

Revisiting the
STATUS OF WOMEN
in Nepal
(1981 - 2012)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

'Revisiting the Status of Nepali Women (SOWN): An Examination of Women's Exclusion from Development Processes – (1981 through 2012)', is a collaborative effort of Shtrii Shakti (S2) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Nepal. The study is a primary research effort based on both qualitative and quantitative research including the Time Allocation Study (TAS) method. The TAS was an important component in the survey which was carried out in two phases, namely during the peak and off-peak agricultural seasons. Besides this, the current study also relied on the detailed research data collected during 2007 – 2008 by S2 in the same 16 sites chosen for this study. This earlier phase was supported by the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) – Oslo, Norway. The current study relied on the quantitative data collected earlier in an S2/NIBR study in 2007/8, and includes qualitative supplementary data collected using time allocation tools, 'first person' narratives based on popular participatory research tools such as focus group discussions, intensive individual interviews, case studies, participant observations, Venn diagrams of relationships, social mapping, village walks including village histories and literature reviews together with the earlier structured survey research questionnaire administered by the field researchers.

The SOWN 2010 was undertaken in order to further explore the important developments taking place in Nepal as highlighted by the data obtained by the earlier (S2/NIBR 2007/2008) structured survey. Substantial changes have taken place in the past three decades in areas such as service delivery, political participation, communications, technology and the mobility and role of women. In addition, political conflict and environmental degradation combined with a burgeoning population have all significantly

impacted the lives of women and men. Despite producing impressive statistical information, the 2007/2008 survey research under NIBR study was inadequate for explaining *why* and *how* these changes were taking place. The lived experiences and empirical interpretations of women's lives, their aspirations and opinions were still missing and the survey research still lacked the authority to provide guidelines and recommendations to policy makers seeking to improve the status and lives of women in Nepal. Realizing this lacuna, Shtrii Shakti approached USAID/Nepal with a research proposal to carry out a year-long qualitative study in the same sites and complement the missing input from the women themselves using qualitative methods and utilizing participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools supplemented by a detailed Time Allocation Study (TAS).

The objectives of the study were:

- To examine the social, economic and civic changes that have taken place at the individual, household, and societal levels in relation to women's lives over the past three decades.
- To examine the patterns of change that have emerged over the past three decades in the lives of women from vulnerable communities, such as the Dalit, Janajati and other excluded minorities.
- To examine the changes that have occurred in the life experiences of women, especially during and after the conflict, and understanding their survival and coping strategies.
- To develop and strengthen the scientific data and information base on the status of women in Nepal.
- To disseminate key information online as well as face-to-face in order to expand knowledge of the gender-based social, economic and civil dynamics in society. The key recipients include government officials, non-governmental organizations, activists, academics, civic organizations, the private sector and the international community.
- To provide the building blocks for a policy framework and advocacy agenda at local and national levels, leading to more responsive and gender-sensitive public policies and public services that benefit women and wider society.
- To produce an up-to-date seminal report of the gender-based scientific data and information related to the status of women in Nepal in 2010.

The Study utilizes a number of methods to gather, analyse and conclude its findings and recommendations. These are principally the primary qualitative and quantitative findings from the field sites complemented by the earlier SOWN reports of 1981 (CEDA) and 1995 (S2). Relevant secondary sources of data including results of national level studies on socio-economic issues were also utilized to enrich the analysis.

The field sites were 'ethno-geographical-centric' and a representative sample of 2,547 households were chosen utilizing a probability proportionate to size (PPS) scientific sampling method. The communities studied were Maithili (Dhanusa), Tamang (Sindhupalchowk), Gurung (Lamjung), Thakali/Baragoanle Gurung (Mustang), Kham Magar (Rolpa), Tharu (Dang), Highland Chhetri (Jumla), Industrial workers (Morang), Lohrung Rai (Sankhuwasabha), Brahmin/Chhetri (Kavrepalanchowk), Newar Traders (Ason), Mixed Migrant Business Groups (Baneshwor), Newar (Bulu), Mixed Business and Tourist Traders (Kaski), Muslim (Banke) and Mixed Brahmin/Chhetri (Kanchanpur).

Young upcoming field researchers were trained in both qualitative and quantitative survey methods by the core research team members and sent to the field for research. They were trained and encouraged to empathise with the women encountered in the research. This was in order to ensure gender sensitivity in considering the responses of the women.

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the background, methodology, limitations, objectives and the study framework. It provides the reader with a glimpse of what to expect from the report.

CHAPTER II COMMUNITY PROFILE

This chapter gives a brief overview of the communities under study and their ethno-socio-cultural characteristics in order to set the tone and context of the study.

CHAPTER III DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES

This chapter describes the socio-demographic characteristics of the communities under study. The study covered 2,547 households (953 in urban and 1,594 in the rural

areas). There were 14,199 people living in these households, (7,167 women and 7,032 men). The average household size in the study sites had decreased from 6.4 in 1981 to 5.6 in 2010, indicating the effectiveness of reproductive health and family planning programmes. Household sizes were above 6 in a number of rural districts and below 5 in Kathmandu, indicating a rural-urban disparity. Two thirds of the households were nuclear families and one third were joint families.

