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## **Role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Women Empowerment: A Case from Bima VDC of Myagdi District, Nepal**

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### **Abstract**

*This study analyzed role of technical & vocational education and training in women empowerment process specifically in local level. In fact, technical & vocational education and training programs not only provide self-employment opportunity to the women but also trigger capability to exercise control over their personal and family life, make choices to improve well beings and take active role in decision making. For justifying central argument; what are the changing role of technical & vocational education and training that has been fostering women empowerment as well as social and economic development process in this VDC (Village Development Committee), the researchers employed quantitative case study research design and applied key informant interview, observation and household survey as data collection techniques. Researchers purposively selected 63 sample populations (10 respondents who completed technical & vocational education and 53 respondents who participated in vocational skill development trainings). The study found significant role of technical & vocational education and training that have been transforming women empowerment and social and economic development process in local level. More so, for promoting social and economic development process, capable and skilled women are equally playing; decision making, leadership, educational and change agent role in the VDC. The study concluded that technical & vocational education and training program conducting in local level help to nourish knowledge, ability and develop vocational skills of women and empowering them. Similarly, empowered women are also playing transformative role in social and economic development process of the VDC. Finally the ideas in which vocational education and training found to be means and ends for women empowerment in this VDC can be replicate in other similar settings.*

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**Key words:** : Technical education, vocational vraining, women empowerment, social development and economic development.

## **Introduction**

Technical and vocational education is defined as practically illustrated career skill instruction especially in agriculture, business, family and consumer sciences, health occupation, marketing, technology and trade industrial sectors (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2004). Whereas vocational skill development training is designed to enable participants from disadvantage group like rural poor and women for developing practical skills so that they can involve in income generate activities (council for technical education and vocational training [CTEVT], 2011). In Nepal, CTEVT was established in 1989 assigning the roles of skilled development (Sharma, 2012). CTEVT coordinates programs, develops and expands technical & vocational education and training (TVET) and ensures the quality of the trainings. CTEVT has been producing basic and middle level skilled manpower through short term, long term, mobile and different apprenticeship training in different parts of the country.

The technical and vocational skill development training conducted throughout the country not only help participants to improve their quality of life through the gainful employment, but also supports to the social and economic development process of the country (CTEVT, 2012). And such types of skills affect economic development process of the country because it enhances earning, potential career progression and employability of the individuals (Bajracharya, 2010). Therefore, it can be said that effective implementation of technical & vocational education and training especially in remote rural areas definitely help to uplift life skill knowledge and vocational skills of the women groups. These opportunities ultimately changes their daily life activities from household chores to social, economic and leadership role in the society and enhanced women empowerment.

Right from the beginnings, women empowerment process in Nepal has been surpassed through contradictory religious ideas. In one hand, Hindu

culture highlighted mother is the power of love and considered the first teacher of the children. In another hand, Manusmriti prescribed woman's main duties in obeying and serving their fathers, brothers and others male members of the family before married and they should serve their husbands, fathers-in-law, mothers-in-law and others senior male and female members of the family in married life (Prabhu, 2004 as cited in Bhandari, 2008). Because of such types of dual cosmologies status of women empowerment process is still vulnerable and suffering from anti socio-cultural and economic structures. Women empowerment means transforming existing power relations in favors of women, disadvantaged groups who faced severe limitations in exercising power and making voluntary choices. Empowerment concerns the transformative use of power, in which a dominant agent also exercises his power in such a way that the sub-ordinate agent learns certain skills that undercut the power differential between him or her and the dominant agent (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2004). Women empowerment is the process of capacity building of women to exercise control over one's own life. It is generating understand to mean the ability of women to make choices to improve their well beings that of their families and communities. Empowered women take more active roles in the house and community. When women take active roles in the household and community decision-making, their families will be better equipped to confront the challenges of poverty, improve family health and well-being and increase household income (UNDP, 2004).

