the showpiece. "We are not allowed to speak up even when we are able to" said Ms Kalu Thapa, PTA member from Siddhanath School Dadeldhura.

Irrespective of the ways women selected in any of the committees related to community school management, in several cases once a woman is selected in the committee, same women selected in the committee again and again in the consecutive years too. In some of the schools we studied

we found that the same woman is a SMC member at least for three consecutive years. Goma Karki from Siddhnath school shared with the research team:

I am a SMC member since the start of the community school. The SMC has already passed the three tenure periods but I am retained as permanent member until now. She further said that I am also the committee member in community forestry, irrigation groups and also the ex-female ward member of the VDC.

Though the criteria for selecting women members are not explicit but rather informal, in practice they consider the level of education, activeness in other social events and previous familiarity with other male members.

Household work and high transaction cost of participation

“Except plowing land once in a year, all other household works and farming responsibilities are in the shoulders of women” said Ms Kalu Thapa, women member of PTA from Siddhanath School, Dadeldhura. In most of the cases, women lack time to participate in the meetings and in other social gatherings. There are also some cases where women are already the members of several community groups and have to allocate significant amount of their time in attending the meetings.

Dhan Kumari B.K. one of the *dalit* women parent from Chhairo Primary School shared as followed:

We are the ones who have to cook our food and feed the family. Male members just reach their home just before lunch and dinner time but it is not the case for women. If someone asks us to participate in the meeting during cooking and feeding time, we can't participate. Even if I participate in some meetings I hear what others talk and come back home without knowing what to talk about the school. As this district is far away from the capital, nobody visits us for awareness rising; instead 'Mukhiya' does all decisions. There should be some government policies to include dalit people too; otherwise earlier time so called upper caste people were not used to sit together with dalit. I think it is because of Maoist's movement that helped us to gain better status in relation to caste hierarchy in the village.

In one case from Dadeldhura district, we found that a woman is an executive member in 17 different community development groups. In these groups the members of all the groups are more or less same but the supporting organizations are different.

Kalu Thapa- PTA member from Siddhanath School, Dadeldhura expressed:

I am the chairperson in most of these groups. If I have to compulsorily attend to all these group meetings then I have no time for my own work to take care of my family.”

She also put a comment to the service providers that everyone wants to promote his or her own 'brand' and so do not want to collaborate with each others. If they collaborate, the number of groups might be less and women's' time cost would also be less. This is a useful strategy to be applied to get rid out from 'time poverty'.

Another woman from Shanti Bhagavati School has also similar experience of being a member in several groups. Ms Subhadra Bhattarai said that often in the village they don't take the consent of women while they select them in the committee. She further shared with us that she knew after seven days of her selection as SMC member. She said that “I was already at least in other five different committees. If they had asked me I would have refused their offer.

Andocentric household level governance

In early days of group formation in Siddhanath School catchment area Ms Kalu Thapa had to struggle a lot with her husband to send her daughters to the school and her husband also resisted

her to go out to attend the group meetings. She remembered a bitter case of her past and said that - when she talked with a man in her shop while selling goods, her husband charged her that the customer and herself might have illicit sexual relation. She further remembered her hard time and said that she had to continually resist her husband's stance to send her daughters to the school and to participate in the group meetings.

When asked about the inclusion of one female in the SMC, male SMC members in most of the cases replied that there is a mandatory policy provision to include one female in the SMC, and that is why she Ms Kalu Thapa is included in the committee.

Suntali Purkuti, a dalit parent of Shringeri School in Lamatar, Lalitpur said that in early days of her SMC tenureship, she was beaten several times by her husband for participating in the school meeting as a SMC member. She said that she used to attend the meeting without letting her husband know several times. Obviously, when she has to participate in the meetings outside her village, then she could not make it. She said that one time she had to send her daughter instead of herself. Because of continued threat from her husband, she further disclosed that for more than six months (at the time of the field study in March 2007) she has not participated in the meeting; rather she put her signature on the meeting register at home (carried by school teachers).

A group of dalit women including Suntali from Shringeri Secondary School, Lalitpur noticed that these days their husband have become a bit liberal and started to allow their wives in the meeting from where they could get some income. As several institutions are working with these women, they have earned some money from pig rearing and their husbands stopped to beat them.

Language as the barrier for active participation

Out of 9 schools studied, parents from two schools (Chaitanya in Banepa and Janshanti in Mustang) reported that they have faced language problem. In Mustang, none of the school parents (both male and female) expressed that due to lack of a common language of communication, their access to district education office was limited. "We used to face problems to take approval from district education office in early days as we were unable to write a letter in official language (Nepali) and the staff were also unable to understand our language" said one of the parents of Janasanti school, Mustang. Likewise, in Banepa, while we were conducting household survey and focus group discussions with female parents, female parents expressed that most of them can't communicate properly in Nepali language and hence hesitate to speak out. One of the female parents said: "It is difficult for me to communicate what I want to say as I can't speak *parbate* (Nepali) fluently. If I speak, I frequently mixed *Newari* and feel ashamed".

Conservative thinking- closed societal norms (doxa)

In at least two out of the nine schools studied, we found that women are not allowed to participate in public meetings. Chairperson (male) of PTA from Banepa admitted that 'religious and cultural norms and values of Newar castes do not allow women to participate in public affairs. He further said that even when they attend, they hardly speak any words in the meeting. Even when men encourage speaking, they (women) say that it is fine for them if men speak on their behalf. This practice lies at the level of doxa – in which women are naturalized to accept a rule or practice that is at their own disadvantage. But there are some women who raise questions to understand the decision of the SMC. When they raise questions in the meetings or at homes, they are discouraged by their male counterpart. "When I asked about the outcomes of the meetings, my husband replied why I needed those things"? Such responses not only made me discouraged at that particular point of time but also gave me an impression that public affairs are not the domain of women and I should not speak there" said one of the female parents from Chaitanya Secondary School, Banepa. This reduces the possibility of activeness of women when the household level gender relations are transferred to public domain.

The biological characteristic of women is also constructed as an inferior and illegitimate factor in public processes. Especially in two of the schools studied in Dadeldhura, Chhaupadi is found to be one of the major constraining factors for women's active participation (this is common throughout far western region). Chhaupadi is considered a state of bodily pollution attached with women during menstruation and during child birth. During monthly menstruation women do not sit in the mass and are not allowed to touch other members at least for five days and have to sleep outside home, traditionally in cowshed or a small thatched roofed hut without doors prepared for the purpose. The beliefs of Chhaupadi is deeply rooted in the society that women have to walk from another route if there is temple or some religious monument in the regular route in the village.

Chhaupadi is a practice which is deeply rooted within women themselves especially among the elderly. When asked about the difficulties of women during menstruation, one of the women aged 50 told the research team that she will not abandon the practice that has been undertaken through generation, and to which she has been accustomed since her childhood. She further said that if they break the practice god may be unhappy and something disastrous may happen in the family. They also know that in the neighboring country in India, women don't follow this practice but they said they can't abandon it. Social norms are rooted at the level of doxa and are found to be so deeply entrenched that the agencies of women do not even think of talking against *Chhapadi*. One of the male SMC members shared with us that we are ostracized from the society as social rule breakers if we don't follow it. I don't send my wife to cowshed, she sleeps in usual room but not in the usual bedroom and not allowed to go to the kitchen said Chair person of the SMC Samaiji primary school.

Caste relations reinforce gender imbalance

Kabita Rokka is a grade 5 passed and 21 years old lady is the member of different development groups in the village and also a member of PTA of Shringeri School. She expressed that being a dalit, women PTA member is more humiliating than encouraging where the majority of the members are from high caste ". Our name is put there in the list of committee members simply to fulfill the quota." She said that in the meeting when the tea is offered to all the members, high caste members do not accept simply because they are with untouchables. The high caste people feel that they become polluted if they drink/eat with *dalit*. She prefers to have the meeting in her own village with their own caste groups rather than with high caste people elsewhere in a mixed group.

Time and venue set by the male are not appropriate to women

Normally the meetings are set during evening, after 5 pm after the school are finished. This time not only the female guardians but also the female teachers cannot participate in the meeting. Head teacher of Chaitanya also viewed the same. A female teacher of Bhanu Primary School, Morang said:

Though we want to attend meetings but it becomes difficult for us to stay after the office hour (10-4). The main reason is household responsibility. It is easy to talk about inclusion and women's right but in reality it is not so easy. Those women of top level who talks about women's right have helper in their house to cook for them, but village women have to do all the works by themselves.

Limited appreciation of the capacity of women by men

Male teachers and SMC members we interviewed from Siddhanath School, Dadeldhura remarked that women don't understand what has to be done, they don't come to the meeting even when they are invited and are not able to perform the task given to them. The head teacher of Siddhanath School, Dadeldhura told the research team that the existing policy provision that the mandatory policy provision to include is not practical as the women of this remote area lack capacity to manage the school said head teacher of Siddhanath school.

Another (male) chairperson from Shanti Bhagavati School, Morang also said during focus group meeting:

Women are not capable to contribute to school related affairs. The SMC members have to visit various government and non government offices in school related matters. Women are not capable to do this as they are uneducated and lack exposure to deal with such issues. Most of the parents of this school are very poor and all the days they have to go for labor work.

In the same meeting, a female (Subhadra Bharrarai) SMC member of the same school resisted against the statement of the chair person and said that women are capable to handle the school if they have got the opportunity. Referring to her nomination in the SMC in her absence, she made a counter argument that if they (male members) had to nominate her, why they did not nominate her as a chairperson instead of simply a member.

Contrary to the perception of male towards the capability of female to carry out the school related tasks, in some cases the group themselves have mobilized women to capitalize women's symbolic status (that women are naïve and bring genuine issues, that men's agency seeks to patronize radically deliberative of women). For instance, women from Dang told us that during conflict women have played important role in safe guarding the school boys and girls from abduction. For doing so women managed several delegations to the local authority and demonstrated their capability against stereotypical thinking of patriarchy where women are perceived incapable. In another instance from Mustang district a group of women delegates were 'sent' by men to the district education office and the district office addresses the issue. Earlier it was not successful when men delegates visited the same office for the same purpose.

There is also tendency to ask to put the signature of women in meeting minutes of SMC even when they are absent physically in the actual meeting dates. In two of the studied schools male SMC members explicitly shared with us that when women members are absent in the meeting they take the register to women members' home to put their signature to fulfill quorum.

Gender identity of change agent

Availability of female teachers has had encouraging impact to the participation of female parents and the enrolment and continuation of the study of the girl children. There is a policy provision that there should be at least one female teacher in primary level. In line with government policy in place we found that it is followed at least in primary level but at lower-secondary and secondary level.

Head teacher from Siddhanath School shared with the research team that the female teachers are effective in counseling the parents to send their girl child to enroll in the school. As shown in Table 7 higher numbers of female teachers are found in relatively advanced area in terms of physical access and lesser number of teachers in other areas indicating that the availability of female teachers in the areas. Additionally, the lowest numbers of female teachers are found in Siddhanath School from Dadeldhura where gender based discrimination is high in the form of Chhaopadi²⁵ and in early days it hindered the girl child's school enrolment. In the area most of the teachers used to be the men and from Brahmin caste which restricted to the girl child to be enrolled in the school as the women and girls are considered polluted during their menstruation.

During our field trip when we were in the premises of Chaitanya School, while the research team was discussing with one of the female teachers, one of the girl students came closer to the

²⁵ During our field research parent of Siddhanath school shared with us that in earlier girl child socially prohibited to attend the school because of Chhaupadi. The teachers used to be from Brahmin caste who used to be very stricked to follow Chhaupadi discouraging girl to attend the school. This might be the reason of not availing the educated female to serve as a teacher in the area. One of our field researchers had to shift the house and stayed in the school building during her menstruation period indicates that Chhaupadi is still strictly followed in the area.

female teachers and whispered to her. The child wanted to take teacher's permission to go home for some minutes because she just menstruated in the school. She wanted to visit home for cleaning and changing the clothes. It is obvious that if there were no female teachers in the school either she had to spend the remaining time in the school with difficulty or go home without informing to the teachers and possibility to be punished in the following school day by the male teachers.

As Table 11 shows, the percentage of female teacher is as low as 7 and all but one have lower than 50%. This means that female children are still short of opportunities to interact with female teachers on matters of high cultural sensitivity.

Table 13 . Composition of School teachers (male, female ratio) in each school

SN	Name of the School	Total number of teachers	Male	Female	Head teacher	% of Female Teachers	Remarks
1	Shanti Bhagavati Higher Secondary School, Morang	28	21	7	Male	33	
2	Bhanu Primary School, Uurlabari, Morang	8	4	4	Male	50	
3	Chaitanya Secondary School, Banepa, Kavre	18	10	8	Male	44	
4	Shringeri lower ²⁶ Secondary School, Lamatar, Lalitpur	11	4	7	Male	63	
5	Sarbodaya Higher Secondary School, Deukhuri, Dang	30	25	5	Male	17	
6	Siddhanath Higher Secondary School, Jogbuda, Dadeldhura	27	25	2	Male	7	
7	Samajee Primary School, Mastamandu, Dadeldhura	4	3	1	Male	25	
8	Chhairo Primary School, Chhero, Mustang	7	3	4	Male	57	
9	Janshanti Secondary School Kagbeni, Mustang	17	15	2	Male	12	

The beliefs of Chhaupadi is so deeply entrenched in the culture that even today menstruating women are not allowed to live in the same usual house. Because of the strong belief our female researcher had to move from one of the teachers' house to the school building.

During my field visit in Siddhnath School Catchmant area, I stayed in one of the teachers' house for more than a week or so. After some days of stay I was asked by his daughter that I should not stay in the same house during menstruation. When my menstruation period started I moved in the nearby school to spend my menstruation period, I could not disobey their rule said, one of our female field researchers.

Women's Agency in Relation to Participation

We conceptualize women's agency as being partly responsible for the production and reproduction of gender inequality. Historically, women's agency is itself attuned to andocentric practices. We analyzed the extent to which women in various roles and in different governance situations recognize and challenge the immanent symbolic violence, and then proceed to claim deliberative spaces of decision-making. We identified at least the following scenarios of

²⁶ One of the best community schools out of 10 throughout the country as categorized by the Government of Nepal

women's agency responding to masculine domination in relation to community school governance:

Entrenched symbolic violence

In some cases women themselves putting high importance for the continuity of gender discriminated practices which are hindering to the participation of women. It is because women's agency has not entered into the reflective domain to analyze such practices are discriminatory for them. It is even found that women themselves have not recognized it as a barrier for perpetuating their subordinate position in the society. While talking the case of Chhaupadi from Dadeldhura a 50- year old woman did not even want to listen to anything against Chhaupadi. When asked about the difficulties of women during menstruation and their impact of the participation of women in different social and development practices, she said that:

I will not abandon the practice that has been undertaken through generation, and to which I have been accustomed since my childhood. If I break the practice god may be unhappy and something disastrous may happen in my family. I also knows that in the neighboring country in India, women don't follow this practice but I can't abandon it.

Similarly, Chair person (male) of the SMC of Samaiji Primary School, Dadeldhura also shared that:

We are ostracized from the society as social rule breakers if we don't follow Chhaupadi. I don't send my wife to cowshed. She sleeps in usual room but not in the usual bed and not allowed to go to the kitchen.

Gender consciousness

Leaving aside the quality of participation in the decision making processes in some cases there is a some level of consciousness found even within the male members to include at least one woman in all kinds of committee including school management committee. They said that it is a kind of common practice to include at least one female member in all development related tasks, so we have also included one woman in the school management committee in the similar manner.

Likewise, women have also demonstrated similar views. One of the female SMC members from Mustang said:

There might be something written about the inclusion of women in the Education Act that is why I am included. Though I am also the member of SMC, they don't invite me in all the meetings. But I am invited only when they need to inform the parents for some particular actions from my settlement.

Women's participation in the committee in terms of voicing the concerns of other women's is not always clear and effective. When asked about how she raised the concerns of women in the meeting of SMC, one of the female SMC members from Shringeri Lower Secondary School, Lalitpur said:

I talk to improve the quality of education in the school; for other matters men talk a lot. I even don't understand all the discussions they do. Most of the time I just remain passive when others talk. At the end I am asked how I find the meeting decisions made; then I say I am fine and leave the meeting place.

When asked about what they have done themselves to increase the participation of women, women respondents mentioned three major types of attempts being made for the purpose. These include: a) encourage women to participate in literacy classes, b) mobilize budget for women empowerment, c) and increase access to micro enterprise. Interesting to note that almost 39 % male and 38 percent female said that they have done nothing in this area (see Table 12).

Table 14: Effort done by respondents to make women participation easier

SN	Types of Efforts	Gender of the respondents			Percentage	Total
		Female	Percentage	Male		
1	Inspire women to participate in adult literacy classes	22	6.43	33	9.65	55
2	Mobilize budget for women empowerment	10	2.92	7	2.05	17
3	Open micro enterprise for women	3	0.88	4	1.17	7
4	Nothing	133	38.89	130	38.01	263
5	Total	168	49.12	174	50.88	342

Source: Field survey 2007

Deliberative challenge

It is not only male and the community who think women are incompetent in actively participating in the decision making bodies but in some cases women themselves also feel that their deliberative competency is not adequate to influence the school management. A group of women parent during our focus group discussion shared with the research team that:

We remain silent throughout the meeting as we are not able to speak in front of *ganyamanya* Reputed male members of the village we rather put our signature in the minute and leave for home.

