

Socio-Economic Status of Women Farmers

A Sociological Study of Bhadaure-Tamagi V.D.C., Kaski

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Abstract

The socio-economic status of women farmers is low because of inherent social hierarchy and economic deprivation. The main objective of the study is to find out the socio-economic status of women farmers and to investigate this different research tools is applied mainly interview schedule. The study reveals that although women's agricultural labor force is high but there has not been any significant change in the status of women farmers. Women are still deprived and discriminated in terms economic ground. The Dalits are mainly suffering from this deprivation and discrimination. So, women farmers need a special concern for their livelihood and empowerment. There is an immense need of women empowerment programmes and cash earning packages to break this vicious circle of economic deprivation.

[**Key Words** : Women Farmers, Hierarchy, Deprivation, Women's Participation and Household Chores]

Introduction

Nepal is an agrarian country where more than 80 percent of her population depends on agriculture for their subsistence. But in Nepal agriculture sector only accounts for more than 40 percent of National Gross Domestic Production (NPC, 2001). Mostly women are involved in agro-production and therefore agriculture used to be considered as women's domain. However, women's socio-economic status is not satisfactory in Nepal. Male dominated family system has provided a limited scope for women to assert their identity. They are marginalized from economic and social opportunities due to illiteracy, poverty and conservative social taboos (www.unescap.org). It is obvious that farming is a labor-intensive work and both men and women involve in production. However, contribution of women in various farm activities is more than that of men. Increasing trend of temporary emigration of males in search of subsidiary occupation and education has further added extra task burden on the shoulder of farming women. Emigration has caused to feminize the agriculture system on the

one hand and increased the number of female-headed households on the other. This has raised the issues of gender-free equitable and justifiable distribution of benefits of developmental activities and creation of an environment for equal participation in family decision-making process and agriculture.

The contribution of women to agricultural production and household food security is substantial. It is stated that women in rural areas grow at least 50 percent of the world's food stuff (FAO, 1990). Where permanent drought and other limitations has forced men to migrate, women's participation in agricultural tasks that were traditionally done by men has increased. In some countries women perform laborious and repetitive tasks around the year, whereas men's works are limited to ploughing and threshing periods. In several cases, irrigation, pest control and fertilizer application are the exclusive tasks of men, while threshing and marketing are the exclusive tasks of women. They work in all aspects of cultivation, including planting, thinning, weeding, applying fertilizer and harvesting. They are actively involved in post-harvest activities and livestock production, particularly small animal and dairy production (FAO, 1990 cited in Das, 1995). It is estimated that a significant proportion of women in developing countries spend up to two-third of their times in traditional agriculture and marketing. Their working hours tend to exceed than those of men.

Nonetheless, Nepalese women farmers are not far from the state of socio-economic deprivation as seen in other parts of the world. Agriculture still plays a pivotal role in the Nepalese economy. About 96 percent women are involved in agricultural works. It is becoming progressively feminized (Thapaliya, 2001). Looking at the pattern of time allocation by gender in the selected districts of Nepal, it is reported that on an average women work for 16.42 hours per day whereas men work for 12.41 hours per day (Uprety, 2004). High involvement of women in weeding, seed preparation, land preparation, digging, harvesting, harrowing, transplanting, planting and manuring, and men's involvement in ploughing and farm preparation are usual processes. Although there is high involvement of women in total

agricultural activities, their involvement in decision-making is meager. As such the issue of the roles of women farmers in agriculture has been recognized as an arena of concern in the process of agriculture development endeavors.

Research Problem

Nepali women are among the worst with exclusionary practices embedded in society from the very beginning. Women and girls are discriminated in all facets of life. They are victimized from rigid caste, norms, values, taboos and deprived from access to cultural, economic and political opportunities than men. Weak judicial system fails to uphold women's rights. Despite various efforts of government and non-governmental organizations, there has been little progress in socio-economic status of women farmers. The condition of gender relation in agriculture is not appreciative and economic. Women and men's role in agriculture are classified and determined by socio-cultural plus economic practices of a society. In most Nepalese families women have considerably less access to and control over family resources than men. Most of the women devote their time in non-remunerative works such as washing, cooking, cleaning, rearing and bearing of children which are not valued in monetary terms, and are merely considered as the mandatory duties of women. Women involvement in any agriculture works is higher rather than men. In crop farming related works, women's involvement is comparatively higher than men. Except ploughing, field preparations and digging, women involvement is comparatively higher than men. Though there is high involvement of women in agriculture activities, women social and economic conditions are miserable. They have no rights on landownership and less participation in decision-making. They work hard in farms by tolerating thirst, hunger and their personal aspiration but their labor is not valued. Except agricultural works, their roles are mostly confined to uneconomic household chores.