But in practice, according to the "State of the world population, 2003 Report" it is said that women have not become empower to participate in the social and economic development in a full-fledged manner as they are excluded from the development process. However, women empowerment in Nepal is slightly increasing due to leading role of policy provision and providing various vocational skill and capacity development trainings and their engagement in income generate activities. At a time, the state mechanism has been motivating women to play

social, economic as well as leadership role through their empowerment. As a result, rural women are also providing transformative role and involving in social and economic development process in local level. Here is why, this study highlighted changing role of technical & vocational education and training that has been fostering women empowerment and socio-economic development process in local level.

### **Theoretical Framework**

We became aware on considerable volumes of theoretical framework for understanding social and economic actions and interactions of the participants on researching issues (Blommaert & Jie, 2010). In this attempt, we reviewed structure and agency theory that has recently been promoted by social constructionist researcher who enters the life worlds of the other social actors' interest, cultural interpretation, knowledge and power (Kontinen, 2004). Agency role focuses upon the making and remaking of society or social structures through the ongoing self-transforming actions and perceptions of the social actors. We understood, the social actors or agency like empowered women groups are capable and knowledgeable and their knowledge is manifested in their actions or in day to day activities (Kaspersen, 2000). In order to raise actor practices, Giddens identified number of characteristics that enable them to take action: their transformative power to act upon structures, their knowledge ability to undertake action, their capability for assessing their situation and their transformative capacity to monitor one another's actions (Lacroix, 2012, p.13).

### **Methodology**

The study begin with sole research question: What are the changing role of technical & vocational education and training that has been fostering women empowerment and socio-economic development process of Bima VDC? Here are two reasons for selecting Bima VDC as a field of study. Firstly, Kisani Higher Secondary School of this VDC has been running agriculture junior technician assistant (JTA) program since 2011 and also running ISC agriculture program since last year. Up to this stage,

eight female students completed JTA program from own village and two completed health related program from city centers and three students are currently studying JTA and ISC agriculture program. Secondly, local women have been also participating in vocational skill development trainings and involving in income generates activities and also playing socio-economic and leadership role in the society.

Ultimately, we became quite motivating with role of technical & vocational education and training in the empowerment of women groups in this VDC and applied deductive logics for analyze objective information related to impact of women empowerment through descriptive and explanatory methods (Creswell, 2012). Under post-positivist epistemology we chose quantitative case study research design that helped to understand specific socio-cultural and economic settings of the research participants in a bounded system (Yin, 2003). In fact, case study investigates contemporary real life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of limited numbers of events or conditions and their relationships (Zainal, 2007 as cited in Koirala & Dhungana, 2015). For making our study reliable, out of total 75 sample population (10 completed technical & vocational education and 65 participated in vocational skill development trainings till 2015[VDC Profile, 2015]) we selected 63 female household (10 who completed technical & vocational education and 53 who participated in vocational skill development trainings) sample numbers for study which is generated with 95percent confidence level and 5percent marginal error by using sample size determination formula (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The study employed structured interview, observation and household surveys as major techniques of data collection (Creswell, 2012). Collected data analyzed through description, analysis and interpretation. Description of data helped to gain a clear picture of the situation and understand the meaning of the data. Analysis of data helped to identify essential features and understand underlying meanings of data to make systematic interrelationships between them. And

interpretation of data helped to understand processes and meanings in the researching context (Yin, 2003).

### **A Case Study: Bima VDC**

Bima, a recently grown hinterland of the VDC is situated above 1200 meter from the sea level. It lies within 43. 04° to 93. 53° easting and 29.20° to 29.47° northing with 1,607 hector total area (VDC Profile, 2015). There are 419 households with 1,856 total population where male population is 842 and female 1,014 (CBS, 2012). It has cold wet climate and alluvial soil. The river side is full of sand and other land is covered by slope area and stone hills. The hinterland is stretched from north to south along with 9 kilometer Darbang road under administrative unit ward no. 2 and 3 and it has a direct road linkage with national highway (Garbuja, .