It is found that, female parents also visit schools in some time interval, basically for routine types of work like collecting marksheets of their respective children. Interestingly such women are not aware that they have right to put complain it suggestions about the quality of education and about the performance of their child. They feel uncomfortable to talk with the teachers. One of the female parents of Chaitanya School said that they are afraid with the teachers and always want to avoid the possible questions That may be asked while they are in the schools. Similarly another women parent from Siddhanath Secondary School Dadeldhura said:

I feel uncomfortable when the school teachers ask me for a speech." We just know now that we (parent) can also make complaints it suggestions to the school teachers about the quality of education and the performance of their respective children .

In another instance it is seen that when there are incentive structures, women seemed to be aware about the existence of those benefits and demanded the transparency and proper allocation systems of available resources. One of the elderly women from Samaiji School in Dadeldhura shared with us that:

I heard there is scholarship for the poor children but our children haven't got it. As you know in the village, all are poor, none of us are rich so our children should also get the benefits.

But women from almost all schools expressed their dissatisfaction on the way they are nominated in the committee. In all studied schools, the membership of the women in the committee is from the nomination by men. We did not find any of the women who are in the committee who became member from their own interest and selected in their presence. Despite the application of above selection methods, some women are found to be active in challenging the current assumptions made by the male members that women are incapable in performing the school related responsibilities. Shubhadra Bhattarai from Shanti Bhagavti School, Morang, said:

I am active cadre of my affiliated political party and busy in five different committees including other development related groups. I am also in leading position in some

committees. I was nominated in School committee in my absence to fill the women quota which I knew a week after my nomination. If I was asked before their nomination I could say I am busy. I am performing very well in all other committees, I wanted to question them why they did not nominated me as the chairperson of the SMC instead of member.

Organized resistance

In some instances women themselves have also resisted against the denial by their husband to participate in school related meetings. A womens SMC member said:

In the early days of the SMC meeting I was beaten by my husband for participating in the meeting. I knew that if I participate in the meeting I know something new and that is beneficial for my life. So I decided to participate by telling a lie to my husband that I was somewhere in household related work. After some years we (women from the village) formed the saving and credit group. Because of regular saving and support from one of the NGOs, we could earn some money from pig raising and their my husband stopped to bit me. He rather encouraged me to participate in such meetings.

Apart from such individual resistance, we did not observe collective types of resistance carried out by women to overcome masculine domination in our research sites particularly in the school related affairs. Apparently we did not find the presence of women leaders and women's institutions to helping village women to overcome the situation.

Table 13 below also depicts that female visit less number of institutions as compared to men and most of them are at the village level. It shows that women have limited access to the institutions outside village.

Table 15: Types of organization visited by the respondents

SN	Types of organization visited	Gender				Total	Aggregate Percentage
		Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage		
1	Village Level	27	7.89	22	6.43	49	14.33
2	District Level	15	4.38	10	2.92	25	7.31
3	Village and District Level	3	0.88	0	0.0	3	0.88
4	All the above	3	0.88	3	0.88	6	1.75
5	None	126	36.84	133	38.89	259	75.73
6	Total	174	50.88	168	49.12	342	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2007

Even educated women are found to be not interested in visiting district and central level organizations due to household responsibilities. One female teacher of Bhanu Primary school of Morang in a FGD expressed, "whatever position we hold, we have to cook food, look after of our children and other household chores. Due to which we don't want to participate in extra activities beyond our office hour. She further added: "we can manage time for meetings and assemblies, but more time consuming activities like looking after the construction work of school, visiting to district is not possible."

Gender sensitive practices

In the all the schools we studied we could not find the activities where they have fully considered gender sensitiveness. It is found that often the meeting time coincides with the cooking time. Women to whom we interviewed have recognized that because of inappropriate time women have to go home early and prepare the food for the family but they put the signature in the minutes even where they are not aware about the agendas discussed after they left. Often both men and women are not in the same committee hence when women go to the meeting means men are at home in the areas where male out migration is not the issue. We did not observe in any of the sites that women have complained to their male family members for not supporting in cooking when they are out in the public meetings.

Respondent were asked for their suggestion to mitigate hindrances for women participation in decentralized educational governance. Interestingly, the views of male and female do not differ drastically. Majority of both male and female view that access to education and training opportunities is the main course of action for enhancing women participation (See table 14).

Table 16. Respondent suggestion in improving women participation

SN	Suggestion	Gender				Total
		Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage	
1	Access in education/training	78	22.81	74	21.64	152
2	Inspiration from family/society	50	14.62	51	14.91	101
3	Providing responsibility	12	3.51	12	3.51	24
4	Employment opportunity/organize	16	4.68	5	1.46	21
5	Don't know	18	5.26	26	7.60	44
6	Total	174	50.88	168	49.12	342

Sources: field survey 2007

When both male and female respondents were asked about the possible suggestions to mitigate the constraints of women participation in school program, almost 22 percent of the female and 23 percent of male respondents said that women's access has at increased in education and training. Likewise family support, providing responsibility and employment opportunities for women to increase the access to financial resources are also important. Interestingly 18% male and 26 % female respondents said that they have no idea on what to do to empower women.

The table below summarisrs aspects of women agency affecting gender relations.

Table 17: Some aspects of women's agency and their implications on educational practices

Aspects of women's agency	Implications on gender relations in educational practices
1. Public speaking capability	Unable to voice their concerns publicly.
2. Perception of males as superior to them	Tendency to leave external roles (including SMC) for men.
3. Women favoring boys in providing opportunities	Girls do not get priority in education even when women make household decisions.
4. Limited sense of gender based political organization among women	Women fight with other rather than collectively fight against men.

Policy Instruments to Promote Women's Participation and their Effectiveness

Policy/programme instruments

There are at least seven policy instruments observed (but not the exhaustive list) to encourage women/girls participation in the schools (Table 15). As provisioned in Rule 91 of the Education Rules, 2002 that there should be female teachers at least in 1/3 ratio, 2/7 for lower secondary and at least three female teachers where there are more than seven teachers if the total number teachers exceeds from seven. Of these provisions, the rules are effectively followed for the primary level but not beyond primary. It is observed that the impacts of such policy provision found to be positive in increasing the participation of women parent and girl child wherever it is implemented.

Table 18: Status of existing policy instrument to encourage women's participation

Policy Instruments	Enforcement	Gender Impact
1. Female school teacher (Education Regulation 2002)	Well-enforced in primary level but not in lower secondary and Secondary level	Sensitivity to female child Sensitivity/care to children
2. Female representative in SMC	Enforced	Role not effective.

(Education Act 2002)		
3. Parent-Teacher Association (community school regulation)	Enforced: 3-4 female representatives	The committee is not active.
4. Representation of parent – head of the household head		Female household heads not recognized as parent.
5. Scholarship to students of disadvantaged groups	Well-enforced	Good impact on girls education
6. Female toilets (funded by local VDC, CFUG and parents)		Good impact
7. Food incentives from World Food Program (WFP)	Enforced in some areas	Contributed to increased participation of girls. Quality not ensured.

Likewise the policy instrument of the inclusion of at least one female parent in the school management committee has been well enforced but limited impacts are observed in the effective participation of women in decision making bodies. When the policy comes in practice it is limited in the fulfillment of physical representation rather than exercising their own agency in bringing the issues of women and girl. It can also be interpreted that compulsory representation of women in the SMC has eased male elites to pass their own agendas as the women are the passive listeners of the decisions and less argumentative in the decision making processes.

In addition to the school management committee another committee called Parent Teacher Association (PTA) also existed in each of the community school studied. Although PTA is conceptualized as parliament and SMC as cabinet, the PTA seemed inactive in all the studied schools. Although in practice more number of women are included in the PTA, they are limited here also in physical presence if the meeting happens. In all the schools we studied we found that there is no second meeting conducted after the first meeting during formation.

State rule to recognize men as the household head of the family and entitled to give his family title as official identity of other female members has not only hindered women to participate in the public affairs but also made illegitimate to be included in a parent list. Irrespective of the recent Education Act (2002) allowed women to be part of the decision making body of the school, it has not made compatible in other legal aspects by which women possess subordinate position in the society i.e. right to property, right to education, right to give family entitlement to the children and so on. In two of the studied schools from Dadeldhura Districts, where male out migration is prominent, women lack access in participating in school related affairs as a parent simply because the schools always invite male eventhough they are out from home for several years and school administration know the situation. Even in such cases women who are in the village, look after their children and bear all the family burdens in the absence of their men are not invited in the school assemblies as parent.

No doubt the provision of scholarship to the girl child has increased the number of girl enrolment in the respective schools.

Of the nine Schools studied only in Samaiji Primary School from Dadeldhura, mother parents of the school going girl child are receiving cooking oil from World Food Program (WFP). The condition for getting oil is that the girl child has to have 80 percent attendance in each of the school attendance month. Every month, mother parent has to be present in the school to receive cooking oil. For this reason the school has already registered the name of mother parents as the legitimate parent of the respective children to receive cooking oil irrespective of the mainstream practice of registering the name of father as legitimate parent. In normal cases, women in the village are often known from their respective male family members as daughter in law of Mr x, wife of Mr x and mother of their respective children.

We asked how the respondents know about educational policy. Majority of both male and female said that there is no real means that help them to get access to policy messages. Slightly

below half of the male and female respondents said that mass media is the source of policy awareness.

Table 19: Medium to know about the women related policies by the respondents

SN	Medium	Gender					
		Male	Percent	Female	Percent	Total	Total Percent
1	Media	55	16.08	43	12.57	98	28.65
2	Meeting/workshop/Trainings	1	0.29	4	1.17	5	1.46
3	Informal Talk	2	0.58	3	0.88	5	1.46
4	Above all	5	1.46	1	0.29	6	1.75
5	None	111	32.46	117	34.21	228	66.67
6	Total	174	50.88	168	49.12	342	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2007

When the respondents were asked about the source of information about community school, it is found that almost 13% of the female respondents said their source of information is media (radio) against 16% male respondents who used media. (Table 11). Large portion of the respondents (34%0 female and 32% male) said that they do not have any medium to know the school related matters.

Summary, Conclusion and Policy Implications

Summary and conclusion

This study has analysed the status of women participation in decentralisation of school education in Nepal where local communities are being given the responsibilities for managing schools as part of nationwide educational decentralization program. By taking nine case studies of community-managed school in six districts covering different geographic and socio-cultural zones of Nepal, the study specifically sought to a) ascertain the current level of women participation, b) analyze the gender disaggregated outcomes of community management of schools, and c) assess how decentralization policy and programs intersect with socio-cultural relations of gender at household, community and societal levels. The purpose was to identify factors (both structural and agency related) that constrain or enable women's participation in community school management. Key findings are summarized box :2

Box 2: Key findings

- Provision in Education Act to include female is a good start to recognize the importance of female participation in school management. It tried to attempt the empowerment of women considering the gender dimension in school level governance.
- But women participation limited to physical presence, and women hardly influence the decisions.
- Low deliberative competence and less empowered women's agency (compounded by the lack of education/exposures and limited social acceptance) is a key factor in limited influence.
- Masculine domination continue to occur at the level of decision making and governance practices. Womans possels limited deliberative competence to influence decision. Masculine doxa of men always sees women as incapable agency and this is sometime accepted by women themselves as being true.
- School infrastructures and facilities are limiting especially for female participants (such as classrooms, teacher salaries, toilets etc)
- There is no societal or governmental disciplinary action to parents not sending children to school or otherwise engaged in gender related diccremination.
- Absence of male-targeted gender mainstreaming activities
- Free education – not implemented in practice. Fees exclude the poor.
- The number of female students increased from 30 to 60% over the past decade.

In Nepal, community management of school education has a long history. Nepal relied almost exclusively on community-owned schools for school education prior to nationalization of schools in 1972. The government's intention behind nationalization was to improve the quality

of education as well as expand access to education to the rural population. But due to the inherent limitations of the centralized management, the public expectation of the quality of education and access was not met. Government then enacted education laws in 2002 to bring back the positive elements of community management. Since then Nepal has a wealth of experience in the management of schools by communities. Gender consideration started only through policy changes made in 2002. For the first time in the history of the development of education in Nepal Education Act 2002 has provided for mandatory provision to include at least one female parent in the School Management Committee (SMC) of the community managed schools.

The nine case studies demonstrate that the level of women participation is still very limited. Despite the legal requirement that at least one woman should take part in the governing body of the school to voice the concerns of women as well as to empower their own agency, often the participation of women is limited in their physical presence.

Another important way through which local men and women participate in school management is through the position of 'parents'. But women are not usually listed as parents, and are hardly invited in the school management activities. So they are not actually recognized as parents in the formal discourses of school management. Even when women have assumed the role as the heads of households after several years of male out migration, the school management committees were found to be still inviting the male members of the household for school related matters. All this indicates that the underlying masculine hegemony is highly entrenched at the community level, which restricts women's access in public domain, including the school related matters.

Nevertheless, level of women participation varies, and it is not always dismally low. Greater participation of women both in terms of quantity and quality has been observed in areas where women's agency is relatively independent at the household level (e.g in the context of non-Aryan society). Policy and programs (such as WFP) which clearly targeted gender related goals, have had some positive impact. In another context, when women had greater access to economic assets through income generation and savings and credit activities, husbands and the entire family began to appreciate women's participation in the public domain. When female change agents (eg women teachers) were involved, girl child found it easier to share their problems and were proactive in seeking ideas and solutions from the change agents.

But at times, the increased participation of women involves greater costs or burdens on women at household or other arenas of social life. This means that addressing gender in one domain may lead to increased gender inequality in another domain of social life. There is still a lack of comprehensive gender policies in place to tackle gender discrimination in holistic way.

The low representation of women is related to both limited gender sensitivity of education policies as well as the highly entrenched cultural relations of gender. Policy seems to be ignorant of the complexity of gender dynamics, and takes a mechanistic approach – such as specifying percentage of required representation, and overlooking the importance of addressing cultural dimensions of change.

The households and community institutions by and large are andocentric in Nepal. There is very limited family/husband support to women seeking to expand their agency in the public domain. Taboos such as Chhaupadi practice continue to suppress the agency of women at the level of doxa. Feudal relations of production such as Kamlari are also a barrier to the education of girl child. Educational institutions are important vehicle that reproduce gender imbalance. Male, bahun, Sanskrit teachers are the gatekeepers of discriminatory gender traditions. The rhetoric of gender balance propagated by development agencies only pays lip service. Women representatives are nominated by males to further legitimise masculine hegemony.

The agency of women is also inscribed within the masculine doxa. Even when women decide to pro-actively participate in public arenas, their deliberative competence is not adequately strong to voice their concerns. Nepali language competency is weak among the janajati and Newar women. Likewise, gender intersects with caste. Dalit women suffers from the added interactional effect of gender and caste. Even when women speak out in the meetings, their voices are often ignored, largely because women are not considered capable to contribute new ideas.

There is a fear that once the schools are handed over to the community, government may withdraw its support and the whole responsibility may have to bear by the community itself like in private school. Student of Maoist party is also consistently raising voice that schools management is to be done by the government themselves not by the community. Teachers seemed even more afraid that if the government does not pay the salary of the teachers but paid by the community, their future profession will be jeopardized.

Policy implications

- Enhance capacity of local level implementing institutions. Also decentralize service delivery system beyond district level
- Create policy incentives to address the structural constraints of women participation
- Provide opportunities to women to get organized to challenge the masculine doxa. For instance formation of women only group, specific campaign/movements etc.
- Provide exposure and opportunity to women to participate in training
- Demolition of discriminatory policies and practices
- Encourage facilitators/activists social mobilisers to address gender justice as women rights
- Provide economic incentives (to cover the opportunity cost of time) to women when they engage in public activities
- Include gender justice and discrimination in school level curriculum
- Increase women quota in SMC to at least 33% from the current level of 10%
- Increase the female teachers percentage to at least 50
- Just handing over school to community is not enough. Create mechanisms to provide post-hand over institutional development support.

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3.3 Gender Justice or Tokenistic Participation? Enlisting of Women in Farmers Managed Irrigation Systems (FMIS) of Nepal

Ram B. Chhetri

Introduction

This paper examines women's participation in the management of water resources (for irrigation in particular) within the context of state decentralization reforms in Nepal during the past few decades. The study has made an attempt to understand women's role as social actors within the overall structure of social relations of gender which we believe shape women's agency in general and in the governance of public resources and services in particular. The primary goal of our research was to examine the depth and scope of participation through which women exercise their agency in various policy and socio-cultural contexts of decentralization. An attempt has also been made to identify processes and strategies that would bring positive impact of decentralization for women in the country—within the irrigation sector in particular and in other spheres of public life in general.

