

## IMPACT OF FEDERALISM ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN NEPAL: CASE OF CHANDRAGIRI MUNICIPALITY

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### Abstract

Women's empowerment in Nepal has been a soaring issue since the promulgation of the Federal Republic Constitution in 2015. The foundation of women's empowerment ensures women's economic participation, educational attainment, and political representation. The challenges include disparities in access to resources and services, cultural norms that shape gender roles, and the effectiveness of local initiatives promoting gender equality. Understanding these factors is essential for fostering inclusive development and empowering women within the community. This study aimed to evaluate the state of women's empowerment after the introduction of federalism and analyze the impact of local government actions on women's empowerment in the area. The research used a descriptive design, focusing on Kathmandu's Chandragiri Municipality, Ward 12. A random sample of 121 households from the municipality provided data on women's empowerment. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as frequency tables, percentages, and t-tests. The findings indicated that the local government positively affected various aspects of women's empowerment, including property ownership rights, decision-making in family budgets, investment and expenditure, recreational choices, and responsibilities related to child health and education. The study concluded that public policies promoting the participation of women have significantly influenced socio-economic aspects both within families and the broader society. It is recommended to support efforts aimed at developing policies and programs that promote women's empowerment and to assist local governments, policymakers, and agencies in implementing these initiatives in Chandragiri Municipality.

**Keywords:** women's empowerment, economic participation, educational attainment, property ownership, recreational choices

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background

Women's empowerment is a complex concept that spans social, economic, and political dimensions, all aimed at improving the status and rights of women. It involves providing women with the resources and opportunities to exercise their rights, participate in decision-making, and gain control over their lives (Reshi & Sudha, 2022). This concept also includes issues such as social discrimination, justice, women's rights, social inclusion, and other societal challenges (Bhandari, 2012). Historically, women's roles were limited to household tasks, but as industry has evolved, their societal roles have shifted significantly (Tariq et al., 2020). Even with historical international challenges, women have made progress in social, economic, and political spheres. Empowerment is seen as a mechanism for achieving gender equality, equipping women with socioeconomic opportunities (Dhamala, 2019). In patriarchal societies, empowering women within the context of local governance requires a comprehensive approach addressing psychological, social, economic, and political aspects. Recent studies highlight the importance of these elements in designing effective empowerment programs (Makinde, 2021). Surveys among female leaders emphasize the need for a competency framework that addresses job-specific requirements, gender-focused educational initiatives, and support from non-governmental organizations (Vander et al., 2019). Family dynamics often shape women's political participation, with many serving as 'mask representatives' to advance family interests rather than acting independently (Butt & Victor, 2014). Therefore, a participatory democracy approach, with a focus on local representation, is crucial for genuine women's empowerment in politics. Decentralization policies, which offer increased opportunities for citizen engagement, also enhance political empowerment (Khan, 2011). Establishing competency frameworks tailored to women's needs in local governance can support their entry and advancement into leadership roles (Vander et al., 2019). Navigating family dynamics to ensure independent and impactful political participation is also critical (Butt & Victor, 2014). Comprehensive programs, regulatory measures, and educational initiatives are essential for fostering inclusive and equitable societies (Makinde, 2021). Prioritizing psychological, social, economic, and political empowerment enables women to make meaningful contributions to their communities (Makinde, 2021). Policies promoting genuine representation and decentralization are key to achieving gender equality and empowering women in local governance (Khan, 2011).

Legal reforms and policies promote women's representation in politics and include quotas across sectors in Nepal. However, entrenched patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles continue to impede progress. Economic empowerment remains critical, with many women facing limited access to education, employment,

and financial resources. Social norms often constrain women's autonomy, especially in rural areas. Despite these hurdles, grassroots organizations and women-led initiatives are working to promote empowerment through education, entrepreneurship, and advocacy. The government's commitment to gender equality, bolstered by international support and awareness campaigns, is advancing a more inclusive society for Nepalese women. Continued, focused efforts are necessary to address deep-rooted inequalities and ensure the full realization of women's rights and potential in Nepal.

Several studies have been done in the various sectors such as the impact on income, loan, education, and assets in women's empowerment, but few studies have been done in the sector such as family budget decisions, investment decisions, property ownership, expenditure decision, child health and education and recreational decision. There is a gap between current research and previous study conducted. So, this study has been undertaken to examine the relationship between the system of local government and women's empowerment. This study deals with certain concepts of women's empowerment and the available literature relating to women's empowerment and capacity building, especially about the contribution of family budgeting and property ownership in women's empowerment in Nepal. The study focused on the assessment of women's empowerment status after federalism and the impact of local government on various aspects of women's empowerment such as property ownership, women's freedom in budgeting, investment, expenditure decisions, children's health and education, and recreational decisions.