Trends in the past 30 years show an increase in the number of nuclear families. Marriage is very common, with virtually all men and women of marrying-age who participated in the study reporting that they are, or have been married. The average age at first marriage was 19 for women and 22 for men, which shows that age at first marriage is increasing for both men and women even in traditional communities where women have tended to marry early (for example in the Maithili community). The overall trend in various household indices shows that there has been a significant positive impact on family well-being, size and reproductive behaviour compared to the past three decades, resulting from better awareness, education and services available through improved infrastructure, transport, information communication and education. However, urban-rural disparity was noted concerning the positive effects that development initiatives have had on the lives of women, with the data indicating that women living in urban sites have benefited more compared to those from rural areas as a result of such programmes e.g. Gurung and mercantile groups in Pokhara or Newar of Ason and Brahmin/Chhetri from Kavrepalanchowk.

CHAPTER IV WOMEN'S ROLE IN HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY

This chapter concerns the role and economic status of women. Based on household income, asset/resources, employment and time allocation data, this chapter reveals the structures of the household economy and its changes over the past 30 years (or between the intervals of the three studies). It shows the participation of men and women in different sectors of the economy and their changing roles and relations. Households across the study sites show variations in economic status based on location and socio-cultural background. The average disposable household income has increased hugely over the past thirty years (even if some adjustments are made for inflation and an erosion of purchasing power), and current trends show households diversifying their income generating activities and moving away from a reliance on

subsistence agriculture and cash crops to business/trade, salaries and remittances. Women however, are more likely to earn 'in kind' as opposed to cash and lag far behind men in receiving opportunities to go abroad for work. The possession of, and command over, land, property and capital remains largely in the hands of men, adding the caveat that although women have taken advantage of widening employment opportunities, societal norms still dictate that they must still spend much of their time working in the unrecognised subsistence and care sectors of the household economy. In this manner, it can be seen that gender roles and relations have not changed much in terms of access to, and control of, significant assets.

This chapter makes important recommendations to strengthen women's rights, well-being and access to gender justice vis-a-vis contributions to the various sectors of the household economy and outside community interactions. Most significantly the recommendations also call for the (long overdue) accurate documentation and formal recognition of the various contributions made by women to the family unit and the national economy.

CHAPTER V WOMEN'S ROLE IN HOUSEHOLD DECISION MAKING

This chapter highlights trends indicating that to some extent, women are becoming more empowered and are initiating an increasing number of decisions within the household. The findings also show an increase in joint decision making between husbands and wives across all survey sites. However men, with whom the bulk of the household's disposable income is kept, are still responsible for major decisions related to the buying and selling of land or property, large capital investments and starting small business enterprises.

Disparities in decision making abilities are observed in dichotomous settings; i.e. urban-rural, educated-less educated, conservative-liberal and wealthy-poor, across all sites. Those in urban areas with a good education, a strong economic base and liberal community background, for example women in the Kathmandu valley, urban towns and among the Lohurung Rai and Thakali/Baragoanle Gurung communities, have more decision making powers, possibly due to their increased mobility and their traditional involvement in trade and business.

The study noted improved gender relations in urban areas where education and income were higher, and also in sites where women were better educated or living in communities with a long standing exposure to countries outside of Nepal (e.g. those who have traditionally sought employment in the British and Indian armies). It also became apparent that in some areas women are now enjoying better access to health care, education and community interaction through association with local social organizations. This is linked to their increasing ability to make sole or joint decisions in the household.

The chapter advocates for further gender sensitization to achieve women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming at disaggregated levels. It also calls for economic opportunities for women through, non-formal education and training programmes.

CHAPTER VI EDUCATION

This chapter describes the status of women and girls in education, with preliminary findings suggesting that the gender gap in education is shrinking rapidly. Despite this positive trend, a lack of financial resources and socio-cultural practices still limit the access girls have to education, particularly in poor rural households and remote disadvantaged groups, i.e. in the Dalit, Muslim, Maithili, Tharu, Kham Magar and Tamang communities.

Although gender discrimination in education exists, with girls being engaged in household work far more than boys, this inequality is narrowing as parents see the advantages of education. Across the study sites the findings reported a strong desire among parents to educate girls as well as boys. Time spent in everyday educational activities has been increasing over the years, although in most rural areas boys still spend much more time engaged in education than girls. In Dhanusha, none of the girl respondents reported spending time on education at all. Women who have studied and received education are also breaking from their traditional roles of housekeeping and caring for the family and are engaging in business, services and wage earning. They are now better able to take care of their health and take part in community life such as civic engagements, acquiring citizenship rights or raising their voices against violence

against women. They vote in greater numbers and are critical towards 'duty bearers', demanding more quality services and good governance from public institutions.

Women who did not have the opportunity to receive formal education in the past and those who are excluded presently have in many cases benefited from non-formal education, learning about health, business and civic institutions, numeracy and literacy.