Agriculture and remittance is a primary occupation of the majorities of the rural people. Purchasing capacity and economic well beings of the local people is increasing because of commercial farming activities supported by inter/national government projects. Agriculture sector in fact has been contributing a third of the total national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and thus it is regarded as one of prioritized sectors for the economic development of the country (agriculture development strategy [ADS], 2012). Local people are supplying their agro based production i.e. food, meat, fruits, dairy products and herbal medicines in service centers especially in Darbang, Beni, Baglung and Pokhara.

The process of women empowerment in this VDC has been playing key role in agro-based and herbal production and distribution. More specifically, those women who completed their technical & vocational education program in agriculture and health sectors and those women who participated in vocational skill development trainings became role model to the other women throughout the VDC and neighboring VDCs. With regard to agriculture sector, some of graduates got job opportunities in agricultural projects, some of them are pursuing agro based farming activities in local level and some of them

are still struggling for government job opportunity. Likewise, with regard to health sector, one graduate got government job in neighboring district and one graduate run private dental clinic in Kathmandu. Along with their occupational role they are still sharing their technical knowledge and skills among rural women and advocating them for their empowerment through engaging in income generate activities and involving in local leadership.

Local women are also participated in vocational skill development trainings like; tailoring, embroidery, tunnel farming, vegetable farming, dry vegetable processing, crop and seed management and mushroom cultivation conducted in local level. At a time they are applying their skill in income generate activities and also working together for women empowerment process and becoming motivating sources to neighboring VDCs. Local women are following traditional norms, values, ritual and rights but following modern farming system to the end they prefer to visit demonstration field (25 ropani agriculture land) of technical school in a group where JTA students have been practically applying their technical and theoretical knowledge. They learn about tunnel farming, mushroom cultivation, insecticide and pesticide and agro farm management during mutual interactions with students and teachers. Reasoning that majorities of the households are rearing animal husbandry especially cow for milk and goat for meat and producing seasonal and off seasonal vegetable, dry vegetables, mushroom and herbal medicines. Modernization of culture, dress, norms and values still could not affect them though nuclear family system, secularism and acculturation have been mounting in the country.

### **Discussions of Findings**

The study dealt with quantitative case study hence numeric data has been analyzed. The unit of analysis is women empowerment and their changing role that has been affecting social and economic development process within a bounded system Bima VDC. For analyzing raising level of women empowerment, the objective data interpretation of selected participants

has been presented under their changing role such as; social, economic, decision making, leadership, educational and change agent role of women in different sub headings. However, in Nepalese context, the term women's empowerment has been viewed through the three basic components of empowerment such as; social empowerment, economic empowerment and political empowerment (Bhattarai, 2009).

### **Social role of women**

Social role of women is one of the determinant factors for social development and outcome of technical & vocational education and training and women empowerment. After becoming skillful, knowledgeable and capable local women groups of this VDC has been playing social role significantly. More than 92 percent sample respondents are working for social development activities like; working for community development, building mutual relationship between community members. Literature says that Coleman also focused on bonding (mutual relationships with same ethnic groups), bridging (mutual relationship with other ethnic groups) and linking (relationship with those who have power) social capital that can foster community development process (Author & winter, 2000) Similarly, more than 71percent sample respondents are advocating for Dalit women empowerment by motivating them to participate in awareness raising and skill development training so that they could change their socio-economic situation. The data indicate that empowered woman are successfully playing social role in the society though, Hindu cultural structure has given little intelligence to woman. It is the reason behind why social role of women in local level has been implementing as an inevitable fact in policy level since many decades. In the reference of structure and agency theory empowered women groups of this VDC have willingness to change miserable life styles of Dalit women and they are also motivating and supporting to change poor socio-economic structures of Dalit community. And it can be said that they are applying their knowledge and capacity to change the structures through their self-

transforming actions and perceptions in day to day activities (Kaspersen, 2000).