In such scenario, this study has tried to find out the socio-economic status of women farmers, the dual role they have to play in farm and household and the problems they face in the household affairs and in the societal

level. The present study attempts to find out the answers of following research questions that are related to women farmers of Bhadaure- Tamagi Village Development Committee of Kaski district:

- What are the socio-economic characteristics of the women farmers at Bhadaure- Tamagi VDC?
- What sort of participation women farmers have in the study area?
- What is the role of women farmers in providing economic support to the family?
- Who does what in household chores and farm activities?
- What is the condition of gender relation among women farmers?
- Who controls the household and farming decisions?
- What are the main problems faced by women farmers in the farm and society as a whole?

Objectives and Research Methods

The study aims to trace out the socio-economic status of women farmers at Bhadaure-Tamagi Village Development Committee of Kaski district. The study attempts to investigate the general characteristics of women farmer, their access/ownership to resources and participation in decision-making process within the family and at village level.

This is an exploratory research primarily based on primary data. The primary data are obtained by applying stratified random sampling technique. The household survey was made and stratified into three different strata according to their socio-economic characteristics. Out of the total 177 households of Bhadaure-Tamagi VDC, 72 (i.e. 40%) households were sampled, the fieldwork was carried out from August 16th to 22nd August 2007. Mainly the interview schedule was developed and used to collect the necessary informations from the sampled households. Beside this, key informant interview and observation method were used to obtain the information. The data collected from the field survey are processed by applying SPSS package and analyzed with the help of descriptive statistical tools.

Study Area

Bhadaure- Tamagi VDC is one of the VDCs of Kaski district in the hilly region of Nepal. It lies west of Pokhara city and connected by 6.5 km long dirt road to the Pokhara-Baglung highway. The village is inhabited by different caste/ethnic groups of people and known for typical lifestyle of the mountains. Bhadaure- Tamagi village is mostly inhabited by Gurungs(51.85%) followed by other caste such as Dalit (28.75%), Brahmin (11.50%), Nepali/ Pariyar (3.90%), Chhetri (0.80%) and others (3.21%). They have tendency to live in cluster of their own caste/ethnic groups. They are mostly depended on agriculture for livelihood. Mostly women are involved in agricultural activities whereas men partly work in farmland. Besides high involvement, prevailing lower socio-economic status of women farmers is very much pronounced. Privileged families mainly richer Gurungs and Brahmins are socio-economically better than others. Underprivileged groups are Dalits who have traditionally been left behind by development interventions. Their participation varies due to their caste or ethnicity and economic status they hold in the family. Being a settlement of multiple caste/ethnicity and accessible location from the city centre Bhadaure-Tamagi VDC was selected as the suitable site for present study.

Socio-economic Status of Women Farmers and Their Role in Household Economy

Subsistence is the main motto of agriculture. Both male and female are involved in farming but women play an important role in agriculture and household activities in the VDC. Even then the status of women in the study area is poor as compared with male due to various socio-economic, cultural and religious factors. There are differences in landholdings, food sufficiency, allocation of resources and role in decision making by caste/ethnic groups. The hierarchy of population and socio-economic discrimination/deprivation are well reflected in the society. The study reveals that both Gurungs and Brahmins fall on large landholding category whereas the Dalits belong to landless and marginal landholding categories. The Dalits are mostly working as sharecroppers or seasonal agricultural laborers. However, many of them earn their bread through foreign employment.

Selling of local alcohol, dairy products, goat and poultry farming supplements the income of majority households. Economic hierarchy is as diverse as ethnic diversity. These households can be roughly categorized into three economic strata. The first, upper strata consist of very few population and households, who enjoy good living standard. Second, middle strata maintain moderate living and the third strata lives hard life. The economic aspect has significant effects on the different realms of village life such as education, socio-political status and health. However, the study has proved that better education and economic status determines the better status of women farmers. The Gurung women farmers enjoy better status than the Brahmin and Dalits women farmers due to their better economic status.

Women's personal asset is one among the key component indicating women's economic condition. More the women has personal assets, the stronger is the women's economic status in the family. The study reveals that women have less ownership on assets due to fewer roles in decision-making and leadership. Economic status is an important and determining component of social change and development. So, the study aimed to explore women's economic status on the basis of assets that women owned.