## **1.2 Statement of problems**

Women's empowerment ensures equal rights for women, preventing oppression and improving societal welfare. Economic growth is enhanced when women advance through education, job training, and skills development. Research indicates that the interplay between women's empowerment and financial development impacts employment and economic growth across various income groups globally, including upper-middle-income, lower-middle-income, and low-income countries (Asaleye & Strydom, 2023). Family businesses can serve as platforms for women's entrepreneurship, enabling their active engagement in economic activities and independent decision-making regarding business ideas. Empowering women is vital for accelerating economic progress and is regarded as essential for national advancement (Mubeen et al., 2022). However, women's financial independence is often constrained by limited access to loans, financial awareness, and gender biases. Women still require support from their families, society, and the state to realize their empowerment. Developing gender-friendly policies and programs is essential for providing this support and promoting gender equality (Gautam, 2020). Barriers like limited financial literacy, gender-based societal expectations, and unequal asset distribution need to be addressed through gender-sensitive financial services,

including microfinance institutions offering childcare and transport assistance (Joshi, 2023). Despite constitutional guarantees for women's representation, such as the 33 percent quota in Nepalese government sectors, only 11 percent of women got the election ticket. Why? Why the situation of women is so miserable in Nepal? Women are seriously victimized socially, economically, culturally, physically, and politically as well (Dhamala, 2019). Decentralization policies hold promise by enhancing local citizen engagement, thereby amplifying women's voices in decision-making processes. Overcoming structural and cultural obstacles requires comprehensive empowerment programs that acknowledge and support women's multifaceted societal roles. In this context, the study has aimed to address the following research questions:

- i) What is the women's empowerment status after federalism in the study area?
- ii) How is the impact of local government on women's empowerment in the study area?

### **1.3. Objectives of the study**

The specific objectives of this study are:

- i. To assess women's empowerment status after federalism in the study area.
- ii. To analyze the impact of federalism on women's empowerment in the study area.

### **1.4. Method of data collection and analysis**

The research is based on the descriptive research design. A close-ended questionnaire was prepared and distributed to the female household members who were above 25 years old in the study area. Among them, some respondents were able to fill up the questionnaire themselves without explaining the question. The remaining questionnaire was filled out by the researcher. A quantitative primary survey technique was used for collecting information by using a structural questionnaire. Two points of time were considered in the study of federalism (i.e. 2007 AD) and after federalism (i.e. 2023 AD). So, the study is cross-sectional. After comparing the gender-wise population of Chandragiri municipality across its 15 wards, ward number 12 was identified as having the highest female population. As a result, it was chosen as the focus for this study due to its potential for providing valuable insight into gender dynamics within the local community. The specific choice of studying this location was due to its proximity to Kathmandu Metropolitan, which offers various facilities and opportunities for women's empowerment. The number of female populations is 6496 in the study area. W.W. Daniel's sample size formula (Daniel, 1999) is used to determine the sample size. The formula for determining the sample size for a proportion of a population is as follows:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p)}{d^2}$$

Where:

n = Required sample size

Z = Z-value (the critical value of the normal distribution corresponding to the desired confidence level, e.g., 1.96 for 95% confidence)

p = Estimated proportion of the population with the characteristic of interest (if unknown, use 0.5 for maximum variability)

d = Margin of error or precision (the acceptable error in the estimate, e.g., 0.05 for  $\pm 5\%$ )

A sample of 121 females from different households was randomly selected.

By gathering insights directly from female residents through these questionnaires, the study sought to shed light on their experiences and perspectives within the local community.

The demographic variables of the respondents are presented and analyzed descriptively. The variables of interest included are women's empowerment, property ownership, family budgeting, investment decisions, freedom of household expenditure, children's health and education, and recreational decisions.

## 2. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 2.1. Demographic status

The age distribution of the sample population is presented in Table 1. The largest age group is 46-55 years, comprising 44 individuals, which accounts for 36.4 percent of the total sample. This indicates that a significant proportion of the population belongs to this age group. Furthermore, the above 55 age category includes 39 individuals, or 32.2 percent of the sample, indicating a substantial representation of older individuals in the population. The 36-45 years age group consists of 27 individuals, making up 22.3 percent of the sample population. In contrast, the smallest group is in the 25-35 years category, consisting of only 11 individuals and representing just over nine percent (9.1 %) of the total population. Overall, this distribution highlights that a majority of the sample population is older than middle-aged with significant concentrations in both middle-aged (46-55 years) and older (above 55) age groups.