We believe that participation does not belong to a group of unproblematic concepts—and it can mean different things in actual practice to different agents (see Chhetri, 1999). For some, it means mere physical presence, while for others it could be limited to showing presence in papers. The second category seems to be a widespread practice in Nepal at present since women in many places are reported to be putting their signatures (thumb marks) on the minute books which contain details of agenda and decisions made by men in their communities.

This study investigated the nature of gender relations in social/public spheres that are meant to be common grounds for the generic 'people'. More specifically, we have attempted to answer a naïve question: Are women also treated as persons in actual practice? If the answer to this question were 'yes', we should expect both men and women to be occupying the public space on an equal footing—in spaces of all kinds around us including the irrigation committees and the decision making domain therein. The empirical reality, however, does not always conform to 'ought to be' point of view. We contend that social relational contexts (that is where social relations including gender relations become enacted) are the strategic sites for empirical observations of how gender and decentralization (cf. Mukhopadhyay, 2007) is perceived, understood and put into practice by various actors/agents.

More specifically, this research has looked into a question like: how far decentralization¹ as a policy and its implementation over the years has resulted in improving women's rights—in relation to their access to critical resources, decision making forums and processes, public amenities and facilities, etc.? Such a question becomes pertinent when we consider the fact that women in general are not the *de jure* owners of farms in Nepal where more than 80% of the total population is reported to be engaged in farming as their primary economic activity.

We have to agree that the voice and agency of one of the key players—i.e., the women—in the development process of the society/country is being given official recognition today through policy instruments. But how do the progressive sounding provisions in the policies become translated into actual practice is little understood in a systematic way. There is anecdotal and fragmented information to suggest that women's voice and agency have improved in contemporary Nepal at least in some development sectors (e.g., Community Forestry). Women's presence in a number of groups formed by various agencies, projects and non-governmental organizations in the villages is enough to make any one agree that women's participation in public space has indeed increased in recent years. However, a careful examination of the empirical realities suggests that such participation is merely a physical inclusion. We argue that better information is needed before making any claims on such issues. Given this, we become critically engaged in examining the available information and the claims based on such information by means of fresh empirical data—both qualitative and quantitative—collected from various communities across the country.

We contend that familial and societal (domestic and local community) domain remain the primary sites for shaping as well as the enactment of most of social relations including those of

gender relations (be it in Nepal or elsewhere) or the issue of gender justice. Given this, we have attempted to scrutinize the process of decentralization and the issue of the promotion of women's rights in public space by placing the search within a progressively contextualized context (i.e., from the household level to the local socio-cultural context and beyond). We believe that the more recent process of decentralization (in the irrigation sector in particular and the various public sectors in the country in general) has created a public site for gender relations also by opening up space for women through policy instruments. We can speculate that women, at least in principle, now can move from the private domain (of their household) and village societal contexts into the larger public domain or can even exercise their agency simultaneously at all levels. This must provide an effective mechanism towards the redefinition of the nature and content of social relations as well as gender relations within the family, village and the society at large.

Background on Decentralization, Irrigation and Women

Decentralization legislation and policies have been in place in Nepal since the early 1980s stipulating the need for people's participation in development and public activities. In some sectors, more specific provisions for participation of men and women in local level development groups and activities were also made by means of appropriate policy instruments. For instance, in forestry sector, the provision for inclusion of 33% women in users' group committees was already made by the early 1980s. Participation of people in public sphere including development work remains a common ideal at present for the line agencies and projects of all kinds in Nepal. Decentralization has allowed the agencies to go down to the community level—forming sector specific groups with a view to handing over the management responsibilities (of forests, schools, irrigation systems, etc.) to the villagers. Decentralization in its totality would imply the devolution or transfer of authority for planning, decision making, etc. However, the formation of groups at the village level whether it be for protecting and managing forests or for taking responsibilities of management of local schools, irrigation schemes, health posts, etc., appears to focus primarily on handing over the role of management of the resources in question to the local people. While making room for wider participation, such a *modus operandi* is known to bring effectiveness and efficiency in the works and reduce the burden on the state agencies (for financial and other types of resources).

Decentralization and the institution of quotas for women by means of policy instruments have made it possible for women to become enlisted and therefore become visible (even if it may be a mere physical presence) in the public sphere. This did not because women demanded the space; it was rather an arrangement made from 'above', i.e., top down by the state agencies perhaps as a result of the pressure from the donors and other external agencies. Our interactions with women in the study sites allow us to report that for the women in the villages (or at least those speaking to us in the context of irrigation management) a conscious demand for parity of treatment with men is not an issue yet. This is true whether we are talking about mere numbers of men and women in committees, groups, etc., or about the quality and extent of access to resources, opportunities, power and authority in the public domain.

Legal Instruments on Water Resources Management

Recent studies on irrigation systems undertaken in different parts of the country have made it amply clear that traditional irrigation systems—built, organized and managed by farmers themselves for generations—were widely distributed in the country. This information also points to the fact that irrigation systems were by default decentralized way before the state and development agencies began to talk about decentralization in Nepal (see Chhetri, 2008; Lam, 1998; Uprety, 2008). It could therefore be argued that the policies and legislation crafted by the state within the past 3-4 decades have only 'formalized' what was already happening in the villages by acknowledging the importance of people's participation in institutionalizing an effective irrigation water management regime in the country.

It is commonly argued in Nepal that up until the 1960s and 1970s the allocation of state resources for development including most of the aid from the donors benefited the elites while the implementation of development projects followed ‘top down’ modality. The centralized modus operandi was considered faulty by the 1980s when the international community’s chorus on the need for people’s participation was being welcomed widely. The implementation of decentralization in development has not been free of problems in Nepal (see Bienen et al. 1990).

In the water resources management sector, the Water Resource Act 1992 is considered as the most encompassing legislation. The act has recognised the need for local community participation in water resources management and utilization and accordingly has made provisions for the formation of water users associations (WUA) at the community level. It also sets up a priority order for the management of water resources—placing water for drinking at the top followed by use of water for irrigation as a second priority.

The irrigation sector appears to have followed the lead of other natural resources management sectors in opening up the space for local peoples’ participation. Until about the 1990s, irrigation and water resources management as viewed from the state’s side had remained the domain of technical experts. Local people were involved mostly as construction labourers to complete the projects designed and managed by engineers and other technical experts. But by the end of the 1980s, the Nepali technocrats in this sector too seemed to have realised that local farmers too had the capacity, willingness and knowledge required to manage irrigation systems. This is clearly reflected in the Irrigation Policy of 1992 which for the first time made a provision for the inclusion of 20% female members in the water users committees. This policy has been revised periodically in order to respond to the issues, questions and demands that have surfaced while the government agency adopted the idea and practice of decentralization.

As per the Irrigation Regulation 2000 at least 33% women and 2 members representing Dalits and marginalized Janajati groups in the area must be included in the executive committee (see Adhikari, 2007). Similarly, the third revision of the Irrigation Policy (2004) now makes a provision for including 33% women members in the WUA committees. These instruments also now emphasize the critical role of farmers in the management of irrigation systems in the country and give due recognition to the traditional irrigation management systems existing in various parts of the country. The policy and legislation in the water resources sector today shows a clear concern for the need to strengthen the capacity of local farmers’ groups associated with the farmer managed irrigation systems (FMIS).

There are two ways the FMIS are handled at the field level. Any irrigation system that has a command area of 25 ha or more is generally handled by the District Irrigation Office (DIO)—and the FMIS is also registered here. But, a system with less than 25 ha command area is generally looked after by District Agriculture Development Office (DADO)—and the group in this case is registered as either vegetable production group or as a given cereal crop production group and not as FMIS. At present there are many traditional/indigenous irrigation systems that have been already registered as FMIS at the District Irrigation Offices across the country—and also have been functioning very well. There are also many smaller irrigation systems managed under the support of DADO.

While all such policies, legislation and implementation strategies for community participation appear progressive and committed to make the management of water resources (including irrigation) an inclusive endeavour, the translation of such provisions into practice suggest that there are rooms for improvements. For instance, a senior engineer met by the study team in one of the districts under study revealed that 33% women members included in irrigation systems up to now are only for the sake of fulfilling the norm set by the policy and legislation. He observed that most of the women participate by putting their signature on the decisions made by men; it is rare to find women who are effectively participating in the actual management of FMIS. This is not because women are incapable but because of the exclusionary social and cultural contexts.

Data and Methods

The general assumption that guided our research was that women's rights would be mediated by the prevailing social and cultural norms of the communities (caste/ethnic groups) in question. Therefore, we felt that there was a need to go into various types of communities in order to capture the variety of ways in which women are treated when it comes to providing them a space or in recognizing their agency in the public spheres. Given this, our research does not look at women as a homogenous group. Our research strategy was guided by the fact that there are differences among women depending on where they come from, what caste/ethnic groups they belong to, and whether they come from a family of village elites or the poor and marginalised family. We believe that women's agencies would vary on the basis of these and other socio-cultural backgrounds and we hope to unravel the empirical reality in regard to women's place in the irrigation sector. Our field research and interactions with men and women in the villages have made it clear that there are indeed different categories (as noted above) of female members involved in the FMIS and thus their level of participation also vary accordingly.

The study sites were selected in order to capture as much of the heterogeneity as was possible. A total of ten irrigation systems operating in the mountainous regions, the hills and the tarai were included in the study. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from the field. Relevant information was also collated from secondary sources. The field work for the present study began in January 2007 and was completed in March 2008. The methods and techniques for data collection included field observation, interviews (focus group and key informants), sample survey and review of records available with the irrigation group or committee under study. Table 1 shows the details about the number of focus group discussions and the individual surveys carried out in each of the ten case study sites.

Table 1: Study Sites and Number of Interactions for Data Collection

Name of Irrigation System (VDC/District)	Focus Group Discussions				Sample Survey		
	Male	Female	Mixed	Total	Male	Female	Total
Bhuwa Chisang, (Letang/Morang)	0	2	5	7	21	20	41
Bakraha Bhingamari, (Urlabari/Morang)	0	1	1	2	27	23	50
Tukucha Water Users (Tukucha/Kabhre Palanchok)	3	1	4	8	27	23	50
Tehrabise Raj Kulo (Lamatar/Lalitpur)	1	0	2	3	23	27	50
Chhairo Sano Sinchai (Marpha/Mustang)	1	1	0	2	4	2	6
Ghousi Sahakari (Thini/Mustang)	2	1	0	3	24	25	49
Kalapani Praganna (Sishniya/Dang)	0	3	4	7	27	24	51
Dangali Chhap (Gadhwa/Dang)	0	1	4	5	28	22	50
Sakayal Irrigation/WU Group (Mastamandu/Dadeldhura)	1	5	1	7	26	24	50
Pantura Irrigation (Jogbudha/Dadeldhura)	3	1	2	6	27	24	51
Total	11	16	23	50	234	214	448

Source: Field Survey 2007

Brahmins and Chhetris were included in the sample of all districts except Mustang while Dalits were met in all of the districts under study. This is perhaps only reminder of the fact that the population of these caste groups is distributed in most of the districts and VDCs in the country (see Sharma, 2008). Of the other groups which have been included in the sample Raute were found in Dadeldhura, Tharus in Dang, Jhangad, Satar and Rai-Limbu in Morang, Newars in Kabhre Palanchok and Lalitpur, Tamang in Morang and Kabhre Palanchok, Magars in Morang, Mustang and Dang, Thakali and Gurung in Mustang.

The irrigation sector seems to be quite complex at present in terms of the modalities adopted for the management of irrigation systems in the country. To start with, the state now recognises two broad categories of systems, viz., Agency Managed Irrigation Systems (AMIS) and Farmer Managed Irrigation Systems (FMIS). There are several modalities of the former ranging from a predominantly government management to joint management between government agency and the local farmers. FMIS are the focus of the present study since it is here that local farmers have been given the management responsibilities with regard to the local irrigation systems.

On the basis of field research we have found that within FMIS, there are traditional and indigenous irrigation management systems, privately owned irrigation systems and other variations as well. The government agencies providing financial and technical support as well as giving a formal status to the local irrigation system also seems to be more than one—and not necessarily the District Irrigation Office in all cases. For instance, in Lalitpur-Kabhre cluster, we found out that the users of a very old local irrigation system had not only received technical and financial support from an Agriculture Development agency but were also formally registered as a group with this organisation—as wheat and vegetable production group.

Profile of the Study Sites and People

The study was carried out in six districts, viz., Morang, Kabhere Palanchok, Lalitpur, Mustang, Dang and Dadeldhura representing the Tarai, Hills and the Mountainous regions. The study sites were diverse in terms of the social and cultural make-up. The selection of the study sites were purposively made in order to include the caste/ethnic groups that are known to inhabit the given districts. However, most of the study sites had populations belonging to more than one caste/ethnic group.

Table 2 shows the caste/ethnic groups represented in the study sites. While Brahmin and Chhetri were met in all the districts except Mustang, Dalits were found in all study sites. Some of the groups met in the study were perhaps migrants in the study sites, e.g., Magar, Tamang, Rai and Limbu in Morang.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Caste/Ethnic Groups and Sex

Caste Ethnic Group	Male (n=234)	Female (n=214)	Total (n=448)
Brahmin	38 (16.2)	37 (17.3)	75 (16.7)
Chhetri	65 (27.8)	49 (22.9)	114 (25.4)
Dalit	27 (11.5)	48 (22.4)	75 (16.7)
Gurung	5 (2.1)	14 (6.5)	19 (4.2)
Magar	6 (2.6)	14 (6.5)	20 (4.5)
Newar	26 (11.1)	14 (6.5)	40 (8.9)
Thakali	22 (9.4)	9 (4.2)	31 (6.9)
Tharu	32 (13.7)	22 (10.3)	54 (12.1)
Others*	13 (5.5)	7 (3.3)	20 (4.5)
Total	234 (52.2)	214 (47.8)	448 (100.0)

Source: Field survey.

*Others include Jhangad, Kumal, Limbu, Rai, Raute, Satar and Tamang.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Educational Attainment and Sex

Level of Education	Male (n=234)	Female (n=214)	Total (n=448)
Illiterate	40 (17.1)	74 (34.6)	114 (25.4)
Literate	43 (18.4)	69 (32.2)	112 (25.0)
Primary (up to 5 th grade)	38 (16.2)	22 (10.3)	60 (13.4)
Secondary (up to 10 th grade)	52 (22.2)	31 (14.5)	83 (18.5)
School Leaving Certificate	42 (17.9)	10 (4.7)	52 (11.6)
Intermediate (+2)	13 (5.5)	7 (3.3)	20 (4.4)
Bachelors	6 (2.5)	1 (0.4)	7 (1.5)

Source: Field survey 2007. Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage.

The sample seems to reflect the overall population in terms of its educational attainment. Among the women respondents only 8.4% had completed School Leaving Certificate or beyond while for men, the corresponding figure is 25.9%. More than two thirds of the women respondents (i.e., 66.8%) reported to be either illiterate or barely literate (see Table 3). In the total sample, only about one quarter of the respondents were found to be illiterate.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by their Primary Occupation and Sex

Primary Occupation	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture	163	141	304 (67.8)
Business	19	6	25 (5.6)
House work	4	51	55 (12.3)
Salaried Job	28	3	31 (6.9)
Unskilled Labour	9	4	13 (2.9)
Skilled Labour	4	1	5 (1.1)
Study	2	6	8 (1.8)
Others	5	2	7 (1.5)

Source: Field survey 2007. Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage. Others include blacksmiths, tailors, carpenters, and those involved in trekking.

The sample is also diverse in terms of the reported primary occupation for the respondents although 67.8% were primarily farmers (see Table 4). Since the remaining 32.2% respondents were also general members of the irrigation schemes under study, it can be safely noted that those individuals must regard agriculture as their secondary occupation.

Research Findings

Participation: Depth and Breadth

This research in general looked at women as a heterogeneous group with a tacit assumption that there can be differences among women depending on where they come from, what caste/ethnic groups they belong to, and whether they come from a family of village elites or the poor and marginalised family. Their agencies tend to vary on the basis of these and other socio-cultural backgrounds. We are in a position to state that there are different categories (as noted above) of female members involved in the FMIS and thus their level of participation also varies accordingly.

For instance, this study found that women were not included in the executive committee in Bakraha Bhingamari (Uralabari, Morang) while their presence was nominal in other irrigation groups under study. Women in Uralabari reported that they were not attending meetings, assemblies, etc., just because they did not own the farms (the land titles were held by men only). In general, women did not appear to have had access to the decision making forums because of the male dominated, conservative and tradition oriented society in the area. But when it came to providing physical labour in the repair and maintenance work, women were easily accepted for the work.

Table 5a: Distribution of Respondents by Membership Status and Sex

Position	Male	Female	Total
Chairperson	6	-	6 (1.4)
Vice-Chairperson	4	-	4 (0.9)
Secretary	5	1	6 (1.4)
Treasurer	5	1	6 (1.4)
Member	22	17	39 (8.7)
General Member	192	195	387 (86.4)
Total	234	214	448

Source: Field survey 2007. Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages.