### **Economic role of women**

Economic role of women is another determinant factor for generating local economic development and outcome of technical & vocational education and training and women empowerment. After participating in vocational skill development trainings and completing technical & vocational education program all of the sample respondents are involving in economic activities like; commercial farming, public and private job and supporting their livelihood. Even some of the role model women entrepreneurs are also creating employment opportunities to local people. Precisely, 57 percent respondents are involving in commercial farming, 25 percent respondents in local business, 11 percent respondents in government/private job and remaining 7 percent respondents are involving in local entrepreneurship development. During key informant interview respondents shared that they are also getting sustainable livelihood and commercial farming knowledge from JTA students and teachers while they conducted participatory rural appraisal field trip in the village. And according to visitors record annually more than sixty women visited agriculture demonstration field of technical school of Bima. The interesting thing is that all the respondents are supporting livelihood and involving in economic activities due to their technical knowledge and skills. Data shows that average monthly income of the respondents is 18,000 NRs and expenditure 11,000 NRs. Further it is found that majorities of the women are keeping daily income and expenditure records, and allocating surplus amount in their occupation. At the same time most of them are also getting credit amount from local cooperative and agriculture development bank and investing in productive sectors. Data indicate that because of economic role of the women majorities of the household able to maintain economic wellbeing and family sufficiency and they are allocating financial capital for commercial purpose. There is a trust and economic cooperation among women groups as well as entire social

members of the VDC. In the reference of structure and agency theory women group are creating productive economic structures in the VDC level and mobilizing their financial capital by themselves and applying transformative power for constructing productive economic structures through their economic role (Lacroix, 2012, p.13).

### **Decision making role of women**

Decision making role of women is directly and indirectly affecting social and economic development process of the VDC. However in practice still most of the rural women in another remote village are trapping in household chores and uneconomic activities. In this village women are not only involving in social and economic activities but also playing decision making role in household level and beyond. It is in fact positive symptom of women empowerment. Data shows that more than 85 percent respondents are playing decision making role in household level for managing cropping and harvesting food grains, commercial vegetable farming, buying daily necessities things and selling own production and investing in child education. Still remaining 15 percent respondents are bypassing by their family members during household decision making process. Literature also claimed that biased gender relations are the result of socially constructed unequal power relations and neglecting active role of women in decision making process. Similarly, 67 percent respondents are also involving in decision making role even in social and VDC level meeting and programs. In doing so they are changing their power relationships with others that can be regarded as a major impact of women empowerment process. According to conceptual meaning of empowerment the situation signifies that these women are arranging their activities from individual self-assertion to collective resistance where class, caste, ethnicity and gender determine their access to resources and power relationships. The data indicate that meaningful participating of women in decision making process advocates about the provision of rights to women. Further, the situation implies that women are fulfilling their social responsibilities through decision making

role that has sustaining social and economic development of the VDC. Literature says that when women take active roles in decision making, their families will be better equipped to confront the challenges of poverty, improve family health and well-being and increase household income (UNDP, 2004).

### **Leadership role of women**

Leadership role playing by selected women is in fact, outcome of social, economic and political empowerment. That could not be possible without providing technical & vocational education and skill development trainings to them in local level. During our observation and structured interview with key respondents we found, by playing social, economic and decision making role their level of confident has been increased and they are motivating (intrinsically & extrinsically) to involve in local leadership. Data shows that more than 51 percent respondents are playing leadership role in local level institutions such as; political organization, local non-government organizations, cooperatives, ward and VDC committee, mother group and community forestry whereas remaining 49 percent respondents are planning to play leadership role in near future. The data indicate that women are becoming politically empowered because most of them are realizing importance of their advocacy and leadership role for reforming socio-cultural structures where still women are considering as passive agent of the society. Literature also argues that political empowerment implies unified meaning of negative freedom from arbitrary arrest, exclusion and positive freedom to vote, participate in political life or actual exercise of political freedom to the women. Most of the respondents argue that involvement of women in politics is necessary for local development because local people are experiencing direct outcomes (economic transparency and working efficiency) from ethical, moral and leadership role of the women in the VDC. Thus, the impact of vocational training program in this VDC is found remarkably high. We observed some kind of social transformation in village due to transformative role of the women.