Table 1: Age group of respondents

Age	Frequency	Percent
25-35	11	9.1
36-45	27	22.3
46-55	44	36.4
Above 55	39	32.2
Total	121	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

The data shows a clear picture of the marital status distribution within the sample population. Among the 121 individuals surveyed, 94, or approximately 77.7 were married. This highlights that a significant majority of the surveyed population is currently a married respondent. In contrast, 27 individuals comprising about 22.3 percent were unmarried. While this group represents a smaller portion of the total sample, it still provides insight into the number of unmarried individuals within this population. The data underscores the prevalence of marriage among respondents and emphasizes that marriage is indeed predominant within this group. Table 2 shows marital status more clearly.

Table 2: Marital status of respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent
Unmarried	27	22.3
Married	94	77.7
Total	121	100.0

*Source: Field survey, 2023*

The data presented in Table 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the educational backgrounds of the surveyed population, shedding light on the distribution and prevalence of various educational levels within the sample group. The findings indicate a diverse range of educational backgrounds among the 121 individuals surveyed. The largest proportion, at 28.1 percent, holds a Plus 2, signifying that this level of education is prevalent within the group.

Table 3: Education level of the respondents

Education Level	Frequency	Percent
Illiterate	7	5.8
Literate	34	28.1
SLC	19	15.7
Plus 2	34	28.1

Graduate	25	20.7
Postgraduate	2	1.7
Total	121	100.0

*Source:* Field survey, 2023

Table 4 offers a comprehensive insight into the diverse range of professions within the sample group, comprising 121 individuals. It reveals a varied occupational landscape, reflecting different roles and employment statuses within the community. The largest proportion of the sample, constituting 39.7 percent, identified as self-employed. This finding suggests a prevalent entrepreneurial spirit within the community, with a significant portion engaged in managing their businesses or ventures. Following closely behind were housewives, representing 24.8 percent of the group. This indicates that domestic roles play a substantial part within this demographic and highlights the importance of household and caregiving responsibilities among its members.

Table 4: Profession of the respondents

Profession	Frequency	Percent
Student	12	9.9
Housewife	30	24.8
Government Job holder	2	1.7
Private jobholder	29	24.0
Self-employed	48	39.7
Total	121	100.0

*Source:* Field survey, 2023

Private jobholders accounted for 24 percent of the sample population, indicating that employment within private companies or organizations is also significant within this subset. Students made up 9.9 percent of the group, reflecting an important segment comprising individuals still pursuing their education while being part of this sample.

## 2.2. Women's empowerment status

Table 5 indicates that a substantial majority of individuals (121), 95 percent, believe they are responsible for child health and education. The remaining 5 percent of women did not shoulder responsibility for their children's health and education. This is followed by expenditure decision which accounts for 92.5 percent. The remaining 7.5 percent of the women population did not enjoy household expenditure decisions. The next to this is captured by the family budget decision that holds 91 percent. However, 9 percent of them did not have the right to decide on the family budget. Then followed by property ownership which comprise 84 percent. In contrast, 16 percent of respondents did not have property ownership. The lowest percent of affirmation was

82.5 who revealed that they are free to make recreational decisions. However, 17.4 percent of respondents revealed that they could not decide on recreational activities.

Table 5: Women's empowerment status after federalism

Determinants of women's empowerment	<u>Percentage</u>	
	Yes	No
Family budget decision	91	9
Investment decision	91.7	8.3
Property ownership	84	16
Expenditure decision	92.5	7.5
Child's health and education	95	5
Recreational decision	82.6	17.4

Source: Field survey, 2023

### 2.3. Impact of federalism on women's empowerment

To analyze the impact of federalism on various aspects of women's empowerment before and after the introduction of federalism, a comparison was made between two periods: 2007 (before federalism) and 2023 (after federalism). This comparison is presented in Table 6, which highlights the changes in different aspects of women's empowerment over time. The analysis involved examining various indicators such as access to education and healthcare, employment opportunities, property ownership rights, involvement in community decision-making processes, and overall household decision-making authority. By comparing these indicators before and after the introduction of federalism, a deeper understanding of how local government has influenced women's empowerment within Chandragiri municipality's ward number 12 is gained. This kind of analysis is crucial for policymakers and researchers to comprehend the specific impacts of decentralization on gender equality within local communities. It can also help inform future policy decisions aimed at furthering women's empowerment initiatives within the context of federalized governance structures.