This chapter makes consequential recommendations for improving and strengthening formal and non-formal education for girls and reducing gender discrimination in education. The recommendations call for the raising of parental and community awareness regarding the rights of girls to education, using various mass communication tools and multi-media. They also point to the need for focused campaigns aimed at the disadvantaged (viz Dalit, Muslim, Maithili, Madeshi, Tharu, Tamang, Kham Magar and Janajati) communities in remote rural areas.

CHAPTER VII HEALTH

This chapter deals with health services for women. This includes, visits by women to health facilities, constraints and barriers in accessing health services, basic services provided to women, family spacing, sanitation and recent developments in this sector. The study finds significant improvements in women's health and health related activities across the study sites, yet also highlights a number of reasons why in some areas women are still not accessing the available health services.

Women predominantly visit health posts for curative health remedies, indicating the shortcomings in current preventive measures and practices. Women also share their health problems with men but find little empathy in poor, remote rural areas and traditional, conservative communities. While the achievements in lowering maternal and child mortality in Nepal have been widely praised, survey findings supplemented by qualitative interviews and group discussions show that a majority of women are still neither accessing nor using antenatal, neonatal, postnatal and safe abortion services. Furthermore, the frequency of pregnancy complications remains worryingly high. In many areas society still dictates that women should marry comparatively early (in their late teens and early twenties) and bear children almost immediately, potentially leading to high fertility and birth rates and an early curbing of opportunities to pursue

further education or economic opportunities. Clearly, women need to be more fully empowered to make their own self-decisions concerning their reproductive health. The socio-cultural barriers which prevent them from seeking medical treatment need to be seriously tackled.

Despite a noted improvement regarding decision making by women concerning their health, two thirds were still unable to seek the health services they need. Where health services exist, the challenges women face include the immediacy of the response and the quality of care received from the health personnel, distances to these facilities and their affordability. Hygiene and sanitation is still poor despite many decades of health education and public health campaigns.

While the majority of women across the urban and rural study sites have access to some form of healthcare, utilization of this access is disturbingly low, indicating that, like in many other fields of this study, women were unable to take full advantage of the increased opportunities now available to them due to a variety of cultural and societal factors which continue to inhibit their freedom and actions.

The health chapter makes six important recommendations to make health facilities more readily available to women; an emphasis on preventive health; improved gender sensitivity on the part of the spouse and male health professionals; campaigns against early marriage; safe motherhood; quality care during birth; and improved health related education and awareness.

CHAPTER VIII ACCESS TO AND AWARENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

This chapter examines the roles of the media, associational life (community group membership), political educative processes and development interventions and programmes in improving the status of women. Significant political changes have taken place in the last 30 years and women's access to, and knowledge on governance and political institutions has increased markedly over time. Women's participation in political processes and governance has been enhanced and facilitated by the development of a free press and media, the growth of civic society organizations, a multiparty political system, political activists and the educative processes of the political parties and development agencies as well as mobility and intra and international migration.

Community-based civil society organizations (CSOs) have been instrumental in improving women's access to, and awareness of, governance and political institutions. The Interim Constitution guarantees one third representation to women in the Constituent Assembly, which currently also functions as the Parliament. Despite this, in terms of adequate representation and active participation, women still lag behind men in politics, public services and public institutions. The majority of women are apathetic and disenchanting with the political process and are disinclined to take an active part in local politics. Corruption, non-responsiveness to their needs, nepotism and polemics were often cited as the main reasons for their indifference towards participation in local politics.

The study makes four recommendations to utilise the potential capabilities of women in governance and political participation. These are aimed at the effective representation and participation of women at all levels of politics and governance including key strategic institutions and structures. Effective mechanisms of implementation, enforcement, compliance and monitoring of legislation and provisions must be created to include at least one third women in all the key strategic structures of the government. Strengthening stable democracy from below for peace and sustainable development (and a continued role for CSOs in empowering women in politics and governance) are equally needed.

CHAPTER IX ACCESS TO AND KNOWLEDGE OF LEGAL PROVISIONS

This chapter examines the rights of women regarding knowledge of, and access to, legal provisions. The study acknowledges the women's movement for equality which has resulted in various discriminatory laws being amended and also points to important women's rights recognized by the state in the past decade. There remain wide disparities across different communities and study sites however, and it is clear that not all women are aware of their rights. This must be addressed by the government taking adequate initiatives to disseminate information on the rights and entitlements of women. The legal literacy campaigns carried out by INGOs/NGOs and civil associations in the Nepali language have not been effective due to language barriers, and many women who are aware of their legal rights do not know how to go about legal or court proceedings. A lack of financial resources to obtain justice in case of the denial of their rights remains a problem countrywide.

The dominant patriarchal psyche still heavily prevalent in Nepal sees women's rights as a 'conflict' between men and women rather than an issue of gender equity, thus making the issue into a contested one. The societal value system continues to emphasize the obligations of a woman, but fails to establish or uphold her rights. Gender biases, unequal socialization processes and prejudice have conditioned the majority of women to feel silenced, disempowered and weak, and subordinated to men and society. The social and judicial systems are not supportive to the realization of women's rights.