Of the total of 448 individuals covered in the sample survey in the irrigation sector, only 42 male (17.9%) and 19 female (8.9%) reported being members of the local irrigation/water users committee. Of the 42 men in committees, 6 were chairpersons, 4 vice-chairpersons, 5 secretaries, 5 treasurers and the remaining 22 were executive committee members. Among the women only 2 were office bearers (1 secretary and 1 treasurer) while the rest were simply in the committee as members (see Table 5). The remaining men and women covered in the survey were general members in their respective irrigation groups.

A review of the records and documentation available with the irrigation groups under study made it evident that at least one or in some cases 2 or more women were included in the respective executive committees. Survey data summarised in Table 5 reveal that women are not normally entrusted to the key positions like the chairperson or vice-chairperson. It must be noted here that a women chairperson (in a predominantly women managed committee) of Tehrabise Raj Kulo in Lalitpur was not available for sample survey even though she was present in a focus group discussion.

We did make an inquiry about why or how were the women included in the local irrigation committees. The response was more or less similar in all research sites. For instance, the chairman of the irrigation group of Tukucha openly acknowledged that without policy which stipulated that women be included in the committees his group would not have incorporated women members in the executive committees. According to him, women generally don't come forward and express interest in becoming committee members. He stated "men have to persuade the women to sit in the committee by assuring them that all they will have to do is to put their signatures at the end of the meetings". On being asked what types of women are selected to become committee members, the chairman's immediate response was rather blunt or straight forward: 'those who are known to listen to the men'.

The survey data also revealed that only 32 (76.2%) of the 42 men in the committees reported that they took active participation in the decision-making process. However for women only 9 (47.4%) of the 19 in the committee reported that they played active role in the decision making process. Active participation in this context was defined as taking part in the discussions and debates on the agenda tabled in the meetings or other gatherings.

When respondents were asked as to who would have a greater say in decision making (i.e., male, female or both), 49 (20.9%) men responded that both men and women had equal roles. In contrast, only 21 (9.8) women thought that both were involved in decision making. Similarly 107 male and 47 women respondents (accounting for 34.4% of 448 respondents of both sexes) concurred that 'men only' took all the decisions. No one reported in any of the research sites that 'women only' were making decisions in the meetings (see Table 6).

Table 6: Decision Makers Recognized by Respondents of both Sex in the Study Districts

Study Districts	Sex of Respondents	Reported Decision Makers			
		Men Only	Both Men & Women	Don't Know	Total
Morang	Male	30	4	14	48
	Female	14	5	24	43
Kabhre/Lalitpur	Male	24	18	8	50
	Female	22	5	23	50
Mustang	Male	8	11	9	28
	Female	0	5	22	27
Dang	Male	28	3	24	55
	Female	1	0	45	46
Dadeldhura	Male	17	13	23	53
	Female	10	6	32	48
Total (% of 448)		154 (34.4)	70 (15.6)	224 (50.0)	448

Source: Field survey 2007.

From what was stated repeatedly by women and men in the FGDs coupled with the survey data it can be inferred that a significant proportion of men and women were not ready to emphatically point out that women were not the real decision makers in their communities. For instance, most of those who stated 'don't know' (see Table 6) in the survey may have been shying away from stating the truth which came out repeatedly in the FGDs when both men and women revealed "women come to the meetings only to put their signatures or thumb marks when decisions are made; they tend to remain quiet even when they are present in the meeting sites".

The whole decision making process in the in the management of any irrigation system seems to be dominated by the committee which in turn is controlled by elite men. It is true that some Dalits and women too are inducted into the committee in many places. But their say in decision making is minimal. The prevailing social structure and gender relations are such that these very women appear to be very submissive and show reluctance to challenge the authority of the local elite who mostly constitute of men.

Men and women in the sample survey who were either committee members (office bearers) or were merely the general members of the irrigation groups were asked whether their voices raised in the meetings and/or assemblies were paid any attention by others present in the gatherings. Only 10.3% of the women were sure that people did listen to them. The remaining of the women respondents felt that people either did not listen (5.6%) to what they had to say or were not sure whether any one paid attention to their voices and concern or not (84.1%). In the case of male respondents at least 41.0% seemed sure that people did listen to their views and opinions in the gatherings and meetings (see Table 7 for details).

Table 7: Respondent's Perceptions about Whether Others Listened to Them

Do others listen to you?	Male	Female	Total
Yes	96 (41.0)	22 (10.3)	118 (26.3)
No	7 (3.0)	12 (5.6)	19 (4.2)
Don't know	131 (56.0)	180 (84.1)	311 (69.5)
Total	234 (100.0)	241 (100.0)	448 (100.0)

Source: Field survey, 2007.

The proportion of women who felt that others did not really listen to what they had to say was almost double to that of men (i.e., 5.6% women and 3.0% men). Women met in the focus group discussions in most of the research sites concurred that fellow villagers (especially men) ignored whenever they spoke up or voiced their views and opinions on issues of women's interest or the topics under discussion.

The respondents were also asked whether they were in other types of committees besides irrigation. A significant proportion of both men and women reported that they were involved in more than one type of committees simultaneously. Except in Dadeldhura district, both men and women in other sites reported that they were members in other types of committees in their respective villages.

Table 8a: Presence of Respondents in Other Types of Committees

Presence in Other Committees	Male	Female	Total
Yes	80 (34.2)	91 (42.5)	171 (38.2)
No	154 (65.8)	123 (57.5)	277 (61.8)

Source: Field survey 2007. Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages.

Table 8b: Distribution of Population in the Sample Household by Membership Status and Sex(Age 15 and Older)

District	Sex	Status of Membership		Row Total
		Yes	No	
Morang	Male	29 (13.7)	183 (86.3)	212 (100.0)
	Female	25 (13.8)	156 (86.2)	181 (100.0)
Kabhre/Lalitpur	Male	51 (24.9)	154 (77.1)	205 (100.0)
	Female	75 (36.8)	129 (63.2)	204 (100.0)
Mustang	Male	14 (16.7)	70 (83.3)	84 (100.0)
	Female	19 (20.0)	76 (80.0)	95 (100.0)
Dang	Male	45 (18.6)	197 (81.4)	242 (100.0)
	Female	62 (27.1)	167 (72.9)	229 (100.0)
Dadeldhura	Male	21 (9.8)	194 (90.2)	215 (100.0)
	Female	50 (23.4)	164 (76.6)	214 (100.0)
Column Total		391 (20.8)	1490 (79.2)	1881 (100.0)

Source: Field survey 2007. Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages.

The proportion of women who reported being members in other types of committees was higher than the corresponding percentage for men. This could be an artifact of the present day implementation modality adopted by most of the development agencies which tend to make it mandatory that a specified percentage of the committee members be women. The data presented in Table 8 show that 42.5% of the women respondents were members in other types of committees (including Forest User Group, Savings and Credit, etc.). This finding implies that the spaces for participation of people and women in particular appear to be expanding or it is large enough in contemporary village communities. Besides, the data in Table 8a also suggest that many individuals (men or women) tend to be occupying executive committee positions in more than one group—perhaps thereby ‘excluding’ others from such membership.

That more and more female than male are involved in various types of committees also becomes clear from the fact that in the total population (15 years and older) in the 448 sample households, the proportion of women reported to be in committees in each of the study districts/clusters is higher than the corresponding proportion for men (see Table 8b). It can be speculated on the basis of this information that many development agencies must be operating in these districts. Perhaps we can also assume that the larger the proportion of men and women reporting to be members in various types of groups and/or their committees in the districts, the larger must be the number of development agencies working in them.

Women in particular are enlisted in committees now-a-days by the locals in response to the policy provisions made by all kind of development agencies in the country. But often one particular woman may appear as a member in several committees in some villages. For instance, in places like Jogbudha where not many women are able to challenge the patriarchal norms and values yet, only a handful of women (and especially from local elite family backgrounds) are able to come out to the public sphere. One Chhetri woman here was found to be representing local women in committees on irrigation, community school, community forestry and so on by herself. Incidentally she was the one who was elected as the ward member in the most recent local elections held about 10 years ago.

Constraints and Opportunities in Exercising Agency

Women’s participation in this sector looks very good in paper while in practice their effective participation can not be observed as yet. Women confessed that they may not always attend meetings but still may sign the minutes upon request from the male members of the irrigation or WUA committees. The male members in the FMIS also confided that a presence of women members in the committees make it attractive in the eyes of the external agencies. They argue that this allows them to fetch financial and other material support needed by their village or the irrigation system. Such instrumentalist attitudes of the village men and the elite in particular may have been inhibiting the emergence of women’s agency.

While it is a positive thing that women are slowly being included (rather than entering proactively) in the public spaces that were opened up for them by policies and legislations. But there seems to be a flip side to this: their workload in general have tended to increase with the new responsibilities of having to participate in group meetings, etc. For instance, a woman member of Tukucha irrigation committee revealed ‘women are always in a hurry to return home from the meetings because they have to do all the household chores themselves’. She further noted that women were just attending the meetings/gathering and listening to what was being discussed since “women are not expected to play active role in decision making by their fellow members or villagers”.

It must also be asked as to what makes the women qualified to become a committee member in the irrigation system. Apparently the primary criteria seems to be rather (obvious) exclusionary. One has to own or be share-cropping the Khet land (irrigable land) as a minimum qualification.

This means those without any land or those with Bari land (non-irrigated farm) only as well as those who are not engaged in agriculture are automatically excluded—and can not benefit directly from the irrigation scheme. A Dalit women (48) in Dadeldhura revealed that she was included in the committee a few years ago when her household was cultivating a portion of a local landlord's Khet on a share-cropping arrangement. But as soon as the tenancy arrangement terminated, she was removed from the committee. In the course of discussion about gender justice and rights a Dalit man concluded “since we belong to the lower caste and because we do not own much property we also do not have many rights”.

What are the other kinds of women inducted in the irrigation committees in practice? Most of the women committee members we met in the study sites were the head of the household by default (either their husbands were away from home for extended periods or were widows); or were considered as capable (by local men) and were in a position to spare time for public/social responsibilities; or their family members (husband, father in law, etc.) were willing to permit them to be in the committees. Three of the women committee members in Mastamandu had some interesting points to make about the conditions of their own inclusion in the local irrigation committee. They gave two reasons, viz., a) the department of irrigation had suggested that women be included; and b) that external agencies including DOI would not give any financial support if the committee was not gender inclusive. These women also revealed that they were not in the committee by their own choice; they were enlisted by men. As committee members they reported that they just listen to what the men have to say in the meetings and were not sure about the financial status of their irrigation committee.

A 72 year old woman of Lalitpur argued that women appear to be lagging far behind men in many societies. When she was prompted to clarify and elaborate on her point, she retorted: “We can see or hear TV and radio programs which frequently stress the need for granting equal rights for men and women. Why is such a statement repeated very often? You should know that this is because men and women are not treated equally yet in many communities”.

In the Himalayan district of Mustang, most of the villages have their a traditional socio-political body headed by a Mukhiya (head man) that tends to be in charge of maintaining order as well as overseeing development activities in the village. Since it is the married men who occupy the post of Mukhiya and the executive membership in the committee, one need not tell what role women must have in the village level decision making forums. When it comes to regular contribution of free labour for public works from each of the households in the village, both men and women can participate. But otherwise, women seem to be denied a space in public domain—in the execution of village rules or in the task of undertaking public development works.

The Mukhiya's job in Mustang is also considered very challenging. He has to devote a lot of his time and resources in attending to social/public duties, in resolving intra-village conflicts and in dealing with problems of all kinds in relation to community works. Given this, the local women do not consider themselves fit for the position since it requires spending a considerable amount of time in community work and away from home. Since both men and women tend to agree here that women should not stay away from home for too long, the norm by default keeps the women away from participating in public domain as a Mukhiya or his associates. One could argue here that the local peoples' ideas tend to be such that they can mostly think of giving continuity to the traditions or prevailing practices. Therefore, any change or transformation may meet with local resistance if such change is thought to disrupt the order and harmony—even though such a condition may only be a perceived one.

A young woman in Mastamandu of Dadeldhura district said: “*Bandheko goru ra na-chhune mahilako sthiti ustai ho*” which literally means that the conditions of a tethered ox and a menstruating woman are similar. The other women present in the FGD immediately supported this local saying which perhaps is an apt illustration of the limited freedom of movement and

truncated autonomy enjoyed by women in general in the local society. While such situations prevail and many are beginning to see this as a limiting factor for women's empowerment or gender justice, some elderly women in the same village said that they were determined to hold on to such afflicting practices including Chhaupadi in the name of giving continuity to the traditional customs and practices. Similarly another group of elderly women in Jogbudha insisted "we will not give up the Chhaupadi practice no matter who comes and instructs us to do so". An interesting paradox here is that these women also talk about the physical and psychological trauma associated with the Chhaupadi practice.

Women in this region are used to the practice of sleeping in a cowshed or Chhau-ghar during their monthly menstrual period (4-5 days) as well as the postnatal period until the purification rites are held (11 to 15 days). There are a number of food taboos observed during this period—depriving women/mothers of some of essential sources of nutrition (e.g., milk and milk products). The women met by the research team acknowledge that spending nights in isolation in a pen like shed which is normally located at some distance from the family house (big enough to creep in and lie down without much room for movement and with a makeshift door made out of thatch or bamboo splits) can be mentally and physically distressing. They further add that the lonely woman has to spend the nights in the Chhau-ghar in constant fear of being attacked by wild animals, snakes or 'wild men'.

The beliefs that misfortunes can befall in the family if a woman did not follow the rules of Chhaupadi is so firmly engraved in people's minds that even educated men and women do not dare to disobey them. A college teacher was embarrassed when we told him that at least as a well educated man he must not be allowing his wife to follow such afflicting rules. He explained that he must follow the rules lest his family would be ostracized by the rest of the villagers. Another school teacher in the district was not doing anything to help his wife with household chores—a very young mother who had just come out of her postnatal seclusion. This teacher of a school in Mastamandu reasoned that he was afraid of being ridiculed by fellow villagers. Similarly a politician (53) approved such behaviours of men by saying "*Sanka jato bhayanak rog kehi chhaina; Biswas jasto aushadhi pani kehi chhaina*". This local axiom literally means that there is no disease as deadly as suspicion; also there is no medicine as powerful as a belief. It is understandable why men should cling to the belief system in order to give continuity to practices that puts them in privileged positions and allows them to have an easier life. However, it remains beyond my capacity to fathom why many women who can only experience trauma in their life strongly support the Chhaupadi and similar inflicting practices and associated norms without any reservations.

We also found that in the villages very often men speak for women. Women also do not seem to be always able to voice their own opinions. Let me illustrate this with an example. Mrs. K Paudel, a member of Tehrabise Raj Kulo committee in Lalitpur district was met for an interview at her home by the research team. As soon as the interview began, her father-in-law (well regarded elite in the village) came and sat near the interviewer and started answering most of the questions on behalf of Mrs. Paudel. The interview had to be rescheduled and completed later. But during the first interview meeting it was revealed that Mr. Paudel was attending the committee meetings regularly on behalf of his daughter in law. She was only placing her signature after the agenda of the meetings and the decisions taken were written down in the register. When we insisted that Mr. Paudel should let her speak for herself he retorted: "What does she know? She does not know anything; she is ignorant about what goes on in the irrigation system. She was included in the committee just to replace me in paper so as to have a woman committee member as required by the agricultural development office (which provided the technical and financial support for the irrigation system). She only comes to sign the papers".

This anecdote from a village in Lalitpur indicates a couple of critical points. First, the women in the committees on irrigation or similar groups in the villages at times may come from elite

households. Second, they may not necessarily be in the committees because of their desire to be there. Last but not the least, such women could be filling the post and their participation can be just ‘tokenistic’ since men are still making the decisions in their name. In this way, such women may in fact be contributing to the continuation of the hegemony of male agency and thereby preventing their community from producing women’s agency in the real sense. In other words, women themselves may be indirectly helping to reproduce the patriarchy which they otherwise believe to be one of the critical hindrances on the way to achieving gender justice in the local society and beyond.

Women also seem to be struggling (at least in a symbolic sense) for an independent identity of their own. In many parts of Nepal, women are normally recognized by reference to their male relatives. That is, they are introduced as so and so’s wife, mother, daughter, daughter in law, etc. A woman in Tukucha insisted that she would be happy to be recognized by her own name and added that most women would perhaps be pleased to have an independent identity of their own just as men do.

A young woman in Letang (married into the village about 2-3 years ago and who has completed high school level education) confided: “I am very interested in becoming involved in public activities. But I can not do this easily. The ‘environment’ has to allow us to go out of the house to begin with. The social and cultural norms are such that daughter-in-laws can not go out of their homes freely. Besides, their work load in the households tends to be very high—and does not leave much spare time for other activities”.

While some women in the study area were eager to see changes, others were found to continue the reproduction of practices that hold the potential to strengthen the traditional discriminatory and dominating relations of gender—based on hierarchy of clean vs. unclean (e.g., the practices associate with Chhaupadi; women not opting to visit district offices/authorities, etc). The traditional social and cultural norms and values—defined by the patriarchal society and internalized as a given by women—continue to cast a strong shadow of authority (influencing people’s ideas about practices like Chhaupadi, movement of women into public sites, etc.) on the women and others with a less dominant agency.