Table 6 shows the impact of local women's empowerment on children's health and education-related decisions before and after the implementation of federalism. 4.1 percent of women were able to make decisions for their own child's health and education while 95.9 percent were not enabled to decide for their child's health and education before federalism in 2007. After federalism the scenario changed dramatically, 95 percent of women can make decisions on their children's health and education and 5 percent are not able to do so. This shift suggests a substantial improvement in the impact of local government on women's empowerment in the case of children's health



and education-related decisions after federalism in 2023. Recreational decision-making by families involves choosing activities that promote relaxation, enjoyment, and bonding among family members. These families often weigh the benefits of various recreational options, such as entertaining long-distance travels, visiting friends, picnic programs, outdoor adventures, cultural events, or leisure activities, to find those that best meet their collective needs. Before the introduction of federalism, only a small portion of individuals participated in recreational decision-making. 17.4 percent of participants revealed that they were involved in such activities, while 82.6 percent reported no involvement. However, after the adoption of federalism, there was a marked increase in participation in recreational decision-making. 82.6 percent of women respondents indicated that they were involved in such decisions, whereas only 17.4 percent replied no involvement in such decision-making. This shift illustrates a substantial increase in the engagement of household female members in recreational decision-making after federalism. Family budgeting decisions contribute significantly to women's economic and social development. Before federalism, 6.6 percent of women were involved in family budget decisions, while the overwhelming majority (i.e.93.4 %), did not participate in such decisions. In contrast, after the implementation of federalism, the situation reversed dramatically. 91 percent of women participants responded that they are participating in family budgeting decisions, and 9 percent were found not involved. This suggests that after federalism women's empowerment has had a profound impact on family budgeting practices. Investment decision of women provides avenues for learning about financial markets and building confidence in financial management, empowering women to influence broader economic activities and advocate for their interests. In essence, investment decisions are integral to fostering women's empowerment through economic empowerment and financial autonomy. Before federalism, 7.4 percent of women were involved in investment decisions, whereas 92.6 percent were not. How the status of women has been changed after federalism in the study area is illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6: Impact of federalism on women's empowerment

	Before federalism		After federalism	
Child health and education	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes(%)	No(%)
	4.1	95.9	95	5.
Recreational decision before federalism				
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
	17.4	82.6	82.6	17.4
Family budgeting decision before federalism				
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)

6.6	93.4	91	9
Investment decision before federalism			
Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
7.4	92.6	91.7	8.3
Property ownership before federalism			
Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
14	86	84.3	15.7
Expenditure decision before federalism			
Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
3.3	96.7	92.5	7.5

*Source:* Field survey, 2023

## 2.4. Discussion

The findings reveal that access to digital financial services has empowered women by enhancing their financial independence, decision-making ability, and social status. Specific facilitating and hindering factors are identified, including literacy levels, access to technology, and prevailing social norms (Gautam, 2020). The use of microfinance services including credit and saving, helped in women's empowerment. Access to financial services and satisfaction with loan payment periods did not make a significant difference in empowerment improvement (Jain, 2020). The result has shown that leadership skills had a positive impact on self-confidence, decision-making ability, and financial independence. Overall, the study demonstrated the positive effects of microfinance programs on women's socio-economic empowerment in Nepal (Joshi, 2023).

Access to digital financial services has empowered women by enhancing their financial independence, decision-making ability, and social status (Khare, 2024). The finding underscores the vital role of microfinance in women's empowerment and economic development. All the lawful arrangements and organizations that came forward are playing a significant part in providing ladies with their rights and helping them in the financial exercises by providing collateral-free advances. Such exercises offer assistance to the ladies to enable them and make crucial money-related choices in the family. As a result of political strengthening, they have acquired an authentic space in the political institutions. Self-help groups are self-governing organizations that play a vital role in empowering women, especially rural women, by involving them in income-generating activities. These groups provide opportunities for women to become entrepreneurs by offering access to microfinance and small-scale loans.