Studies carried out elsewhere have noted the direct relationship of an improved political-economical situation, attainment of education, improved development amenities and a free and fair media with legal awareness and fairer legal provisions for both men and women. With these in mind this chapter makes several recommendations to overcome the current barriers women face when accessing legal provisions. These are, *inter alia*, creating enabling environment for enactment, enforcement and compliance of laws that are pro-women; information dissemination and legal literacy campaigns in order for women to know and exercise their rights; legal provisions and legal procedures that are women friendly including the use of simple Nepali translated into other languages and dialects; a community support system together with manuals, operating systems and procedures to help practitioners and women; affirmative action to strengthen adequate participation of women in law enforcement mechanisms; and provision of legal aid for indigent and indigenous women.

CHAPTER X EXCLUSION OF WOMEN FROM DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

This chapter synthesizes the main conclusions and findings of the preceding nine chapters. It provides perspectives from the qualitative field research 'first person narratives' to complement a number of statistical findings from the earlier NIBR survey which are embedded in each chapter. It deals with the context of development and how a woman's lived experiences, perceptions; confidence and agency determine her status. This reality is juxtaposed against her household environment and the outer (patriarchal) world of community life and other external spheres including interactions with the state at district and national levels. The chapter analyses this in conformity with the past ethno-socio-cultural framework of 'open and closed' societies in Nepal and the important 'inside/outside' dichotomy in gender relations between men and women. Ethno-socio-cultural and ecological variations are also examined from an

'inclusive' perspective. The chapter identifies barriers to women's empowerment at 'differentiated levels' and outlines their resilience in coping with these challenges.

CHAPTER XI SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarises all the salient findings of the dimensions analysed in the main report and highlights recommendations for policy advocacy and action at various levels. It emerges that, despite the impressive achievements in the expansion of education and health facilities and the growth of various forms of media coupled with the advent of a multi-party democratic political system and increment in disposable income, the roles and lived experiences of women in Nepal have actually changed very little when compared with previous studies (1981 & 1995). Women continue to be dominated by the overbearing patriarchal society within which they live. This is not a problem that can be dealt with through 'quick-fix' solutions, for example short-term development programmes which focus only on improving the material standards of living. What is needed is longer, more in-depth studies which fully explore the sources of the structural and ideological underpinnings underlying women's subordination. The recommendations are presented in tabular format and address to a range of stakeholders and policy makers across the development field.

SUMMARY: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Substantial changes have taken place in the past three decades in areas such as service delivery, political participation, communications, technology, mobility and work patterns. Political conflict and environmental degradation combined with a burgeoning population have all significantly impacted the lives of women. The current study follows up on the 1981 and 1995 SOWN studies and highlights interesting contrasts, trends, changes and challenges in relation to the lived experiences, practical wisdom and empirical interpretations of women's lives, their aspirations and opinions.

The study covered 2,547 households (953 in urban and 1,594 in rural areas). There were 14,199 people living in these households (7,167 women and 7,032 men). The average household size in the study sites had decreased from 6.4 in 1981 to 5.6 in 2010, indicating the effectiveness of reproductive health and family planning programmes. Household sizes were above 6 in a number of rural districts and below 5 in Kathmandu, indicating a rural-urban disparity. Two thirds of the households were nuclear families, one third joint families.

Trends in the past 30 years show an increase in the prevalence of nuclear families. Marriage is very common, with virtually all men and women of marrying-age who participated in the study reporting that they are, or have been married. The average

age at first marriage was 19 for women and 22 for men, which shows that the age at first marriage is increasing for both women and men even in traditional communities where women have tended to marry early. Examined in terms of a three decade time span this pattern has remained constant with only a slight increase in marriage age.

The overall trend in various household indices shows a positive development in family well-being, size and reproductive behaviour compared to the past three decades, resulting from better awareness, education and services available through improved infrastructure, transport, communication and education. An urban-rural disparity was noted in terms of the positive effects development initiatives have had on the lives of women, with the data indicating that women living in urban sites have benefited more as a result of such programmes.

In terms of economic progress, without accounting for inflation or changes in purchasing power, the average household income has increased over the past 30 years. Current trends show households diversifying their income generating activities and moving away from a reliance on subsistence agriculture and cash crops to business/trade, salaries and remittances. Women however are still more likely to earn 'in kind' as opposed to cash and lag far behind men in receiving opportunities to go abroad for work. The possession of and command over land, property and capital remains largely in the hands of men, although women have taken advantage of widening employment opportunities, societal norms still dictate that they must spend much of their time working in the unrecognised subsistence and care sectors of the household economy. In this manner, it can be seen that gender roles and relations have not changed much in terms of access to, and control of, significant assets.

Women are becoming more empowered and are initiating an increasing number of decisions within the household. The findings also showed an increase in joint decision making between husbands and wives across all survey sites. However men, with whom the bulk of the household's disposable income is kept, are still responsible for major decisions related to the buying and selling of land or property, large capital investments and starting small business enterprises.

Disparities in decision making abilities are observed in dichotomous settings; i.e. urban-rural, educated-less educated, conservative-liberal and wealthy-poor, across all sites. Those in urban areas with a good education, a strong economic base and

liberal community background, for example women in the Kathmandu valley, urban towns and among the Lohurung Rai and Thakali/Baragoanle Gurung communities, have more decision making powers, possibly due to their increased mobility and their greater involvement in trade and business.