Effective and meaningful participation of women in decision making remains a goal that is yet to be achieved in practice. For instance, it was found that women in a number of research sites were not aware of the financial matters related to their group’s work. Their role in decisions on fund allocation for various activities is even minimal. It is rare for village women to present their arguments and opinions on ‘issues’ in front of everyone present in the meetings/gatherings. Why would this be so? One obvious reason is that many of them have not attained functional literacy. Besides, in most cases the office bearers in the committees are men while women are ‘members’ only. We were quite surprised to find out that women in Jogbudha (a research site in Far-Western hills) were not aware that there was an ‘FMIS’ operating in their area and that they too were included in it.

Awareness about Policies

As noted already policies are gradually opening up space for men and women to participate in the governance and decision making at the local level. In this context it was felt necessary to understand if the men and women in the villages were aware of the policy provisions in the irrigation sector. It is interesting to note that the general awareness about policies tends to be significant among both men and women (see Table 9)

Table 9: Awareness about Government Policy on Women’s Inclusion by Respondent’s Sex

District/Cluster	Yes (%)			No (%)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Morang (n=91)	25 (27.5)	14 (15.4)	39 (42.9)	23 (25.3)	29 (31.8)	52 (57.1)
Kabhre/Lalitpur (n=100)	31 (31.0)	16 (16.0)	47 (47.0)	19 (19.0)	34 (34.0)	53 (53.0)

Mustang (n=55)	18 (32.7)	8 (14.5)	26 (47.3)	10 (18.2)	19 (34.5)	29 (52.7)
Dang (n=101)	24 (23.8)	4 (3.9)	28 (27.7)	31 (30.7)	42 (41.6)	73 (72.3)
Dadeldhura (n=101)	32 (31.7)	17 (16.8)	49 (48.5)	21 (20.8)	31 (30.7)	52 (51.5)
Total (448)	130 (29.0)	59 (13.2)	189 (42.2)	104 (23.2)	155 (34.6)	259 (57.8)

Source: Field survey 2007. Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages.

The proportion of women stating that they were aware about the government's policy provisions on women's inclusion in irrigation groups and committees was generally low in comparison to the men in the respective districts. As revealed by the survey data, the proportion of women reporting that they were aware about such policies was highest in Dadeldhura (16.8%) followed by Kabhre/Lalitpur (16.0%) cluster. Among those who reported that they were aware about the government policies on women's inclusion in the irrigation groups, the proportion of men is almost double that of the women respondents in most all the districts under study (see Table 9).

If we look closely at the data across the districts, Dang has the lowest percentage (3.9%) of women who had acknowledged that they knew about the inclusive policies. Of the total survey respondents, 29.0% men and 13.2% women only reported being aware of such policies while 23.2% men and 34.6% women said that they were not aware of the policies in question.

If we examine the data across the districts for those who said 'yes' or 'no' irrespective of the gender of the respondents, Dang district lags behind all the others (Yes=27.7% and No=72.3%). In Dang district most of the respondents were Tharu people and we have reasons to suspect that caste/ethnic group affiliation may have influenced people's access to information about policies. In Table 10, we present data on policy awareness by caste/ethnic affiliation and gender of the respondents.

Table 10: Knowledge about Policy by Respondent's Caste/Ethnic Affiliation and Gender

Caste/Ethnic Group	Yes		No	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Brahman (n=75)	28.0	17.3	22.7	32.0
Chhetri (n=114)	34.2	18.4	22.8	24.6
Dalit (n=75)	14.7	6.7	21.3	57.3
Gurung (19)	5.3	15.8	21.0	57.9
Magar (n=20)	10.0	25.0	20.0	45.0
Newar (n=40)	35.0	7.5	30.0	27.5
Thakali (n=31)	29.0	12.9	41.9	16.1
Tharu (n=54)	14.8	3.7	44.4	37.1
Others (n=20)	15.0	20.0	50.0	15.0
Total (n=448)	27.0	13.6	25.2	34.2

Source: Field survey 2007.

The data presented in Table 10 show that there were differences in respondent's knowledge of the government policy on women's inclusion by their caste/ethnic affiliation as well as gender within each caste. Newar, Chhetri and Brahmin men were among the people who had larger proportion with knowledge about the policies. Except for the Gurung and Dalits, the Tharu people also seem to have little knowledge about the existing policies on gender equality and inclusion (see Table 10 for details).

Women's Participation: Perceived Hindrances and Mitigation Measures

As we have made it clear already, the policy and legislative instruments have already made provisions for positive discrimination in favor of women. The discussion in the preceding section, however, suggests that women are not able to participate effectively in the public space provided by the policies. In this section we focus on identifying the perceived hindrances inhibiting women's participation as well as the measures suggested by the respondents to improve the situation.

Table 11: Perceived Hindrances for Women's Participation

Perceived Hindrances	Male (n=234)	Female (n=241)	Total (n=448)
Traditional beliefs based on patriarchy	130 (55.5)	136 (59.4)	266 (59.4)
Lack of awareness and education	131 (56.0)	108 (50.4)	239 (53.3)
Non-exposure and poor communication skills	25 (10.7)	24 (11.2)	49 (10.9)
Poverty and ignorance	27 (11.5)	20 (9.3)	47 (10.5)
No response	29 (12.4)	27 (12.6)	56 (12.5)

Source: Field survey 2007.

About 60% of the respondents suggested that traditional beliefs and practices associated with patriarchal norms and values of the caste Hindu society are the major hindrances on the way to empower women. That is, such arrangements inhibit women from free participation in public sphere in general and from engaging in the decision making forums in particular. A larger proportion of women (63.5%) support this line of argument than men (55.5%). Lack of education among women and lack of awareness about the programs and policies too stand out as the second biggest set of hindrances (53.3%). A significant proportion of men and women also pointed out that women in general were not exposed to the realities of the world outside their localities and also had poor communication skills (see Table 11 for details). These factors together are believed to account for lower participation of women in public spheres. Many respondents did not mention any hindrances at all.

Respondents were also asked to suggest measures to overcome the critical hindrances. This question has also acted as a proxy to bring out other hurdles present in the society for women to move around in public with relative ease.

Table 12: Perceived Measures to Enhance Women's Participation

Perceived Measures	Male (n=234)	Female (n=214)	Total (n=448)
Education and awareness raising	151 (64.5)	117 (54.7)	168 (59.8)
Family support	48 (20.5)	53 (24.7)	101 (22.5)
Assign responsibilities	10 (4.3)	4 (1.9)	14 (3.1)
Opportunity to become organized in groups	18 (7.7)	26 (12.1)	44 (9.8)
No Response	47 (20.0)	41 (19.1)	88 (19.6)

Respondents were asked to suggest measures they think could mitigate the evil practices or hindrances and thereby pave the way for enhanced participation of women in public activities (at their own will). The data presented in Table 12 show that both men and women gave the highest priority to education and awareness raising (59.8%). Family support was another important element suggested by a significant proportion of men (20.5%) and women (24.7%). Some respondents also suggested that assigning responsibilities to women and providing them opportunities to become organized in groups can have positive impacts on women's participation and empowerment in general. Three categories of measures suggested in Table 12 must also be seen as acknowledgements that women do not get family support, they are not entrusted with responsibilities in public work, and they do not get opportunities to become organized in groups easily.

As suggested by the data in Tables 11 and 12, it could be inferred that educating women is regarded as the most potential tool for empowering them. Many will not disagree with this suggestion. However, based on the empirical information from this research we argue that "education is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for bringing about positive change in a rural society". Such an argument seems to become stronger in situations wherein conditions for the desired changes happen to be located in such a way that the structural factors make it difficult for them to become effective. This can be an explanation for well educated men remaining committed to continue the Chhaupadi practices in their households and village.

Conclusions

Women's presence in the public sphere has increased after the policy provisions were made by the state for the need to include women in groups and committees. More and more women in the villages have now felt that they too can contribute to the public discourses and that they can also play significant role in carrying out public works. Gradually, some are realizing that the 'public space' is for both men and women. Women are enlisted in irrigation groups or committees since there are policy provisions now that require this. But this is done quite often in order to give legitimacy to the agenda and tasks defined and determined by men (local and/or outsiders together?). In this way, inclusion of women is merely a strategy adopted by men in order to secure women's (and other concerned agencies') compliance to the decisions already made or yet to be made by men (see also Cornwall, 2003).

The participation of women in public sphere opened by means of policy and legislative instruments thus far must certainly be considered progressive steps. Notwithstanding this we must point out that as suggested by the finding of this study, the policy stipulations are taking a blanket approach—of creating room for women in general. The fact that women can belong to a number of heterogeneous groups—based on caste/ethnicity, class, religion, their position in the family, age, education, etc., remains overlooked.

The instruments in question also have been designed with the purpose of 'providing space' to the women. It is the thought of 'including women' that is evident in the policy stipulations and the way those instruments have been put into practice. Women are included by the central or district line agencies as well as the villagers in the committees—but instrumentalism seems to be the primary driving force. The space for women does not necessarily come out of the ethical principle that acknowledges and admires gender justice.

The process of decentralization has certainly allocated some space for women in the public sphere in the communities. However, it appears that it is not easy for women as it is for men to go out of their homes and participate in the social works. It is not easy for the women to leave their homes; before they go out they have to finish their household chores/duties. The decentralization process and policies alone do not seem to be enough; advancement of women (gender equity) has to begin at home and from within the local community. If these institutions remain conservative and do not approve changes in the roles and responsibilities of men and women (within the households or the community) or remain indifferent to the idea of gender justice, policy and legislative instruments alone will not be able to transform the society easily. Very often customary norms and values were invoked to justify the prevailing inequality of treatment to which women and other socially disadvantaged groups were subjected in most of the research sites.

In our attempt to understand as to what types of women were participating in the newly created public space, we found that most of them were the ones who either had less workload at home or those who had leisure time and the support of the men in their respective households. Incidentally, most of such women also come from local elite families. Given this, we must concede that there is the continuity of elite capture of the space. Whether the interests of the genuinely disadvantaged and deprived women would be represented in the groups and committees that appear to be functioning smoothly remains an open question.

Women in the villages are not yet ready to advocate their rights; neither are the men (in the villages as well as those in the line agencies) thinking of women's inclusion as their rights—or as gender justice. Everyone concerned appear to be content with the policy and practice that has ensured at least the physical presence of women in the public sphere. This achievement can be considered positive in at least one sense, viz., that a beginning has been made to bring out women out of the four walls of the house and beyond the sphere of the family. That is, women now can come out of the confines of their family and household albeit in a limited way.

It was clear from what local men and women said in the study sites (more emphatically by those in Urlabari) that women were being invited to the assemblies or meetings with a purely instrumentalist inclination. To begin with, villagers are interested in showing it to the others that they do allow women to participate in the public spheres. That is, women are not included because people feel that they too can contribute to the discussion or at least with a feeling that they too should know what goes on in their group's work.

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***3.4 Decentralisation and Gender Justice in Nepal:
Local Governance Perspective***

Radhika Regmi

Introduction

Within gender studies, there was a recognition some years ago that to neglect power relations in society would mean failure to reach any understanding of (or solution to) the deprivation of women in the development process (Kabeer, 1994)

Decentralisation has been a continual theme in Nepal over the last five decades and has made a number of initiatives in the field of 'local governance'. The main impetus behind decentralisation efforts in the past has been to enlist people's participation in development. In Nepal, the governing authority at least in paper is transferred to elected political bodies at district, village and municipality. These structures however are largely shaped by the male dominated party politics, policies and practices. The idea and practice of decentralization appear to lose sight on the more subtle constraints that inhibit the agency of women. This indicates a need for understanding the dynamic links between women's agency and the inherent social, cultural and political structures through which women exercise their rights in the decentralized spheres of governance. Construction of women as homogenized identity and passive recipient of development schemes despite diversity in ethnicity, class, religion has been one of the major weaknesses in the field of decentralisation and governance. Homogenization has led to oversimplify the complex structures of power. Gender and especially women issues, should be recognised as a dimension of social stratification.

It is in this context that this study examines the gender dimension in state's decentralisation process in local governance. The paper analyses women's participation in local level political governance within the context of state decentralization in Nepal. In particular, the report has tried to analyse the depth and breadth of participation through which women exercise their agency in various socio-cultural contexts of decentralization. The study has focused the dynamics of women's participation in local government under various conditions in order to identify factors and processes that affect women's ability to exercise their political agency in decision-making process. The study has made an attempt to understand women's role as social and political actors within an overall structure of social relation of gender that shape women's agency in the governance of public resources and services. A reflection on the current policies, practices and civil movements for women rights in local governance is also made in order to identify some processes and strategies that enhance positive impact of decentralization on women in Nepal. The cases and examples provide a range of situations with reference to gender, social structures, processes and strategies of decentralization, and the level of impact.

Research methodology

The overarching questions which guided the research included mainly the following:

Does decentralisation enhance women's right in public decision making?

If yes, under what conditions and with what social movement and policy strategies?

By 'condition' we mean a range of social factors that mediate decentralization – such as gender relations of power and regimes of access to different types of resources or capitals including cultural identity.

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied. Primary and secondary - information was collected and compiled through a number of methods such as key informant interviews, survey, focus group discussion, observation, meetings and, interaction, discussion and review of secondary materials available. Analysis of key events, and records together with a number of case stories have been prepared to generate information of the prevailing socio-cultural environment as well as gender dimension in local governance. The sample sites for the study were selected purposively based on geographical location, caste/ethnic composition and feasibility. A total of 10 local governance units (nine Village Development Committees (VDCs)

and one municipality) of 6 districts are the study sites. Studies on the gender dimension of decentralisation are limited in Nepal (Maclean 2003).

The data generated by means of the sample survey allowed discovering the extent of women's participation as well as men and women perceptions on prevailing constraints and opportunities for the local governance policy, processes and practice. A sample survey of 482 individuals was undertaken by considering various criterion such as sex, caste, ethnicity, educational status and representation in local governance (Table 1). Out of 191 female respondents, 64 women were elected and

Table 1 List of study locations, Focus Group Discussions and Individual Surveys

Name of VDCs/Municipality	No. of FGDs				No of Individual Surveys		
	Female	Male	Mixed	Total	Female	Male	Total
Urlabari	0	5	4	9	16	33	49
Letang	0	0	3	3	14	27	41
Banepa Municipality	3	3	3	9	30	21	51
Lamatar	2	1	2	5	20	30	50
Kagbeni	1	1	2	4	12	35	47
Marpha	1	1	2	4	22	25	47
Gadawa	7	6	4	17	25	22	47
Sishhania	2	1	3	6	24	22	46
Mastamandu	2	4	2	8	16	36	52
Jogbudha	3	4	2	9	12	40	52
Total	21	27	27	73	191	291	482

Source: Field survey 2007

nominated representatives of local political units. Similarly, out of 291 male respondents, 141 were representatives of local bodies. Focus group discussion (FGD) was also used as a tool to collect in-depth contextual and ethnographic information. An average of 5-10 participants (both mixed and separate groups of male and female) were selected for group discussions. Participants with specific interests, expertise and direct affinity with decentralisation process were selected for this purpose. The details of focus group discussion are also presented in Table 1.

The study was conducted with semi-structured and open-ended interview techniques. Attention was given to generate data from key informants including opinion leaders. A total of 99 key informant interviews, of which 31 were women, were conducted in the study sites. Other than local communities, interview with government and non government personnel, donors and other related stakeholders were conducted during the study. One interview sometimes took from one hour to several hours, for which young energetic people would require to answer all the questions. For elderly, illiterate house wives who had to go to forests to fetch grass and fuel wood and women with small babies and children with a lot of domestic responsibility had no time to focus and concentrate on interviews. In the one hand this has given me extra insights on research related gender issues at household and intra-household level, on the other hand it has negative impact on the quality of information and sometimes women were to be excluded from the research process as key informants. Apart from quantitative data, narratives, stories and experiences of the interviewee have also been captured.

Another method of data collection was observation of places, people and their activities. Social events were also intensively observed. The information obtained from observation was cross checked with that from other sources to help illuminate the discrepancies between what people said in the interviews and what they actually do. These observations were made during the interview to capture the body language, gesture, gender biased language used and situation of the participants.