The Gurungs have better status in the study area compared to Brahmins and Dalits because of their strong economic condition whereas Dalits suffer from caste- based discrimination. The level of education is very low among the females compared to males. The study also proves that agriculture is the main occupation of the area of study where women's involvement is higher compared to men. Women farmers' socio-economic status in the research area is poor because most of the women have no personal assets; they have very less role in income generating activities. The Household chore has primarily become women's domain. The women farmers in the study area suffer from unequal division of labor. Women were found highly involved in domestic works mainly caring children (98.2%), cooking food (91.7%), cleaning house (88.9%), fetching water (76.4%) and washing clothes (76.4%).

Women farmers face overburden of work both in household chores and farm activities. Men in the household chores support women but in the case of farm works women bear high workload. Though women's involvement is found higher in agrarian works they have very little economic contribution to support their family. Almost all the farm works except ploughing is carried by the women. The women farmer also suffers from unequal division of labor in farm works as similar to the household works (see Table 1).

Table1: Division of Labor in Farm Work

Agricultural activities	Person						Total
	Women	Men	Both	Wage laborers	Both and wage laborers	Women and wage labors	
Farm preparation	2.8 *	48.6	1.4	18.1	-	2.8	100.0
Manure carrying	36.1 *	8.3	19.4	18.1	6.9	11.1	100.0
Fertilizer application	50.0*	50.0	-	-	-	-	100.0
Seeds	59.7*	15.3	18.1	4.2	1.4	1.4	100.0
Planting	52.8*	2.8	22.2	6.9	2.8	12.5	100.0
Weeding	43.1 *	2.8	23.6	12.5	4.2	13.9	100.0
Irrigation	13.2*	84.9	1.9				100.0
Harvesting	36.1 *	2.8	30.6	8.3	9.7	12.5	100.0
Marketing	50.0*	50.0	-	-	-	-	100.0
Storage	79.2*	6.9	13.9	-	-	-	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2007

**Based of Percentage*

Women carry out majority of activities pertaining to household chores and farm activities. Men's involvement was relatively limited. The average

time spent by women respondents in farming was more than that of men. Although women spent most of their time both in agriculture and household chores their work has not been counted as paid or productive work. Women farmers in the study area were found depending on their husband or male member of the family for financial purpose. It was also found that almost all women farmers were active in financial transaction due to the absence of male member in the family. This tendency was found mostly in Gurungs. Although the women farmers were active in financial transaction but they have no access to income generating activities. Women were still bounded by the social taboos. Women have very less financial contribution to the family.

Women have very less role in financial contribution to the family. Women were completely dependent on her husband for financial support. Women were unable to own property and have less access to resources. Very few women sell the surplus crops in the market and the ratio of keeping the money earned from crops was equal but was not free to spend the earned money for which they need to take the permission of the husband and the family members. Women were active in financial transaction of the family in the absence of the male member and female-headed households. In the study area, women have very less economic independence compared to men. They have no property right and less access to resources. Women have to get permission from the husband to spend the money.

Women have no economic independence, which shows women's economic status very poor. Women have no access to income generating trainings. Very few of them were trained in this regard. Women have no knowledge about sale of surplus crops in the market. They were found completely dependent on their husband or the male member of the family for financial help. Women in financial contribution to their family were very small than the women having no access to financial contribution. Women were far from saving the income and for their personal expenditure.

Women farmers in the study area comprises of mainly Gurungs, Dalits and the Brahmins. Due to male out- migration females take decisions on all the financial and household matters. Comparatively, Brahmins have the less

decision power in this matter. Very few women farmers in the study area were found literate and trained due to which they have no access to financial contribution. Only few women farmers contribute to their family by selling domestic animals, vegetables, dairy products etc. Women in the study area were of subordinate status and women have no access to control over income. Women lacks in opportunity to enhance their capacity and trainings to boost themselves and actively participate in financial contribution to the family. Infact, the rate of women's role in financial contribution was very poor because large portion of women respondents (56.9%) have no access to financial contribution.

Women Farmer's Role in Decision-Making

Women's household decision-making input in a given community is directly related to the strength of the inside/outside dichotomy. The Nepalese decision making pattern clearly indicates that when major decisions areas involved money, those decisions involved money, those decisions domains were men's when money was not involved, such as farm activities and food sharing, decisions were made entirely by women or jointly with men. The male members of the family solely do the financial activities. Women have greater input in household decision-making. Although women play a major role in overall decision-making process, their role is more active in domestic sectors. The male member of the family solely makes the economic decisions and women have greater input in household chores. In the study area, the data reveals that women make the major domestic or households decisions.

Table 2: Household Decision Making by Caste/ Ethnicity*

The socio-economic status is closely linked with women power of decision-making. Women constitute the main farming population but their role in decision-making is minimal. Among all caste/ethnic groups women farmer's household decision-making process are in better position (see Table 2). Women are less accessible to skill development trainings and income generating activities due to unawareness, illiteracy and lack of time and overburden of work. Nowadays the family somehow appreciates women's labor but majority of women are still deprived.