The study observed improved gender relations in urban areas where education and income were higher, and also in sites where women were better educated or living in communities with a long standing exposure to countries outside Nepal (e.g. those who have traditionally sought employment in the British and Indian armies). It also became apparent that in some areas women are now enjoying better access to health care, education and community interaction through association with local social organizations. This is linked to their increasing ability to make sole or joint decisions in the household.

The status of women and girls in education is improving, with preliminary findings suggesting that the gender gap in education is shrinking rapidly. Despite this positive trend, a lack of financial resources and socio-cultural practices still limit the access girls have to education, particularly in poor rural households and remote disadvantaged groups, i.e. in the Dalit, Muslim, Maithili, Tharu, Kham Magar and Tamang communities. Although girls remain engaged in household work far more than boys, this inequality is narrowing as parents see the advantages of education, and across the study sites the findings reported a strong desire to educate girls as well as boys. Time spent in everyday educational activities has been increasing over the years, although in most rural areas boys spend much more time in education than girls. In Dhanusha no girls reported spending any time on education. This reveals low priority given to the education of girls in conservative groups such as the Maithili community, and the burden of dowry associated with marrying women in the terai districts, often to families in adjoining border areas of India.

Women who have studied and received education are also breaking out from their traditional roles of housekeeping and caring for the family and engaging in business, services and wage earning. Similarly, they are better able to take care of their health and take part in community interactions such as civic engagements, acquiring citizenship rights or raising their voices to denounce violence against women. They vote in greater numbers and are critical towards 'duty bearers', demanding more quality services and good governance from public institutions.

Women who did not have the opportunity to receive formal education in the past and those who are excluded presently have in many cases benefited from non-formal education in classes where they learn about health, business and civic institutions, numeracy and literacy.

The study found significant improvements in women's health and health related activities across the study sites, yet also highlights a number of reasons why in some areas women are still not accessing available healthcare services.

Women predominantly visit health posts for curative health remedies, indicating the shortcomings in current preventive measures and practices. Women also share their health problems with men but find little empathy in poor, remote rural areas and traditional conservative communities. While the achievements in lowering maternal and child mortality in Nepal have been widely praised, the study indicates a need to improve women's access to antenatal, neonatal, postnatal and safe abortion services. Furthermore the frequency of pregnancy complications remains worryingly high. In many areas society still dictates that women should marry comparatively early (in their late teens and early twenties) and bear children almost immediately, potentially leading to high fertility and birth rates and an early curbing of opportunities to pursue further education or economic opportunities. Women need to be more fully empowered to make their own self-decision concerning their reproductive health. The socio-cultural barriers which prevent them from seeking medical treatment need to be addressed.

Despite a noted improvement regarding decision making by women concerning their health, two thirds still lack the ability to seek the health services they need. Where health services exist, the problems women face include the immediacy of the response and the quality of the care from the health personnel, distances to these facilities and their affordability. It should be noted however, that access remains a far greater challenge for women in rural areas than for urban women. Hygiene and sanitation is still poor despite many decades of health education and public health efforts such as clean water and proper environmental sanitation campaigns.

Studies show that while the majority of women across the urban and rural study sites had access to some form of healthcare, utilization of this access is disturbingly low. This indicates that, like in many other fields of this study, women were unable to take full advantage of the material progress which has been made and the increased

opportunities now available to them, due to a variety of cultural and societal factors which continue to inhibit their freedom and actions.

Significant political changes have taken place in the last 30 years and women's access to, and knowledge of, governance and political institutions has increased markedly over time. Community-based civil society organisations (CSOs) have been instrumental in enhancing women's participation in political processes and governance. In addition, the growth and development of social media and the educative processes of the development agencies, mobility and intra and international migration have further facilitated this process.

The Interim Constitution guaranteed one third representation to women in the Constituent Assembly, which currently also functions as the Parliament. Despite this, in both adequate representation and active participation, women still lag behind men in politics, public services and public institutions. The majority of women are apathetic and disenchanted with the political process and disinclined to take an active part in local politics. This is relatively true for men as well. Corruption, a lack of responsiveness to their needs, nepotism and polemics were often cited as the main reasons for the indifference of women towards local political participation.

The study acknowledges reasonable success of the women's movement for equality which has resulted in various discriminatory laws being amended and also points to important women's rights recognized by the state in the past decade. There remain wide disparities across different communities and study sites however, and it is clear that not all women are aware of their rights. This must be addressed by the government taking adequate initiatives and appropriate measures to disseminate information on the rights of women. The legal literacy campaigns carried out by INGOs/NGOs and civil society associations in the Nepali language have not been effective due to language barriers, and many women who are aware of their legal rights do not know how to go about legal or court proceedings. This was shared especially during focus groups discussions. A lack of financial resources to obtain justice in case of the denial of rights remains a problem countrywide.