Profiles of sites

The sample sites for the study were selected purposively considering various factors such as geographical location, caste ethnic composition, rural urban context and size of the local governance units. The focus was to find out women's role and position in various geographical,

cultural and economic settings under the theme of decentralization in local governance. The general assumption that guided research team select research sites was that women exercise their agency differently in different socio-cultural norms of different communities either in private and public domain, Therefore, to the extent possible, study sites were selected purposively to capture the heterogeneity of women such as which caste, ethnic group they belong to, where they come from (a rural village or relatively urban areas), and also from a family of political affiliation, village elites or poor and marginalised family. The study was carried out in six districts namely Morang, Kavrepalanchowk, Lalitpur, Mustang, Dang and Dadeldhura of all the five development regions representing Terai, Inner Terai, hill and mountain regions having different socio-cultural diversity in terms of caste and ethnicity. Similarly, while selecting the sites women's position in leadership was also given due consideration. A total of 10 local governance units are the major study sites. Of which, 9 are VDCs and 1 is municipality. Summary of which is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Summary of General Profiles of the research sites

Name of sites	District	Ethnic groups	Economy	Specific features
Letang VDC	Morang	Mixed	Agriculture	Terai low land, migrated community from other parts of Eastern Nepal. Janajati as major caste group. No feeling of untouchability.
Urlabari VDC		Mixed	Agriculture	Terai and Peri-urban area with higher percentage of indigenous groups (Rai, Limbu and other Terai groups)
Banepa Municipality	Kavrepalanchowk	Mixed	Business followed by agriculture.	Municipality and higher percentage of Newar community. High feeling of untouchability.
Lamatar VDC	Lalitpur	Tamang, Brahmin/Chhetri, Dalit	Agriculture,	Very close to country capital, access to resources and information. Higher percentage of Brahmin/Chhetri community.
Kagbeni VDC	Mustang	Thakali, Gurung	Agriculture and tourism.	High mountain with higher percentage of indigenous groups (Thakali, Gurung). Society is governed by traditional Mukhiya system – a higher caste male dominated decision making process. Prevalence of Jhuma (middle daughter offered to monastery) Lama (middle son offered to monastery according to Buddhism)
Marpha VDC		Thakali, Gurung, Dalit.	Agriculture and hotel business.	
Gadawa VDC	Dang	Mixed (Tharu and Brahmin/Chhetri, Magar)	Agriculture	Inner Terai with Tharu as major demographic composition. Social relation is shaped by landlord and tenant system. Extended family among Tharus, the indigenous people of Nepal to fulfil the household labour.
Sisahaniya VDC		Mixed, Tharus as dominant group.	Agriculture	
Jogbudha VDC	Daduldhura – Inner Terai	Mixed (Chhetri, Brahmin, Dalits and other)	Agriculture,	Higher population of Chhetri and Thakuri. High prevalence of caste-based untouchability. High discrimination against women during menstruation and child birth (chhoupadi system). Raute's (one of the highly marginalised ethnic groups) are residing on one village of Jogbudha VDC
Mashtamandu VDC	Daduldhura – high middle hill	Mixed	Agriculture	

The caste ethnic groups that are included in the research process were Brahmin, Chhetri, Thakuri so called as higher caste groups, Newars, Gurungs, Thakali, Tamang, Limbu defined as hill indigenous groups and Tharu as Terai indigenous groups, Dhimal, Jhagad as highly

marginalised ethnic groups and Dalits who are considered as untouchables. As presented above in the table 2, most of the study sites had mixed population belonging to different caste/ethnic groups with dominance of one or two major groups. For example, Banepa municipality is having higher percentage of Newar community, Kagbeni and Marpha VDC by Thakali, Gadawa and Sishahaniya VDCs by Tharus, Lamatar VDC is by Brahmin/Chhetri, Mustamandu is by Chhetri/Thakuri's and dalits.

The sample sites also represent population in terms of its educational attainment and primary occupation. In the total sample, majority of them are literate or with primary and secondary education (Table 3). Among the women respondents, only 5 percent of them are with higher education and 21% of women respondents are illiterate. While for men, the corresponding figures are 14.48 % and 10 percent respectively.

Furthermore, majority of the respondents are farmers and rest of the respondents are also have agriculture as their secondary source livelihood generation (Table 4).

Table 3 Educational background of the respondents by gender

Educational attainment	Female	Male	Total
Illiterate	40	28	68
Literate	61	74	135
Primary	32	73	105
Secondary	48	73	121
Higher	10	43	53
Total	191	291	482

Source: Field survey 2007

Table 4 Occupational status of the respondents

Occupation	Female	Male	Total
Agriculture	106	172	244
Business	19	47	66
Carpentry	0	3	3
Household chores	40	12	52
Paid job and pensioner	7	32	39
skilled labour	8	15	23
Wage labor	6	6	10
Study	2	1	3
others	3	0	
Total	191	291	482

Source: Field survey 2007

Background information

An overview of decentralisation in Nepal

The systematic efforts for decentralized governance in Nepal began in the early 1960s with the constitution of District, Town and Village Panchayats to manage their own affairs. These units with insignificant power delegation were treated as service providing agents of national level government rather than self governing units at local level. This was followed by the enactment of the Decentralization Act in 1982 (Kalin, 2002). In this Act, there is no mention of women's rights and provisions for their empowerment, neither mention of affirmative action.

Emphasis on decentralisation grew after the inception of multiparty democracy in 1990 and Nepal government's decentralization policy finds its roots in the Constitution of 1991. As per the spirit of the new democratic constitution, democratising the state and enhancing people's participation in local governance was recognised as the main political agenda of the democratic era. However decentralization appeared to lose sight on gender issues except the constitutional provision of non-discrimination on the basis of sex and some provisions of affirmative action. The constitution, however, has no provision of autonomous local governments. Moreover, following the historic People's movement of April 2006 and commencement of peace process in the country, the Interim Constitution, 2007 has been promulgated. It has made a constitutional provision of autonomous local governments.

In accordance with the Government's decentralization policy, planning and decision-making are being devolved to the district level to improve local governance. The Local Self-Governance Act of 1999 (LSGA) and its supporting regulations (2000) provide the framework for a decentralized approach and a greater degree of autonomy for local governance units. At least in principle, there are some provisions of affirmative actions to promote women's participation in local government.

Nepal's current decentralization policy is defined as part of the strategy of the Ninth (1997 to 2002), and of the Tenth (2002 to 2007) Five Year Plans and three years interim plan (2008-2011) and by the stipulations of the LSGA. The LSGA decentralizes the responsibilities for administrative, socio-economic and infrastructure development to local political units. The LSGA has three major chapters each addressing the governance of three local units. In its different sections, the Act has laid down the annual planning process for each of those units and also their financial management. Besides, it has made it mandatory to have a 'periodic plan' (a five-year development plans/vision) of each of the local units. The budget allocations from the central government to these units are tied up with such annual and periodic plans. Within the framework of the periodic plan, decentralised bodies receive an annual block grant from GoN for both administrative and development expenditures, and a proportion of the development grant is earmarked for local development. All Village Development Committees (VDCs) receive an equal annual grant of NRs. one million from GoN, part of which should be spent on social development including human resources and women's empowerment.

Local Governance Structure

Nepal has made arrangements to provide more power and authority to the local political units called local bodies (district development committees [DDCs]¹, municipalities and village development committees [VDCs] (see Table 5) and to increase the voices, influence and contribution of local people in the development process through the Local Self Governance Act (LSGA 1999) and Rules, 2000 (Dhungel, 2002)).

Local development planning at the grassroots level starts at the ward level planning which is done by the inhabitants of the ward and is coordinated by the Ward Committee (WC). The WC is constituted of elected members (on party basis) with a Ward Chairperson, one woman member and three other Ward members. The WC finalizes the local level plans and budget and submits to VDC for approval.

Table 5 Local Government Structure

Local bodies	Total	Ilakas/Wards	Total units of Ilakas or wards
DDC	75	9-17 Ilakas	927
Municipality	58	9-35 wards	806
VDCs	3913	9 wards	35,217

Source: Ministry of Local Development, office record, 2007

Planning is also done at district Ilaka level. This is the first place where the rural and urban plans are integrated. At this level, there is no provision for women's representations through affirmative action.

Each of the local bodies has a council responsible for overall development of the area and is the final institution to approve the village/municipal/district level plans and budget¹. Similarly, each of the local bodies has executive committee that coordinates the planning process at the local level, get approval of the council and submits the plans to the district development committee for final approval. The VDC secretary and officer deputed by the government functions as the member-secretaries in VDC and municipality respectively. An executive committee (EC) in a VDC is constituted with the representation of the elected Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Ward Chairpersons (nine) and two members including one woman nominated by the EC from among the members of village council. Similarly, EC in municipality have similar representation. The number of EC members in the case of municipality depends up on the number of wards it has.

Similarly, the District Development Committee (DDC) is an executive body of the DC. The DDC of a district is an elected body responsible for district level planning and overall development of the district. It is composed of: a) a President and a Vice-President indirectly elected on a party basis by the Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons of VDCs, Mayors and Deputy-Mayors of municipalities within the district; b) a member elected from each of the Ilaka within the district by the Ilaka's VDCs Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Mayors and Deputy-Mayors – indirectly on political party basis; (thus, the size of the elected members of a DDC can range from 9 to 17 members, a President and Vice-President); c) The members of House of Representatives and National Assembly of the concerned district are ex-officio members of DDC; and d) two members including one woman nominated by DDC from amongst the members of DC. The Local Development Officer (LDO) deputed by the Government to the district functions as member-secretary of the DDC. In the interim period, prior to holding local elections, the LDO acts as a Chair of the DDC.

Three types of federation representing DDCs, municipalities and VDCs are in place in Nepal. These include Association of District Development committees of Nepal (ADDCN), Municipal Association of Nepal (MuAN) and National VDC Federation in Nepal (NAVIN). The principle objective of these institutions is to facilitate the process of sustained development at local level based on people's participation. In ADDCN and NAVIN, there is a provision for inclusion of at least one woman from each district, and similarly in MuAN one woman is to be represented compulsorily from each municipality in its council, an apex decision making body. Although, there is no mandatory provision for the representatives of women in executive committee of these institutions, one woman has been elected in ADDCN committee and also executive committee of NAVIN is headed by a woman.

Gender in local governance policies and organizations

As briefly highlighted above, LSGA, 1999 is a milestone legal base for the inclusion of women in local governance. The Act has following provision for women participation (Shrestha & Hachhethu, 2002, MoLJ/HMG 2000a and MoLJ/HMG 2000a).

- At least twenty percent seats reservation to women in ward committee of VDC and Municipality (must be one women members out of five)
- Reservation of at least one woman among nominated members of following structure of local government:
 - District Development Committee (among six seats that has to be nominated by the VC)
 - District Council
 - Village Development Committee
 - Village Council (among the six seats that has to be nominated by the VC)
 - Municipality committee
- Forty percent women representation has to be nominated in Municipal Council (among the six to twenty seats that have to be nominated by the Municipal council).

As mentioned in the same Act, there is sufficient room or mandate of prevailing legal structure for formulation of policies to include women in the organisation as a staff and in other structure. As provisioned in the same act, priority can be given to plan and execute women empowerment programs. In addition, its Regulation has made following provisions for women advancement.

- Representation of at least 30 percent women members in all types of User's Committees
- Priority should be given in formulation and implementation of income generating and skill enhancing projects for women while planning periodic plan in local levels
- Enlistment of woman arbitrator to the extent possible in the formation of judicial arbitrary board in the VDC.

A Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines was approved by cabinet and circulated through Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare in 2001. There is provision for district level gender mainstreaming committee having representation from government and non government organisation. Women Development Officer has to act as member secretary of the committee and district level gender focal person. Likewise, a separate guideline has been issued by the Ministry of Local Development (MoLD) on "Gender mainstreaming in VDCs. Both guidelines basically, aim to promote coordination among local stakeholders on participatory local planning, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment.

Regarding, strategies of policy related information dissemination and communication, Nepal Government has made one of the indicators of performance to establish and properly operate district information and documentation center (Section 212) albeit, all DDCs do not fully comply with. DDCs, Municipalities and VDCs have practiced to disseminate information through local media, viz local news papers, FM radio, information display board has been established and local media promotional activities are being carried out. Unfortunately, there is no mention anything specific about women related policy provisions in information dissemination.

Findings and Discussion

Following are the main research findings on the status of women participation, constraints and issues for women to exercise their agency in different socio-political context of local political governance in Nepal.

Participation of women in Local Governance

"If local government is to meet the needs of both women and men, it must build on the experiences of both women and men, through an equal representation at all levels and in all fields of decision making..." International Union of Local Government Authorities (IULA): IULA Worldwide, Declaration on Women in Local Government/www.iula.org

Despite the fact that there is sufficient room or mandate in the prevailing legal instrument to include women in local bodies, women representation in Nepal's local government is at best minimal. Among three types of women representatives in local bodies¹, following the local election in 1999, on average only 18.6% women were represented.

Among many factors, limited number of women candidacies given by masculine dominated political parties both in ward and VDC level committees is the main reason of low representation of women (Binda Pandey, woman political leader, Per. Comm.)

Total positions in local bodies = 221,667	
Position categories	Women in local bodies
Elected	6,648 (3.0%)
Reserved	5,520 (2.5%)
Nominated	29,160 (13.1%)
Total women representatives	41,328 (18.6%)
Source: Office record of MoLD, 2007.	

Table 6 shows the status of women who had contested and were elected in executive positions of local bodies nationally. Though policy provision does not disallow women in decision making positions, no women candidates were elected in the position of DDC President, Mayor and deputy Mayor of municipalities across the country. Only one woman from Rai ethnic community from Eastern Nepal was elected as DDC Vice-president. Similarly, out of the 3913 VDCs Chair and Vice-Chairperson, only 17 (0.4%) and 15 (0.38) women are elected as Chair and Vice-Chair persons. The extent of gender insensitivity and male favouritism of political parties clearly suggested by women's lower candidacy in election under multiparty election.

Table 6 Position wise representation of women in LGs on non reserved seats

Description	DDC			Municipality		VDCs	
	President	Vice president	Member	Mayor	Deputy Mayor	chair	vice chair
Position to be elected	75	75	927	58	58	3913	3913
Women Candidates contested	1 (1.33)	3 (4)	39 (4.2)	7 (12)	6 (10)	40 (1)	82 (2)
Women candidate elected	–	1 (1.33)	8 (0.86)	–	–	17 (0.43)	15 (0.38)

Source: Office record ADDCN. Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages.

Review of available records in the VDCs and study revealed that women participation in executive committee of local bodies before and after the enactment LSGA 1999 has increased (Table 7). Upon the investigation made about why and how were the women included in the local decentralised governance, the answers were almost same in all research sites. They said “*women were included because of policy provision*”. It is also evident that there was no women representative in executive committee except in two VDCs in the election that was held prior to the enactment of LSGA, 1999.

Table 7 Participation in Executive Committee

Study sites	1992			1999		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Urlabari VDC (Morang)	0	11	11	1 (7.6)	12	13
Letang VDC (Morang)	1	12	13	1 (7.6)	12	13
Lamatar VDC (Lalitpur)	0	11	11	2 (15.3)	11	13
Banepa Municipality (Kavreplanchowk)	-	NA	-	0 (o)	13	13
Kagbeni VDC (Mustang)	0	11	11	0 (o)	11	11
Marpha VDC (Mustang)	0	11	11	0 (o)	11	11
Gadawa VDC (Dang)	0	11	11	1 (7.6)	12	13
Sishaniya VDC (Dang)	0	11	11	2 (15.3)	11	13
Mastamandu VDC (Dadeldhura)	2	11	13	1 (7.6)	12	13
Jogbuda VDC (Dadeldhura)	0	11	11	1 (7.6)	12	13
Total	3	100	103	9 (7.6)	117	126

Source: Field Survey 2007. Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages.

Although, total members in VDC executive committee should be 13 including two (with at least one woman) nominated by village council, no woman was nominated in three local governance units (two VDCs in Mustang district and Banepa municipality of Kavrepalanchowk district). This indicates the extent of masculine domination and gender insensitivity of the local governance units. Other six VDCs have at least one woman in EC and two VDCs have two women. It revealed that only two women, one each in Lamatar and Sishaniya VDC have been elected on non-reserved seats in executive committee. Of which, one elected in Sishania was VDC chairperson and in Lamatar was ward chairperson. If there would have been no provision of 20 percent reservation seats for women, data shows that there would be only 0.86 percent elected women in ward committee and 0.62 percent of women in council of local governance units in the study area (Table 8). This justifies that women are included because of quota allocated for them.

Table 8 Representation of Male and Female in Ward committee and Council

Study sites	Ward committee			Council		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Urlabari	10	35	45	12	41	53
Letang	10	35	45	12	41	53
Banepa Municipality	11	44	55	11	46	57
Lamatar	10	35	45	11	42	53
Kagbeni	9	36	45	9	38	47

Marpha	9	36	45	9	38	47
Gadawa	9	36	45	10	39	49
Sisahaniya	10	35	45	11	40	51
Mastamandu	9	36	45	11	40	51
Jogbuda	9	36	45	10	43	53
Total	96	364	460	106	408	514
Percentage	20.86	79.13	100	20.62	79.37	100

Source: Field survey 2007

While making an inquiry about why and how political parties have given the candidacy for women to be engaged in local politics, one of the ward committee chairmen of Jogbudha VDC expressed that, *“we are compelled to bring women because of policy provision. Women have no capacity to be member of local bodies. They know how to cook food and serve to child. We had to struggle to find women to be included as a candidate in local elections.”* According to him, women generally do not show interest in involving in political democratic process.

Nevertheless, it is also revealed that political party has given women candidacy if the post is likely to be lost without women candidates. An elected woman during discussion in Uurlabari VDC has given the reasons of her candidacy as follows. *“I was very active social worker in the village and many people admired me. Party was going to lose the seat if I was not given the opportunity. I wanted to make my candidacy in leadership position but I had given a chance only as a member”*.