Finding the assessment of women's empowerment status in 2023 AD in Chandragiri municipality ward no. 12, based on a family budget decision is found that 91 percent of women are more powerful and empowered and less portion of the respondents i.e. 9 percent are not empowered still now. They couldn't get access to participation in the household budget decision-making process. Based on investment decisions there is good condition on women's empowerment with 91.7 percent of respondents making investment decisions themselves and 8.3 percent of the total respondents are not able to make decisions to invest themselves. In the case of property ownership in the study area, 84.3 percent can take right on property ownership and 15.7 percent of respondents haven't gotten right on property ownership yet. In the case of recreational decisions, among the respondents, 17.4 percent are not eligible to decide on entertainment, long-distance travel, picnic programs, etc. Similarly, 82.6 percent of respondents are eligible to decide on recreational activities. It means that while assessing the women empowerment status in the study area, each variables have a higher portion of the positive signal and while comparing among them 15.7 percent of respondents have not gotten any household property right for property ownership, 17.4 percent of respondents are not enabling and freedom for recreational decision. It means that while assessing women's empowerment status on property ownership and recreational decisions there is a higher portion of not enable or "No" response than other aspects.

Respondents indicated positive outcomes, suggesting substantial progress in these critical areas. Similarly, participation in recreational decision-making saw a notable increase from 17.4 percent to 82.6 percent post-federalism, reflecting enhanced engagement and autonomy among women respondents. Family budgeting decisions have also experienced a profound shift, with participation soaring from a mere 6.6 percent before federalism to an almost universal 91 percent afterward. Investment decisions followed a similar trend, rising from 7.4 percent to 91.7 percent, indicating a significant increase in financial independence and activity among respondents. Property ownership saw a dramatic increase as well, with the percentage of property owners climbing from 14 percent to 84.3 percent, showcasing enhanced economic empowerment and stability. Expenditure decision-making witnessed one of the most striking changes, with involvement jumping from 3.3 percent before federalism to 92.5 percent after its implementation in 2023 AD. This substantial increase across various dimensions of health, education, recreation, budgeting, investment, property ownership, and expenditure decisions proves the positive impact of federalism on women's empowerment. The data underscores the broad-based gains in autonomy, economic participation, and decision-making power among women in the study area, signifying a transformative shift towards greater empowerment and equality.

The data reveals a strong relationship between local government and women empowerment. The increase in property ownership signifies an improvement in women's economic independence and social status. Moreover, owning property provides women with greater security and bargaining power within their families and communities. The study highlights the importance of local government and legal and political frameworks in promoting women's empowerment status. Federalism appears to have provided women with better access to property ownership, which is a critical factor in their overall empowerment. By analyzing the changes in property ownership, the study underscores the positive impact of local government on women's rights. This finding aligns with the broader objectives of enhancing women's economic participation and autonomy. The increase in property ownership is a significant indicator of progress towards gender equality in the study area. Federalism's role in facilitating this change is evident, as it likely introduced policies that promoted women's property rights. The study's objective is to analyze the impact of local government on various aspects of women's empowerment is thus met with clear evidence of positive outcomes. Property ownership saw a dramatic increase as well, with the percentage of property owners climbing from 14 percent to 84.3 percent, showcasing enhanced economic empowerment and stability. Expenditure decision-making witnessed one of the most striking changes, with involvement jumping from 3.3 percent before federalism to 96.7 percent after its implementation. This substantial increase across various dimensions of health, education, recreation, budgeting, investment, property ownership, and expenditure decisions proves the positive impact of federalism on women's empowerment. The data underscores the broad-based gains in autonomy, economic participation, and decision-making power among women in the study area, signifying a transformative shift towards greater empowerment and equality.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The introduction of federalism has significantly advanced women's empowerment in the study area. Before the implementation of federalism in 2007 AD, indicators of women's empowerment—such as decision-making on child health and education, and broader participation in household decisions—were notably low, reflecting limited autonomy and economic involvement for women. However, with the advent of federalism in 2023 AD, there have been notable improvements across multiple dimensions. Women have gained rights and responsibilities related to their children's health and education, resulting in marked progress. Additionally, women's participation in recreational decision-making has increased significantly. Most importantly, there has been a major rise in women's involvement in family budgeting, investment decisions, property ownership, and management of expenditures. These changes illustrate a clear movement toward greater economic empowerment and decision-making autonomy for women, marking progress toward gender equality within Chandragiri Municipality's

Ward 12. The study highlights the substantial impact of local government on various aspects of women's empowerment both before and after federalism. Initially, gender disparities were evident, with a small fraction of women owning property before 2014. Following federalism, there was a remarkable increase in women's property ownership, underscoring the transformative role of federalism in empowering women by strengthening their property rights. The connection between local government and women's empowerment demonstrates enhanced economic independence, social standing, and greater influence within families and communities. Finally, the study provides valuable insights into assessing women's empowerment and its impact on various facets within Chandragiri Municipality. The findings emphasize that local government has positively influenced numerous aspects of women's empowerment, including family budget decisions, property ownership, recreational decisions, and investment and expenditure management.

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