The dominant patriarchal psyche still heavily prevalent in Nepal sees women's rights as a 'conflict' between men and women rather than an issue of gender equity, thus making the issue a contested one. The societal value system continues to emphasize

the obligations of a woman, but fails to establish or uphold her rights. Gender biases, unequal socialization processes and prejudice have conditioned a majority of women to feel silenced and disempowered. The social and judicial systems still have a long way to go in actualizing women's rights. It can be stated that despite the impressive material achievements in the expansion of education and health facilities and the growth of various forms of media, coupled with the advent of a multi-party democratic political system and increment in disposable income, impressive participation in decision making etc., the roles and lived experiences of women in Nepal today have actually changed little when compared with previous studies especially on substantive issues such as gender roles and relations. This became obvious during personal communications, case studies and group discussions. They continue to be dominated by the overbearing patriarchal society within which they live. It will be shown that this is not a problem that can be dealt with by 'quick-fix' solutions in the form of short-term development programmes which focus only on improving the material standards of living. What is needed is longer, more in-depth studies seeking to fully explore the ingrained ideological and institutional complexities underlying women's disadvantaged position and propose optimum measure to address them. Hence, the study, proposes a number of recommendations for timely and effective measures, both immediate and long term; strategic and operational; local, national and global in order to improve the status of women in Nepal. It is believed that these will root out some of the regressive barriers to women's progress, towards an improved life situation for them and their families. This in turn will lead to the holistic development of the country.

Improving the status of women is a complex and challenging task and calls for the interweaving of a multitude of socio-economic, civic and political measures to achieve the immediate and long term goals.

The recommendations suggested below are presented in tabular format and address relevant stakeholders for either policy or implementation interventions. They call on women and their national and grassroots organisations to be the advocates for change in terms of effective policy formulation, implementation and effectiveness including sustained monitoring of efforts towards women's empowerment and development.

Major Recommendations at a Glance

SECTORS	FOCUS	RELEVANT AGENCIES
Household Economy		
<p>Recommendation 1: Women predominantly contribute to the subsistence and care sector of the economy. Ensure women's inclusion in the macroeconomic framework and recognise their vital contribution to the care sector in the 'reproduction' of labour force for the growth of the nation.</p>	<p>Immediate Policy Strategic</p>	<p>State</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: Women own less physical and financial assets such as land, property and vehicles. Providing women incentives through tax breaks and easier access to such assets will help women meet their livelihood needs..</p>	<p>Long Term Policy Strategic</p>	<p>State, monitored by NGOs/CSOs/ Human and Women's right groups</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: Women are migrating overseas to work in the labour market, with current trends showing that women constitute one seventh of the labour force going abroad for employment. Women should be given improved marketable skills, including training in languages, to make themselves more employable overseas. The government should ensure diplomatic and legal provisions for women, i.e. the grading and registration of authorized employment agencies in order to prevent labour and sexual exploitation or the trafficking of women.</p>	<p>Immediate Policy Operational</p>	<p>State monitored by Human/Women's Right Groups Media</p>

SECTORS	FOCUS	RELEVANT AGENCIES
<p>Recommendation 4: Engendering the macro-economic framework must continue as women contribute hugely to the care economy and expanded economy. Policy makers and relevant stakeholders, i.e. government and non-government organisations, academia, action research institutions and the international development community can continue to research and update scientific macro-economic data to include accurate estimates of women’s contributions to the GDP in order to better orient and inform development activities targeted at women.</p>	<p>Long Term Immediate Policy Operational</p>	<p>State; National Planning Commission; Development agencies; I/NGOs</p>
<p>Decision Making</p>		
<p>Recommendation 1: Gender sensitization and advocacy efforts to aid women’s empowerment must be continued in development activities. Men from urban and rural areas should be sensitized to the importance of women’s roles and the importance of their participation in development activities.</p>	<p>Immediate Operational</p>	<p>State; Development agencies; NGOs</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: Gender mainstreaming and sensitization needs to be strengthened at the individual, household, community, societal and state levels. The constitutional and fundamental rights of women must be disseminated and upheld. Built-in inclusion mechanisms should be devised for all core national development plans and programmes including results based monitoring.</p>	<p>Immediate Policy Strategic</p>	<p>State; Advocated by NGOs/CSOs Human/Women’s Rights Groups</p>

SECTORS	FOCUS	RELEVANT AGENCIES
<p>Recommendation 3: Provisions for marketable skills acquired through appropriate vocational training together with general education must be provided to allow women to participate more fully and equally in various economic spheres.</p>	<p>Immediate Operational</p>	<p>State; Development agencies; NGOs/CSOs</p>
<p>Education Sector</p>		
<p>Recommendation 1: Women and girls rely heavily on non-formal education (NFE); therefore, providing quality education through this alternative medium is vital and must continue in the future. Flexibility in the timing and hours of the (NFE) must be carefully considered to allow women to take full advantage of these opportunities, bearing in mind the heavy work burdens of most women, especially in rural areas.</p>	<p>Immediate Strategic Operational</p>	<p>State; Development agencies; NGOs</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: Gender discrimination in education is narrowing but the gains which have been made are not uniform throughout Nepal. The rights of girls to equal education must be disseminated through various media such as mass communications and multi-media, with special focus given to the disadvantaged Dalit, Muslim, Maithali, Madhesi, Tharu, Tamang and Janajati communities in remote rural areas.</p>	<p>Immediate Strategic/Policy Operational</p>	<p>State; Development agencies; NGOs</p>