Though total council members in the 10 research sites were 514, caste/ethnic data was found only for 472 representatives. Table 9 reflects that there was still very limited participation of women belonging to *dalit* community. Their representation was found only in four VDCs namely Mastamandu and Jogbudha (Dadeldhura), Marpha (Mustang) and Letang (Morang). Relatively higher percentage of Janajati women have been found in local governance. The sample VDCs obviously have higher percentage of Janajati groups. Janajati here refers to Indigenous population defined by government of Nepal.

Table 9 Participation by Caste Ethnicity

Caste Ethnicity	Female (n=106)	Male (n=367)	Total (n=472)
Brahmin/Chhetri	41 (9)	114 (24)	515 (33)
Janajati	58 (12)	210 (45)	268 (57)
Dalit	6 (1)	38 (8)	44 (9)
Others	-	5 (1.1)	5 (1)
Total	105	367	472

Source: Field survey 2007. Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages.

The quantitative data mentioned above on women participation seems to indicate that numbers of women in local government is in increasing trend and was higher than at the national level except the Constitutional Assembly. The sad part however is that the selection of female candidates by parties for reserved seats has been to a large extent determined by the calculation as to which women are the most ‘useful’ either because they are related to powerful men or because they can be easily bypassed in everyday political decision making. Ratnawali Thapa, a woman representative of ward no 4 of Lamatar VDC expressed that *“opportunities are taken by the people who are close to male leaders.”*

Generally, the council meets once a year; and executive committee and ward committee meets once a month. In almost all research sites, ward level meetings were hardly held. Although women were elected and nominated (at ward level committee, executive committee and council of VDCs and Municipality) to voice their concerns, interest and actively participate in decision making process, often the true participation of women is limited to their physical presence. Although, in almost all research sites, women representative were invited in the council and executive committee meeting, often, their participation is considered less imperative in decision making process. This has had the obvious consequence of an increasing presence of women in planning and management, but without a visible impact on local governance and political

processes. Though, the decentralisation of authority and resources is an important means of improving local people participation, struggles around resources at the local level can be unruly and local patron-client networks sometimes involve malfeasance and pork-barrel politics, which may serve further to exclude women rather than to encourage them into the political process. One of the ward chairpersons, Mr Narbhan Kami in Jogbudha VDC said *“women are not aware about their rights and role they have to play in local political domain.”* A graduate women representative in Banepa municipality said *“we are neither involved in decision making process nor informed about the decisions made. Men leaders decide what they want. They exclude women. Let me give you a concrete example. I learnt from some other sources that EC of Banepa Municipality made a decision to make an official study visit to China. All male members were selected to participate in the visit. I raised the issue to include some women in the team. They said it is not good for women to go to such trip; they added taking women in such trip would logistically be very difficult”*.

Men and women interviewed in the sample survey who were not representative of local governance institution and structure asked whether they were presented in any development planning and decision making process within the system. None of them had ever participated in such process. They are neither aware of how planning is done nor know how VDC's/Municipality budget is allocated for local level development.

Constraints for exercising women agency

There is an increasing trend of women political participation after the restoration of democracy in 1990 both at national and local level. Emergence of local level organisations and collective efforts of government, non-government and other agencies, to some extent, has contributed to exercise their agencies. Despite these efforts, a number of constraints to women participation in local governance are observed and discussed as follows.

Women's social and economic dependence

There is no social security, social protection and promotion system for women except elderly and widow women of above 70 and 65 years of age who receive just NRs 100 (1.5 US \$) per month allowance. Restriction in mobility and reliance on male family members, kinship and neighbourhood to access to social gatherings and economic opportunities (mainly employment) have reinforced the unequal power relations between men and women.

To quote women's voice in focus groups discussion in Lalitpur and Dadeldhura district - *“We are treated as second category of citizens. We have low level of literacy, weak health, lack of money and less mobility outside home. Therefore we cannot enter into the politic”*

Similarly, a Brahmin women with leadership skill and from Letang VDC shared emotionally with me the following:

“I stood for the election with the support of my husband. There are many meetings to be attended and I had to go to attend meetings by bus that cost money. I do not earn money neither own any property. I have had no money even to pay the bus fare that I need to pay to go to attend the meeting. At the same time, my health has been going down as I have been suffering from gastritis. Due to lack of money I cannot afford to buy food while attending meeting, which should be a voluntary work. My husband, though supported me to be a member of a political party in the initial years, now is very reluctant to allow me to continue to be a member of political party that requires time for several meetings and movements. He says politics is only affordable if you have enough money. He has warned me that I should earn money if I want to be involved in politics”. She burst into tears and added *“Despite my interest to be a leader to change this society and social system, I cannot be involved in politics any more because I am poor”*.

Gender construction of women's identity

In Nepali society, women are hardly seen as separate entity in a disaggregated way. In most study sites men from all classes, caste and ethnicity represent the family except voting rights. In the meetings rights of women are not discussed, claimed, fought for separately. Women are hardly encouraged to come forward to the public domain and their identities are not acknowledged as individual citizen rather they are seen as the relative of male members in terms of someone's wife (*phalano ki swoasni*), grand mother, mother, sister, daughter and sister in law. Their entitlements are in all cases arbitrated by family, kinship, culture, custom, values and norms that maintain status quo. Researchers in Dang district read out the list of respondent including a women whom no one knew by her name. Later she was recognised by her husband and father in laws name. This was not an exception in Dang rather a phenomenon in most of the sites.

Similarly, example below shows how government officials such as LDO, Urban Development Officer and VDC secretaries (all male, never female!) run the local government in a gender unfriendly way. In post 2002 period after the dissolution of elected local bodies, it is found that, in most of research sites except in Sisahaniya VDC of Dang district, women were never invited in local level planning and decision making meetings. When asked about women participation in decision making process, A VDC secretary of Matamandu VDC of Dadeldhura district said *"Why should women be invited separately because their man represents them. They cannot put forward views neither can bring ideas"*. In official's opinion, man can represent women's needs, concerns and interests. This is one of the typical examples of stereotypical behaviour of an official.

Similarly, research team observed a two day council meeting in Dang district. A group of women from a distant VDC came to attend the meeting with an agenda related to drinking water. Long boring speeches of men leaders consumed the whole day. Women leaders wanted to put forward their views but organiser (DDC) didn't see any value of their presence. They thought that their concerns were represented in the speech. We asked them whether they were going to come next day to push their agenda, they replied with disappointment that they would not have time to come and also they felt they were ignored and excluded.

In addition, most of the women incoming in all ten local bodies are beginner political representatives. In many cases, in study sites of Eastern and Western Nepal, in Adibasi and Janajati as well as in "high caste" Brahmin family, to fill the mandatory slots, male politicians nearest family members or close relatives chose the women to participate in the local governance. For example a husband, a powerful political affiliate, of Khini Maya Tamang from Letang VDC, made her candidacy on women quotas. Similarly, Shiva Sharma, though not interested and aware of politics, left the job of health worker, elected as VDC chairperson in Dang district from Western Nepal, from Brahmin family entered into the political life in the village because of her husband's political identity.

This indicates that the traditional leaders mainly the elite families (across all political parties) act as power grabbers and "gatekeepers" in controlling seats in local government, their influence is strong in the selection of women candidates, most preferably their own family members, nominating women in quotas and they make use of their traditional power ultimately reinforcing the patron-client relationship with women candidates whom they offer quota. This in fact makes male leaders more powerful than the women who would be offered quota.

Shiva Sharma of Sisahniya VDC of Dang district mentioned above and Sushila Chowdahary and many others (too many to name here) are the examples in case of time. Both are elected women leaders and they come from the traditionally political family as one is the wife of District leader and the daughter in law of the parliamentarian.

Gender, class and caste differentiation: Women suffer the most from it

Nepali society is long ruled by a group of feudal elites (dominated by males) that reflects the prevailing social order. It is perpetuated along dynastic and familial lines that conditioned people to accept the highly hierarchical and patriarchal socio-cultural institutions and practices. Particularly the women suffer the most. While the poverty line for Nepalese people is 38% it is 80% for women and children (Shrestha, 2002:72). Women constituted 62% of total unpaid family labour and only 18% among wage earners with almost no progress since 1991(NPC, 2005:30). There is a huge challenge in narrowing the literacy differential between the sexes among adults (NPC, 2005:30). Violence against women including domestic violence is widespread. A woman in Kavre district expressed *“In early days of my tenureship, I have been scolded and beaten several times by my husband for participating in VDC meetings and program organised by other development agency”*. She added, she was not allowed to stay at home if she wanted to continue her tenureship in VDC. Upon my request, my husband had been invited to participate in one gender training program organised by an NGO. Later, he realised and allowed me to take my responsibility in VDC. Polygamy and child marriage though is outlawed, still continues. In our two research sites in Dang and Dadeldhura, child marriage is prevalent. A Tharu woman in Sisahaniya VDC in Dadeldhura district explained to me that *“early marriage is our custom. Getting late marriage is a sin for a girl herself and more to the parents. We do not want to go to hell simply delaying our daughter to get married.”* Notwithstanding the sexual abuse at home, thousands of women become rape victims, almost 40% under the age of 19, forcing them to social and psychological problems and sexual and reproductive disorders including HIV/AIDs (SAMANATA, 2001). Women’s trafficking into foreign sex market is one of the severe problems with more than 200,000 young girls reported to have *been trafficked to India (IIDS and UNIFEM, 2004)*. A woman representative in Mastamandu VDC said *“majority of woman of this VDC are facing illness of uterus prolapsed because of heavy workload during the time of pregnancy and child birth.”* She further added *“women get pregnant in early age and suffering from various sexual diseases. Local authorities are still not seriously concerned about the problems.”*

Gender discrimination varies among different caste ethnic groups. For example, *Rai, Tamang, Gurung, Tharu, Thakali* women enjoy more freedom and are less discriminated in private sphere than women belonging to *Bahun, Chhetri* and *dalits*. Nonetheless, all research sites in Nepal are characterised by high levels of female deprivation where the baby girls are not the desirable sex for both father, mother and grand parents (increasing number of female children, abortion to kill female embryo, though we do not have data as rural women were reluctant to tell the story because of the fear) and the health care that women get during sickness and the funeral and post funeral rituals that women get is inferior quality, an indicator of the low value given to women. A pregnant dalit woman in Mustamandu VDC expressed with us that, *I have given birth to five daughters. I did not want to have another baby. But pressure from husband and parents- in- law compelled me to get pregnant.*

Women limited experience in public interaction undermines their opinions. Some of these limitations can partly be conquered if the women have leadership qualities, of high class and caste, self confidence and have political connections. Women living in their parental homes and widow are less socially constrained. For example, widow woman and unmarried woman members representing in ward committee of Banepa Municipality expressed with research team that they have more freedom of mobility than that having by married women. Among women, the victims of social differentiation process are those who are from disadvantaged and vulnerable social groups such as *dalits, indigenous groups* (caste based) and poor (class based). These are the sources of differentiation within women and can be attributed to differential impacts of local governance.

Though, the Table 9 shows higher percentage of Janajati (indigenous) groups of people representing local bodies, there are different and interlinked factors which have contributed to the ongoing phenomenon of class and caste differentiation that hinder women to participate in politics. Since Nepal's unification process began in 1743, social exclusion, discrimination and suppression along caste and ethnic lines, gender and region have been a significant feature of Nepalese society (Kotani 1997). While dalits have been discriminated and excluded on the basis of ritual status, the ethnic groups are discriminated and excluded for cultural reasons. Besari Rana, a 65 years old dalit woman of the same VDC expressed with the research team that *"though I represent many community level groups including VDC, being a dalit woman, I have not got opportunity to express my opinions and my capacity has been undermined by male members and even by female members of high caste and class groups. She further added if I speak with low voice no one hear me and criticise me saying women of bad character speak with loud voice if I speak loudly."*

The living condition of poor women from *dalit* caste in terms of life expectancy, adult literacy ratio and per capita income is much lower than other groups. The discriminatory practices against dalits and particularly women within dalit and women are found in various fields such as denial of entry into the house and temples; services during rituals and worship conducted by dalits are not accepted; access to common resources such as using the water tap, pond is denied; denial to entry into public places such as religious or social functions; forced labour or discriminatory practice of labour, bonded labour or the carrying of dead animals; dominance to dalits in behaviour such as *jadau* system (practice of obeisance); atrocities, more cases of dalit women raped than others; social boycott in case of inter caste marriage and attitudinal untouchability as children of higher caste groups will not attend a school if a dalit teacher is teaching there and so on. The practice of untouchability is widely prevalent in western part of the country than in eastern research sites.

Feudal patriarchal structure and traditional system

Nepali society is characterized as patriarchal in nature. The cultural and socio economic traditions of patriarchal systems have been so internalized by Nepali society that women involvement in decision making is viewed as an invasion of a sphere traditionally reserved for men. Norbu Gurung of Mustang, a key informant, sees women as the leader for household chores and decisions related to domestic affairs are being guided by women, where as he sees the public sphere is for men to go out and make decisions.

Mustang is dominated by ethnic groups. Though generally in ethnic society compared to Brahmin/Chhetri community women possess freedom of mobilization, but in this place also women are not freely participating in public affairs. It is found even male are also not so open to change the traditional values and system. In this area '*Mukhiya*' System is in place where *Mukhiya* is the village head plays dominant role in decision making forum who is always male. *Mukhiya* is a head of clusters of villages (4-5 wards) and is selected periodically by village assembly of men (mostly once in a year). They make a village constitution with the role and responsibility of *Mukhiya* and also about governance of the village. Number of *Mukhiya* in each VDC varies from 2-4. Though there are political representative, but all the activities are launched on the decisions of *Mukhiya*. Inside village activities are handled by the *Mukhiya* and political representatives' role is mainly focused in attending meetings at VDC/district level activities. Women are never been selected as *Mukhiya*. Thus, women have very little space in public affairs. *"We are never been called in the meetings. No women have become a Mukhiya to rule the village in Marpha and Kagbani VDCs of Mustang districts. It's a male domain."* (One woman furiously said in Marpha VDC of Mustang. Meetings are called only for traditionally influential and powerful men. In Mustang, though, women are recognized as home minister, i.e., they have full power in household economy, but in public affairs particularly in local governance, they have very little space and their participation is very low. Though, there is provision for the nomination of women in EC of VDC, both ECs of Kagbeni and Marpha VDCs in Mustang were without woman member. Similarly, *dalits* are also

not allowed to hold the position. As in village assemblies only male members participate in district level planning and governance. Even women of the district head quarter who are involved in key positions in NGO federation, district branch is also unaware that there is separate budget for women development in district budget!

As mentioned earlier section, among women who represent local bodies, most of them are passive listeners. Man dominates the decision making process. In most of the research sites, it was revealed that women's voices were not heard in decision making process. Many women representing VDC executive expressed in native language: "*Mahila ko kura basera bole parkhal le chhekchha; Uthera bole hawa le udauchha*". Literally this means women's voices are blocked by the wall if they sit down and speak while it is blown by the wind if they stood up to speak. For example, a Brahmin women speaking in focused group discussion with us in Letang VDC had been interrupted by a man and said "*I will make the things clear as women could not express properly. They do not know about VDC governance even though they were elected*".

Another woman in Sishhaniya VDC member revealed that *we attend the meetings but do not understand what other members are talking about. We take the tea and snacks, put our signature on the register and return home.*" "*We normally sit on the edge of the crowd in the meeting. We did not hear clearly what was discussed in the meeting and what they were taking about and what was decided and what was not*" (A woman representatives in Banepa municipality). *Kamlari* practice (bonded labour) in Dang where sexual abuses by landlords is still prevalent.

Social norms, women's own perception and capacity

Researchers have found many social norms that shape women's own perception and undermine their capacity. Social norms discriminate women while seating, eating, meeting, dressing, moving, speaking, laughing and so on. For example, rural women are not supposed to speak out in front of men counterparts. *Pothi Baasnu hunna* (it is the cock that should make sound, not the hen!). Seating in back seats in a public meeting, eating time at the end of all, restriction in mobility without attendant, practice of *chaupadi* and untouchability during maturation and child birth period in Dadeldhura, *kamlari* practice (bonded labour) in Dang where sexual abuses by landlords are common practices that are reproduced by women themselves reinforcing discriminatory social norms, this ultimately undermines their capacity and hinders women's participation in public sphere. No women in study sites found to be gathering in small tea stalls and open meeting places. Moreover, some communities have quite stick rules for women isolation and seclusion. Social norms and *pardaha* practice in Muslim community strictures on women visibility, mobility and behaviors than in other caste/ethnic groups. For example, even though, a Muslim woman in Gadawa VDC in Dang district was elected and joined the VDC. However, she never been there in her tenure. Keura Devi Dhami, a woman representative was looked with a negative eye when she was involved in public affairs. She expressed, "*after I was nominated as ward member I used to participate in different meetings and used to go outside of village for participating in trainings. At that time villagers used to gossip about me saying as I am 'characterless' and participating freely.*"

Women submissiveness, low self confidence and dependence on others in matters related to their own lives also hinder their participation in public forums. The result is not only a disinclination on the part of women to run for public office but also reluctance on the part of both women and men to elect women. An elected Tharu woman in Sisahaniya VDC said to research team that "*it is a man who had to go to the meeting. They are more aware of local governance process and can speak with logic.*"

Chairperson of VDC from Urlabari VDC admitted that 'social, religious and cultural norms and values do not allow women to participate in public affairs. He further said that even when they attend, they hardly speak any words in the meeting. Even when men encourage speaking, they (women) say that it is fine for them if men speak on their behalf. In addition, Jamuna Ghimire of Lamatar expressed that "*It is due to policy provision I was nominated as VDC council and*

executive member but I don't have political identity. She mentioned for the sake of name I am leader but don't have any leadership role". She added, "I am not educated and don't know what to do. Most of the time, I put my signature in the minute book and left the meetings." Similarly, while we were talking with her, her brother in law was making fun of her by saying, "what proposal she can tabled, she proposed what we want her to propose! She was selected because it was hard even to find women even like her.