Women play the catalyst role in family and household decision-making. But as far as the matter of decision making beyond family is concerned the participation was seen very low. Male heads most of the families and they make economic decision and other major decision. Male in the study area mostly dominates the village level decision and meetings. Looking at the overall participation of women in village level decision-making and meetings women's participation was not remarkable due to hesitation, illiteracy, unawareness and patriarchal taboos. Out of the total 8.3% women reported high participation, 25.0% equal, 36.1% low participation and 30.6% reported no participation in VDC level decision making respectively. The given data also reveals the fact that Brahmins have the popular participation in village level decision-making and meetings compared to the Gurungs and Dalits because Brahmin women farmers are educated than the others. Gurungs have good participation compared to the Dalits. Training is one major component of women's independence and decision-making. Women who have never access of information and exposure can upgrade their knowledge attitude, behavior and skill through the training most of the trainings were organized by the coordination of line agencies to impart awareness and knowledge especially to women farmer. Dalits are found far behind in receiving training than the Gurungs. Brahmin women farmers have better status in training (see Table 3).

Table3: Trainings Attended by Caste/Ethnicity

Trainings attended	Caste/ Ethnicity			Total	
	Brahmin	Gurung	Dalit	Number of HHs	Percent
Trained	6 (50%)	7 (17.5%)	2 (10%)	15	20.8
Not Trained	6 (50%)	33 (82.5%)	18 (90%)	57	79.2
Total	12 (100.0%)	40 (100.0%)	20 (100.0%)	72	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2007

*Figures in parenthesis are percentage based on caste/ ethnicity

In order to bring changes in knowledge, attitude and behavior of the women different social groups have been established in the study area. To uplift the women's socio-economic status women are made involved in different social groups. It is found in the study area that the community development activities through social group are interlinked with social awareness (decision-making), training and other exposure programs. These social groups aimed to enhance social and economic status of women, their children and families. Social group has increased level of confidence, assertiveness among the women in the study area. So, the trend of women involvement in social group has gradually increased. (see Table 4).

Table4: Women Farmer's Affiliation in Social Groups/Organization by Caste/Ethnicity*

Membership of social group	Caste/ethnicity			Total	
	Brahmin	Gurung	Dalit	Number of HHs	Percent
Affiliated	10 (83.3%)	26 (65.0%)	12 60.0%	48	66.7
Not affiliated	2 (16.7%)	14 (35.0%)	8 (40.00%)	24	33.3
Total	12 (100.0%)	40 (100.0%)	20 (100.0%)	72	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2007

*Figures in parenthesis are percentage based on caste/ethnicity

Conclusion

Socio-economic status of women farmers in the patriarchal dominated linear society of Nepal is predominantly poor and deprived. The women farmers have very low participation in providing economic support to the family and decision-making. Their level of education is also low. As a result, domination in decision-making is pervasive even in horizontal society of Gurung community. Non-economic household chores have been women's domain. Majority of women farmers are involved in saving and credit programme and very few of them have received skill development trainings. Economic status of Gurungs is better than that of Dalits and Brahmins but in overall there is no difference in freedom, economic participation and independence, role in decision-making and property ownership pattern. In fact, socio-economic status of women farmers is highly determined by community setting, culture, household roles and responsibilities, encouragement and support from the family members, attitude and perception towards women in the community, mobility, education, awareness and training. The structure made by men to share power with women is less accepted by men hence women are not involved in decision-making process on the other hand women farmers hesitate to participate in decision-making due to traditional cultural practices. Women are socio-economically deprived in many respects. Much more time of women is spent in uneconomic activities. They have the lack of time to involve in income generating productive activities. Women's labor is exploited because they have to work very hard both at farms and at home. Males are involved only in less physical work. Viewing on women's role, they work more than men but get lower economic value in the society. In order to uplift/empower women's status they are provided vocational training opportunity to enhance their skills and knowledge. This will help to generate income opportunities and raise women farmers' confidence towards an independent life. Empowerment is essential for women for her self-esteem; allocate energy and support for women to lead a human life.

Empowerment process needs to focus on gaining power, prestige and property for women to reduce existing inequalities between men and women in the family, community and society. The local NGOs, leaders, institution

play pivotal role to raise their overall status. Efforts of agricultural development projects must be targeted to women farmers. Women farmers need extension education and awareness programmes. Therefore, they should be facilitated with income generating opportunities and skill development trainings. Participation of rural women in decision-making should be mandatory from programme formulation to implementation phases of development. The concerned authorities should empower women through providing their rights and justice.

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