SECTORS	FOCUS	RELEVANT AGENCIES
<p>Recommendation 3: There is growing evidence that families across the study sites are giving equal priority to the education of sons and daughters, hence, we suggest that schools and formal/informal education be utilized as entry points for development activities, especially those activities that will positively impact women and girls.</p>	<p>Long Term Strategic Operational</p>	<p>State; Development agencies; NGOs</p>
<p>Health General</p>		
<p>Recommendation: One of the important overall recommendations is promotion of reproductive health education and active family planning. Supported by greater reproductive health awareness and improved health education, reproductive behaviour change can lead to smaller family size, delayed marriage and better spaced child birth. This can contribute to improved health and greater educational and economic opportunities for women.</p>	<p>Long Term Strategic Operational</p>	<p>State; Development agencies; NGOs</p>
<p>Recommendation 1: Women do not use available health services to the desired level. This may be due to lack of awareness, traditional beliefs or the cost of the services. Therefore, further studies should be carried out to explore in more detail the reasons why women are not availing themselves of existing health facilities so steps can be taken to remedy this situation.</p>	<p>Immediate Strategic</p>	<p>State; Development agencies; NGOs</p>

SECTORS	FOCUS	RELEVANT AGENCIES
<p>Recommendation 2: Respondents visit health facilities predominantly for curative health treatments. Awareness is negligible in terms of preventive measures due to lack of understanding or lack of promotion by the health services. Hence, community awareness and capacity building for preventative health and promotional activities should be strengthened.</p>	<p>Immediate Operational</p>	<p>State; Development agencies; NGOs</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: Women share their health problems with their male counterparts. Men are at times insensitive when they are in a position to help women. Hence, men should be sensitised and take an active role in improving women's health through positive actions.</p>	<p>Immediate Operational</p>	<p>State; Development agencies; NGOs</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: Early marriage and early pregnancy remain widespread, leading to a number of health related problems and early curbing of economic and educational opportunities. Education and awareness campaigns promoting deferred marriage must be intensified.</p>	<p>Immediate Operational</p>	<p>State; Development agencies; NGOs</p>
<p>Recommendation 5: Improved antenatal, neonatal, postnatal and safe abortion services must be more widely publicised and strengthened in order to improve the sexual and reproductive health of women.</p>	<p>Immediate Operational</p>	<p>State; Development agencies; NGOs</p>

SECTORS	FOCUS	RELEVANT AGENCIES
<p>Recommendation 6: Improved health education and awareness campaigns through multi-media should be strengthened. This can lead to women making their own self-decisions when seeking health care services, especially sexual health care.</p>	<p>Immediate Operational</p>	<p>State; Development agencies; NGOs/Media</p>
<p>Governance and Political Participation</p>		
<p>Recommendation 1: The government, political parties, civic society organisations, the private sector and the international community must continue to emphasize the need for effective representation and participation of women at all levels of politics and governance, including key strategic institutions and structures of the state.</p>	<p>Long Term Immediate Strategic</p>	<p>Government/ NGO/ Media Human/Women Right Groups</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: The effective implementation, enforcement, compliance and monitoring of legislation and provision created to include at least one third women in all the key strategic structures of the government must be enforced.</p>	<p>Long Term Strategic Operational</p>	<p>State NGO/Media Human/Women Right Groups</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: The free press and an entire ‘ecology of media’ have helped women gain an improved understanding of politics and governance. This process must be continued through a focused approach in the media such that women can have better access to political participation in Nepal.</p>	<p>Immediate Operational</p>	<p>Media/NGOs Development Agencies Human/Women Right Groups</p>

SECTORS	FOCUS	RELEVANT AGENCIES
<p>Recommendation 4: An ‘ecology of CSOs’ working for women’s right has had positive effects on women’s awareness and knowledge of governance and politics. This educative process must continue to effectively reach urban women and more efforts must be made to reach rural women in remote disadvantaged areas and communities.</p>	<p>Immediate Operational</p>	<p>NGOs/CBOs/SHGs Media Political Parties</p>
Legal Sector		
<p>General Recommendations: Steps have to be taken to facilitate the de facto realization of the rights of women through the creation of an enabling environment including the adoption of policy measures, the improvement of enforcement and monitoring mechanisms, legal literacy and awareness campaigns, sensitization among law enforcers, effective implementation of comprehensive legal aid services and advocacy for the changing social perceptions regarding women’s rights. The following recommendations are based on an analysis done of the legal knowledge of respondents.</p>	<p>Long Term Strategic Operational</p>	<p>State Monitored by Human/Women Rights Groups NGOs/CSOs</p>
<p>Recommendation 1: Disseminate comprehensible legal information so that women are aware of their rights and therefore able to claim and exercise them more effectively. Ensure legal provisions and legal procedures are easily accessible by having them in simple Nepali language, and translated into other languages and dialects.</p>	<p>Immediate Operational</p>	<p>State Human/ Women Rights Groups NGOs/CSOs</p>