More specifically, the voice and choice of women groups are enlarging and demanding technical supports related to community home stay management in their imitation. In the reference of structure and agency theory women who are playing leadership role have knowledge about cultural tourism that enable them to start proposed tourism activities in village so that they can generate economic and employment opportunities to the local people (Lacroix, 2012, p.13).

### **Educational role of women**

Education is an element of human development indicator and the lime light of life. It is in fact, means and ends of personal and local development. The basic concept of education is process of learning socio-cultural, economic and environmental knowledge that must apply into experience. In this VDC women are learning such knowledge from informal, non-formal and formal education system. However, most of the women in the VDC are playing educational role in household and social level. They are interlinking their knowledge and skills with their empowerment and livelihood activities and also motivating their children and other social member for doing accordingly. Data shows that more than 84 percent respondents are playing good parenting role because they are experiencing multiple benefits of education i.e. benefit to individual, social and national level. Likewise 44 percent respondents are enrolling their children in institutional school and investing in higher education. Most of the women are encouraging their daughters to enroll in technical & vocational education and training program so that they can get job opportunities in national and international labor market. Similarly, 51 percent respondents who are playing leadership role in the society are encouraging Dalit children for involving in formal and non-formal learning process. They are also advocating for providing scholarship opportunities to Dalit students from targeted budget program implemented in local level since couples of years. In the reference of structure and agency theory we got opportunities to review educational role of the women in VDC level who are worrying

with illiterate and unskilled male and female youths, who are interpreting worth value vocational education and training themselves and applying their knowledge and power for reforming educational structures in local level (Kontinen, 2004).

### **Change agent role and empowerment**

Playing change agent role can be considered as one of the vibrant factors of women empowerment. Most of the women in the village are sharing their lived experience about their transforming life with their children and other family members and neighbors. Some of the women leaders are mobilizing both male and female groups, motivating them to involve in self-employment and create employment opportunities to villagers. More so they are guiding other women for maintaining health, hygiene and sanitation, playing social and economic role along with household chores. According to data fact more than 65 percent respondents claimed that they are highly satisfied with their changing roles because they are achieving higher social status in the society. It does not mean that other respondents are losing their social status as they are working for social and cultural change. Similarly, majorities (77%) respondents shared that they are still worrying with poor status of Dalit women empowerment in the society and they are motivating them and also advocating in local level for their empowerment. During key informant interview with VDC representative, local intellectuals and social worker we found women groups are playing change agent role in the society and their changing roles have been positively contributing for women empowerment and local development process. Further, they added women groups are becoming one of the stakeholders of participatory development. Literature says that participatory development seeks to build and foster cooperation and collaboration among development stakeholders (individuals, households, community, government and non-government organizations) for rural problem appraisal, agenda setting and project implementation (Rowlands, 1998).

## Conclusion

Women are practicing socio-economic role due to the outcome of technical & vocational education and training programs conducted in local level. Women are feeling them valuable and worthy development stakeholder and are playing active agency role for changing the socio-cultural and economic structures. They are becoming socially, economically and politically empowered due to their regular involvement in transforming social and economic structures. Their meaningful participation in during rural problem appraisal, agenda setting and their working efficiency has been contributing to local development activities (Rowlands, 1998). Based on field observation, structured interview and house hold survey, this study found significant role of technical & vocational education and training that has been positively affecting women empowerment and local development process. At the same time status of women empowerment in this VDC also helps them to engage in vocational farming activities and entrepreneurship development. Reasoning that socio-economic situation of women in the VDC seems satisfactory who are also supporting livelihood. Their socio-economic role has been transforming daily life styles of the family members. Women are also playing very good parenting role and also investing in child education. Because of that women are now able to create demand with VDC authorities and local institutions, working and advocating for women empowerment. No doubt, the raising level of women empowerment and achieving higher social status has been motivating women for playing social, economic, decision making; local leadership, educational and change agent role in the VDC. However, for the sustainability of these transformative role, local stakeholders must appreciate role model women, provide them more advanced level of vocational skill development training like hospitality and home stay management and also provide them economic incentives and technical support for production and distribution of local products.

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