But Kalpana Poudel of Lamatar, mentioned, *"women covers half the space, but still they are not getting equal space in public sphere because of men. If women would not raise their voice, they would not get any rights."* She added, *"if women are given opportunity they can do good, because in initial period I was unable to express my opinions and don't used to tabled proposal, but as time passes on I become bold enough to tabled proposal."* She has given an example of her emancipation and said, *"in one meeting in VDC where participation of women was low and male were voicing of women's absence. Soon, I seized the mike from a male and questioned to talk the walk and asked them to bring their women to participate in committees and meetings rather than blaming other women."*

It indicates that without altering social norms that alter gender power relations, the agenda of women participation has little value. In one of the study sites, for example, a woman was heading the VDC in Sisahaniya of Dang district. Many women respondents in FGD perceived that even being women chair person she was not able to bring forward gender related agenda because her own perception had not changed. She was found not different than any men and was operating exactly in a similar way of that of men.

Gender role, language and inappropriate meeting time as barriers

What has been observed commonly in the study sites is that multiple roles that women perform are huge. Women participation in public affairs only adds to their burdens and takes up even more of their already limited time. This restricts women to participate actively. In all study sites, majority of women who attended meetings expressed that attending public meetings for them are new additional tasks without reducing the existing domestic tasks. These include: fetching water, collecting firewood, grinding, cooking, cleaning, washing and looking after cattle. In addition, significant amount of women's time is to be given for child and elderly care and agriculture work.

"Meetings are always lengthy. In the first place, we cannot attend the meeting; if we attend we cannot stay for long, if we stay, our views are not valued. Most importantly, we have to feed our cattle. We should look after elderly and get food ready for children by the time they come home from school. How could we attend such long meetings depriving our children and elderly? Our men hardly share our domestic chores even we are asked to attend public meetings" (Nirmala Acharya, a woman representative speaking to researcher at Lamatar Lalitpur).

Nepal characterized by multi-ethnic and multi cultural societies; the majority of women speak only local dialects. Lack of sufficient interaction with other communities also lack of schooling restricts women to learn other dialects or languages, including country's official language. Use of only one language is also a barrier for women to participate in public meetings. Women belonging to Chaudhary ethnic community, for example, though elected in local bodies in Dang district neither understood any discussion matters nor was able to make contribution in council meetings to give their opinions. Similarly Tamang women of Lamatar VDC because of her weak language skill to express in Nepali used to be silent in the meeting and excluded from the decision making process.

In most of the research sites ward level meetings were not held. Where meetings of ward committee were held (such as in Banepa municipality) at ward level, they normally were held in the morning. Women representatives faced barriers to attend meetings because during that time they had to cook food and feed their children. VDC council meetings would normally start in the

mid day. Meeting used to be very lengthy and lasted until the evening. Major decisions were made at the end of meeting by the time women would already leave.

Women's movements

Although the history of women's movement in Nepal goes back to the formation of women's organisations between 1920 and 1940, civil society movement has a very recent history in Nepal. It started only after Nepal's 1990's Constitution which was promulgated after the restoration of the multiparty democratic political system. Since then, many efforts were made to provide space for both local governments, civil society organizations (not necessarily for women focused organisation though). The Local Self-Governance Act (LSGA), passed in 1999 and new economic policy for private sector promotion are the milestone for the empowerment of citizens. Notably, DDC, VDC and Municipality Federations have been constituted where the chair of VDC federation is women itself. In addition, elected and nominated women representatives have formed a national federation. A national 'Women's Caucus' of women parliamentarians, was formed to represent issues of common concerns (MGEP, 2004). This is however not very effective as the whole country is at the transition of political change and a new constitutional election, the first time in its history, has been held on April 10, 2008 in which a minimum of 33 % women are expected to be the candidates. In comparison to the past, the women candidates are in significant numbers in Nepal's history. There are a total number of 5094 candidates for the 601 seat constitutional assembly election, of which 1539 are women candidates, which comes around 30.3%. Of which 19% are from proportionate representation and the rest 11% for 'first pass the post' system. First time in Nepal's history, the total women members in the CA reached nearly 34% (Election Commission Report 2008). This is the highest figure in Nepal's history. This has been possible partly because of the voice raised by women civil society organizations and the pressure they exerted to influence their political leadership. Pro-democracy movement 1990 and 2006 which were called by the political parties but shaped by civil society actors together with women alliance of 7 political parties have been the main factors which were instrumental for ensuring women's representations rights in country's constitution.

Similarly, some women's movement have been observed in study sites. In a FGD with Women representative and health volunteer of Jogbudha, a woman mentioned, *'we tabled proposal for providing dress and allowance to the women health volunteer, but as it was not heard, so we women representative from all the nine wards and health volunteer locked the VDC office for half day. As a result dress was provided to women health volunteers'*.

As women are victims of family violence due to alcoholic behaviour of male, so women representative along with other women activist in Urlabari VDC march a rally and put pressure to stop gambling and alcoholic drinks.

Accountability structure

Enhancing women's capability to exercise their citizenry rights is one of the key policy goals of decentralisation (NPC, 2002). At least in principle, participation of women in policy documents has been a constant concern. Women's needs have been noted as national development concerns since Sixth development plan, 1980-1985. Considering women as high productive labour force, the Seventh and Eighth five year plans had given a high priority to uplift women by providing opportunities to make them efficient and productive. In the mean time, Ninth five year plan adopted the policy of gender equality through gender mainstreaming in all development sectors including local governance. The Tenth plan reinforces the spirit of Ninth Plan. The current three year Interim plan envisioned gender mainstreaming and women empowerment as policy goal for lessening of feminisation of poverty ((NPC, 1980; NPC, 1997; NPC 2007).

Establishment of Ministry of Women and Social Welfare, formation of 'Women's Divisions' within Ministry of Local Development, Education, Agriculture, formation of women cell in National Planning Commission (an apex body of Nepal planning process) and 'Gender Focal Points' in 26 Ministries, establishment of National Women's commission, ratification of women related international agreements such as Convention on Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), development of National Plan of Action on CEDAW and embracing '12 points of Women Empowerment' in the National Plan of Action, and establishment of National Women Commission are some notable initiatives in this direction (Shrestha & Hachhethu, 2002, Shrestha, 2002). Similarly, The Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal, 1990 had provision of quotas for 5 percent women candidacy in each political party for parliamentary elections, 5 percent seat reservation for women in a total of 60 members in the National Assembly are the initiatives taken by Nepal for women's empowerment. The Interim Constitution and the House Declaration have made special provision for 33 percent representation of women among the candidates for elections for the Constituent Assembly. The Gender Equality Act passed by this Interim Parliament and the Interim Constitution has called to end all discriminatory laws and regulations against women. The Parliamentary Declaration also calls for 33 percent representation of women throughout in government structures. In addition provision for women in various decentralised bodies, human resources development strategies to enhance their capability, incentive mechanisms in industrial sector to employ women, and provisions for increasing women's access to legal protection have been appreciated (HMGN, 2005). Provision of 20 percent reservation for women in civil service, extension of age bar to 40 years for entering government service against 35 years for men and reduction of one year service than men to be eligible in competing for higher post in civil service, pension for widows are also taken as positive steps taken by Nepal government (Acharya, 2003).

Three years interim plan has mandatory provision of gender audit and gender budgeting, which in all studied districts is found to be in infancy stage. Kavrepalanchowk DDC is an exception where gender policy and women empowerment section are in place. The sad thing however is that the outgoing LDO facilitated the process of gender auditing, but the incoming official has no clue therefore it is yet to be institutionalised. There are no cases (both at DDC and VDC level of any study site) that they have introduced rules of attendance that would make sure that a quorum for the DDC and VDC council or committee cannot be fulfilled without women being present. This has resulted in all men assemblies making decisions excluding women altogether. Except for Kavre district no other districts and none of the VDCs have actually made decisions for a certain percentage of the budget for women's development. There are also very few cases where the agendas related to women's rights and development are discussed and debated to change the existing planning system and budget allocation

Constitution making, policy, and women's political representation

Women's participation in political institutions remained miserably low, particularly at higher levels. For example in 1999 parliamentary election women candidate constituted only 6% and women member of parliament constituted only 3% (HMGN, 2005:30). In 2008 at least 33 percent seats reservation is made for women candidates in Constitutional Assembly (CA) election (50 percent women candidacy in proportional electoral system)- CA Election Act, 2007. Interim Constitution of Nepal has provision of at least 33 percent seats reservation for women at all tiers, position of government including of local government. The Interim Constitution has also called to end all discriminatory laws and regulations against women and made special provision for 33 percent of women among the candidates for Constituent Assembly Election.

Inappropriate policy, electoral process and institutional mechanism

The extent of gender insensitivity of political parties is publicized by women's lower candidacy in election after the restoration of democracy in 1990. The number of women candidates' increased marginally from a total of 79 in the 1991 election to 86 in 1994. It is worth to note that none of the major political parties allocated women candidacy above the minimum 5 percent required by the Constitution.

The rapid increase in the number of women's representation in local bodies at village level from less than one percent in 1992 to 19 percent in 1999 became possible only after the introduction of 20 percent reservation for women in Ward level committee. Women presence in all higher

post of local elected bodies ranging from Ward chairperson to DDC president remained unchanged since there is no reservation for this post.

To a positive side, nevertheless, the provision for reservation of seats for women in LSGA, 1999, about 18 % women were engaged as elected and nominated members in the local bodies throughout the country. Such an approach of creating a space in public sphere for women has some positive outcomes. This allows women to participate in exposure visits, trainings, organised in groups and to find a forum or place to share their feelings and emotions.

However, women representation in executive committee is limited because of policy provision that only ward committee chairs from different wards can be the members of the executive committee. Last two rounds of local election showed that very few women were elected as chairs of ward committees let alone as chairs of the VDCs. There are no women that were elected as the chair of DDCs so far.

Regarding the other institutional framework of local government, LSGA does not envisage women representation in other committees and sub committees such as account committee, advisory committee and integrated and subject-wise planning committee within it. However, LG has practiced to formulate such a committee considering women participation- especially, social development and population sectoral committee was even chaired by the women members (Parasuram Upadhyaya, ADDCN). Similarly, WDO is considered as a sectoral unit of the DDC (section 257, the LSGA), but not internalized in the DDC yet. According to Upadhyaya, some DDC has established its separate social development unit but is not focused on women development. Despite the sufficient room in prevailing legal structure for formulation of policies for inclusion, women staffs in local government service are insignificant. Though actual data is not available, only Kavre district and Banepa municipality has employed one woman each as a staff. Jogbudha VDC has employed three staff from its own source but no woman.

Another problem lies in information sharing with women. Women's lack of access to information restricts women's participation. Women are often ill informed about the policy, policy making and electoral processes. It was revealed by local women in the field sites that they were hardly informed about different policy provisions made by the state for empowerment of women. No mechanisms for communicating such information were observed in all the study sites. Most of the elected and nominated women and even poor men in the local government bodies are found to be unaware of the rules, regulations and their responsibilities as office bearers, and also lack the skills and knowledge to handle their new responsibilities as people's representatives. Except in few cases, no capacity building efforts have been made by the concerned agencies so far. Women are often left out (Banepa municipality) when local bodies organised exposure visits to other parts of the country. However, women of the different wards sometimes organize meetings among themselves so that they can exchange information and share experiences. Such meetings seem to have played an important role in raising the spirits of local women leaders and also allow them to come out of the otherwise generally held feelings of being isolated and powerless.

Policy Implications

The following policy implications are summarised based on the points emerging from the findings.

Special policy provisions for women in key positions

As the result of a policy provision in 1999, at least many women entered in local level politics and civil movements in urban and rural areas of Nepal (Shrestha 2002). Some contested, others joined the movements and few elected. This has led obvious outcome of an increasing presence of women in public forum especially of local governance. Though, women have the equal right to freedom from discrimination and exclusion from participation, they have no influence and a visible impact on planning and policy processes in local governance. They can act as decision makers, planners and managers if sufficiently empowered, informed and confident. However,

with a very few exceptions, there is an absence of women in key leadership positions so that they can influence local decision-making processes meaningfully. If the objective of the state is to establish good local governance system, women's active participation in local political institutions must be secured. Mandatory provisions in policies to facilitate the involvement of women in key positions are needed not only within political domain, but also within civil society and private sector so that women leadership emerges from all sectors.

Capacity building package

Special policy provisions for women in key positions needs to be accompanied by capacity building package. Local authorities often lack the necessary organisational structure, knowledge and skills to work effectively with women's grass roots organisations. There is a need to build the capacity of local bodies to establish formal institutional mechanism to link with these organisations. At the same time, there is need for building the capacity of women, and of community-based organisations, to facilitate their links to local government.

Institutionalising gender budgeting

The budget is a key tool for the implementation of social, political and economic policies and priorities. Gender budgeting should be included in policy and programme planning at all levels. At present, the majority of women have no say in how money is collected and how it is spent. At the VDC or municipal level, gender budgeting entails allocating adequate finances towards the needs and the priorities of women. Policy needs to find ways to re-direct resources to areas and groups previously under-resourced, particularly gender focused programmes at local level.

Special interventions at household and societal level

Violence against women including domestic violence and violence in public spaces constitute serious threats to women's equality and empowerment and is an obstacle to their participation. Information on the subject is rarely available because it is considered to be within the confines of what is private and intimate. These perspectives need to be transformed and the women's issues need to be taken as social and political issues. To address the poor participation of women in public forums and meetings, which are resulting from the difficulties that women face in balancing their responsibilities at home and at work with their political engagement, there is a need for *special interventions* to transform patriarchal socio-cultural values, norms and practices particularly at household level. Ensuring property rights of women, emphasis on girl's education, gender sensitisation activities targeting both men and women including legal awareness on women's rights are some examples of special interventions.

Conclusion

This study has analysed the status of women participation in political decentralisation process in Nepal. It sought to understand women's role as social actors, as well as the social relations of gender that shape women's agency in the political governance at local level.

The systematic efforts for decentralized governance in Nepal began in the early 1960s with the constitution of District, Town and Village Panchayats to manage their own affairs. These units with insignificant power delegation were treated as service providing agents of national level government rather than self governing units at local level. This was followed by the enactment of the Decentralization Act in 1982. The government of Nepal has made arrangements to provide more power and authority to the local political units called local bodies (district development committees [DDCs], municipalities and village development committees [VDCs]) and to increase the voices, influence and contribution of local people in the development process through the Local Self Governance Act (LSGA 1999) and Rules (2000). Despite such attempts at policy level, however, participation of women in the local governance remained a distance dreamed till the enactment of LSGA, 1999. As a result of the mandatory provision for reservation of seats for women in LSGA, 1999, they were engaged in the local development planning through political governance throughout the country. Such an approach of creating a

space for women served as a training ground for them to be aware of the local governance, organised in groups and to find a forum or place to share their feelings and emotions.

The ten case studies revealed that the level of women participation is still very limited. Despite the legal provision of inclusion of women to take part in the decision making forums of local governance to voice their concerns, needs and interest as well as to empower their own agency, often the participation of women is limited in their physical presence. Political parties took significant role in selecting women for contesting in elections but they do not encourage and motivate them to take up higher position. The participation of women in local councils is contingent on several factors- women social and economic dependency to men, gender construction of women identity, gender, class and caste disparity, feudal patriarchal social structure, social norms and women's own perception and capacity and gender division of labour, language and the timing of public meetings and so on. It appeared that socially defined gender role, power relations, women's own perception and capacity both in public sphere and at the household level are responsible for keeping the women in a subordinated position and thereby inhibiting their meaningful participation in local level political governance.

The ten case studies also has demonstrated that there are very little evidences of political parties supporting women candidates to contest general seats in local politics which are considered as male domain. In most of the cases, women have been active in politics only at the request of their male family members. On the other hand, level of women participation at local development process varies, and it is not always low. Greater participation of women have been seen recently in Constitutional assembly.

Education is necessary for women participation but not sufficient condition. Alteration in social power structure mainly class disparity, caste system and women's own perception are also the main factors. All the constraints for exercising women agency described in this report should be considered together. Lastly, the most important point which has come up in the study is that mathematical counting of women participation in public sphere can often be considered as cosmetic unless constitutional provision, policy and legislation provide framework for women rights, both men's and women's own perception is altered by themselves and their capacity is enhanced to have sustainable change in women's life.

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