SECTORS	FOCUS	RELEVANT AGENCIES
<p>Recommendation 2: Gender justice should be provided through a woman friendly enabling environment. Ensure human, financial, legal, psychological and mindset changes in the legal system, including in the judiciary, to allow justice to be delivered to women. Procedural hurdles to exercising rights, i.e. citizenship laws, need to be removed. Community support systems such as paralegal groups must be encouraged, using up- to-date instruments, such as management manuals, operating systems and procedures.</p>	<p>Long Term Immediate Strategic Operational</p>	<p>State Judicial System Bar Association Human/Women’s Right Groups NGOs</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: Encourage and strengthen the participation of women in law enforcement mechanisms and increase female membership throughout the legal profession, the Judicial Council, Bar Council and Bar Associations and include provisions for legal aid for indigent and indigenous women.</p>	<p>Long Term Strategic</p>	<p>State Judicial System Human/Women Rights Groups</p>
<p>Exclusion from Development Process</p>		
<p>General Recommendation: Women as a group are generally disadvantaged, marginalized and vulnerable. Within this category women from Muslim, Maithili/ Madhesi, Tharu, Tamang and Magar are doubly disadvantaged. Policies, programmes and affirmative action must specifically target such disadvantaged women and women in remote rural areas in the future.</p>	<p>Immediate Strategic</p>	<p>State Development Agencies/CSOs Human/Women Rights Groups</p>

SECTORS	FOCUS	RELEVANT AGENCIES
<p>(A) Recommendations aimed at the individual level</p> <p>Recommendation 1: Education, positive discrimination, economic opportunities, and enforcement of legal provisions on social evils on such as untouchability, constructive leadership, personality development and focused targeting by CSOs will help to empower the women of Nepal.</p>	<p>Immediate Operational</p>	<p>NGOs Development Agencies</p>
<p>(B) Recommendations aimed at the Household Level</p> <p>Recommendation 2 : Women are vulnerable on various counts due to social-cultural practices, gender based violence, the practice of dowry and trafficking. Social, economic, civic and human rights activities must be developed in these areas to empower women in positive ways.</p>	<p>Immediate Strategic Operational</p>	<p>Human/Women Rights Groups NGOs State</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: Livelihood support in terms of asset, know-how, market and financial capital can be provided to women on a priority basis. This includes inheritance of parental property and rights over such capital, property or other productive assets.</p>	<p>Immediate Strategic Operational</p>	<p>State Development Agencies NGOs</p>

SECTORS	FOCUS	RELEVANT AGENCIES
<p>(C) Recommendations aimed at the Community Level</p> <p>Recommendation 4: Women deserve greater opportunities to act as leaders, managers and peacemakers in their communities, such as through microfinance credit and resource groups, among other possibilities. Affirmative action must continue such that women are included and capacitated and can both represent and participate effectively in local governance, CSOs and the market sector.</p>	<p>Immediate Operational</p>	<p>State NGOs Development Agencies</p>
<p>(D) Recommendations aimed at the State level</p> <p>Recommendation 5: Citizenship privileges such as inheritance and ownership including the transfer of birth-rights through mothers should be guaranteed as basic human right based on global standards and practices.</p>	<p>Long Term Immediate Strategic</p>	<p>State Local Government Human/Women Rights Groups</p>
<p>Recommendation 6: The state needs to ensure equitable representation and participation of women in all public institutions, i.e. diplomatic services, constitutional bodies, human rights organisations, the judiciary, legislature and executive, government ministries and departments, district level government offices, educational institutions, health institutions, the army and police as well as civil services.</p>	<p>Long Term Strategic</p>	<p>State monitored by Human /Women Rights Groups</p>

SECTORS	FOCUS	RELEVANT AGENCIES
<p>Recommendation 7: Affirmative action, reservations and preferential treatment can be given to women from disadvantaged communities such as Dalit, Muslim, Madhesi, Tharu, Kham Magar, Tamang and other vulnerable communities, including persons with disabilities. Protection and progressive legislations aimed at women who are currently shunned by society, such as lesbians and sex workers are also urgently called for.</p>	<p>Long Term Immediate Strategic Operational</p>	<p>State Development Agencies Development NGOs</p>
<p>Recommendations 8: Livelihood and food security are under severe pressure. Supplies of livestock, pasture and so forth are dwindling and not yielding feasible returns due to a number of factors such as climate change, conflict, land fragmentation and population explosion, and in most cases, women have borne the brunt of the impact. Government, non-government and private sectors together with the international community must urgently create and implement policies and programmes designed to effectively tackle these challenges.</p>	<p>Long Term Immediate Strategic Operational</p>	<p>State Development Agencies Development NGOs Private Sector Media</p>

NB: The recommendations above are neither compartmentalized nor meant to stand alone but dovetail or overlap with a number of strategies and stakeholders. These are as follows:

Focus: Long Term (5 years) or Immediate; Policy or Implementation; Strategic or Operational.

Relevant Stakeholders: State (Government); International Development Agencies (including INGOs); NGOs (including CSOs, CBOs, SHGs i.e. Mothers Groups/Forest User Groups/Natural Resource Management Groups/Credit Groups etc), Human Right organisations; Women's Right organisations.



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