

General Scenario of Female Workers in Nepal

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Abstract

The size of the labour force in Nepal is increasing significantly more than employment growth in the country. The country is facing the problem of both the unemployment and underemployment but the problem of underemployment is more serious compared to the unemployment in the country. The share of female employment is significantly low compared to the male employment. On the other vast majority of female workers are in the unpaid job. Among the women workers in the paid job majority are working at low status job. Despite the ILO conventions regarding to equal remuneration for equal work the wage rate of the female workers is low than their male counterparts mainly in the informal sector where it is valid legally in the tea estates, which belongs in the formal sector. Our socio-cultural taboos are considered the major problem to reach the women workers as equal status of the male workers. Female workers are equally discriminated from the society and the family in any field as of the discrimination of general females. As a consequence only few female workers are involved in any social or labour organisations actively or inactively. Globalisation and liberalisation of the economy had affected all the Nepalese working class where female workers are affected much negatively.

Labourforce and Employment

Labor force size in Nepal is increasing rapidly every year mainly due to high population growth caused by high fertility rate. But the growth of employment is very low mainly because:

- Most of the female population are involved in household/domestic activities which is not counted in economic activities though they work 18 hours or more in a day,
- Enrollment in the educational institutions has increased significantly,
- Lack of employment opportunity in the country,
- Lack of skill in the Nepalese labour force,

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- Free flow of non-Nepalese labour force especially from India because of open border and family relation.

Labor force size and employment situation of Nepal reflects a backward character of the society. The employment scenario is indicative of very small formal sector (about 10%) surrounded by the large informal economy covering overwhelming majority of workers. Shortage of skilled manpower on the one hand and on the other large number of manpower of different skilled categories including highly professionals are migrating outside from the country to search better employment is a salient feature of the Nepalese economy. Similarly heavy underemployment and serious unemployment contributes to increase surplus labour. The labour force size in Nepal and their proportion in gainful employment are presented in table 1 & figure 1.

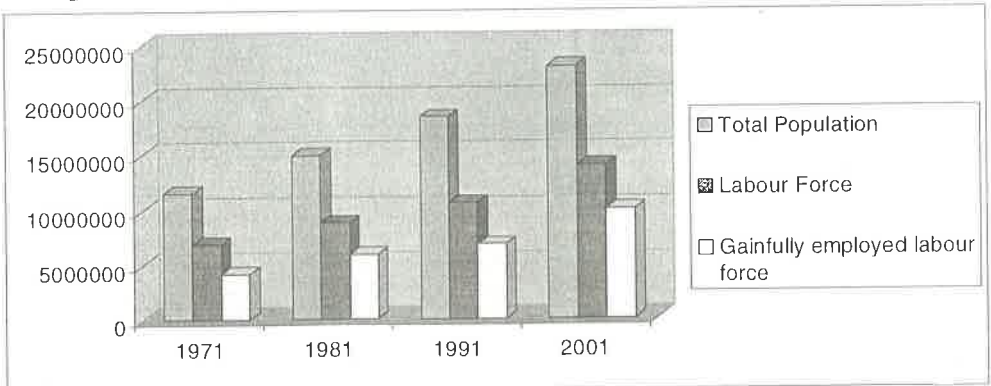
Table: 1 Labour Force Size in Nepal, 1971-2001

Census year	Total Population	Annual Growth Rate of Population	Labour Force (Total Popn aged 15+)	Labour Force as % of Total Popn	Gainfully Employed population (15 Years of Labour & Above)	Gainfully Employed Popn as % of Labour Force
1971	11555983	2.05	6881405	59.5	4197962	61.0
1981	15022839	2.62	8810867	58.6	5878188	66.7
1991	18491097	2.08	10650326	57.6	6807751	63.9
2001	23151423	2.25	14039705	60.4	9955671	70.9
1999*	19104000		11232000	58.8	9273000	82.6

Source: Calculated on the basis of the census results.

- Nepal Labor Force Survey, 1999

Figure: 1 Labor force in Nepal



Source: Table 1.

Nepal is also suffering from reliable statistics regarding labour force and employment. The Population Census of Nepal conducted regularly at an interval of 10 years recorded limited information on employment. Sample Census of Agriculture, Census of Manufacturing Establishments, Census of Cottage and Small-scale industries are the regular subordinate sources. According to the information available from the decennial population census it is observed that about 60 percent population aged 15 years and above were in the labour force in 1971, which is declining nearly by one percent in every decade up to 1991, which reached 60.4 percent in 2001 (Table 1). On the other more than one third of the total labour force are not employed gainfully that has improved slightly in recent years. Among them homemakers and students represents a large proportion where lack of employment opportunity is also a major reason behind to increase in unemployment.

The Eighth Plan (1992-97) estimated that roughly 200,000 individuals per year would enter into the labour force and would be seeking job. This number further estimated about 300,000 in Ninth Plan period (1997-2000). The Nepalese economy is not only suffering from unemployment problem but also equally from underemployment. Various studies shows that more than 40 percent labour force are underemployed in the country. Thus for the development of the country it is equally important to solve the underemployment problem along with the unemployment. In this context most of the Nepalese plans have given priority to generate employment but there had been no substantial progress in this field due to lack of political commitment of the leaders, lack of appropriate funds and weak implementation of the programmes.

According to the NLFS, 1999 the labour force in the country is increasing by 2.3 percent per annum. Women workers cover 47 percent of the total labour force. The total female labour force in agriculture exceeds by about 20 percentage points compared to the male labour force. Contrary to this female worker in non-agriculture sector is very low (Table 2).

Table: 2 Currently Employed Labor Force Aged 15 Year & Above by Sector and Sex

(In percent)

Sector	Both Sex	Male	Female
Subsistence Agriculture & Fishing Works	67.4	57.0	77.7
Market Oriented Skilled Agriculture & Fishery Works	2.9	3.1	2.8
Agriculture, fishery & Related workers	6.2	6.8	5.7
Total Agricultural workers	76.5	66.9	86.2
Non-agricultural workers	23.5	33.1	13.8
Total	100.0	100	100.0

Source: NLFS, Annex E 6.5, p. 118

Of the total employment, agricultural sector covers more than three fourth of the labour forces though the share of this sector is declining slowly. On the contrary employment in non- agriculture sector especially in the service sector is increasing.

A central level Employment Promotion Commission was formed under the chairmanship of the then Prime minister in 1996 with ambitious objectives. But not formulated any remarkable policy and programme to achieve its goal to reduce the rate of unemployment and underemployment. Lack of the appropriate employment policy in the country is the basic problem faced by the highly skilled Nepalese manpower, which forced them to migrate outside for better employment opportunity that created shortage of high-level manpower in the country.

Women in the Formal and Informal Employment

In broad terms the economy is divided into formal and informal sector. Employment creation in the formal sector is very limited. The informal sector plays a dominant role in providing employment to the labour force of the country. The employment generation in the formal sector is limited at present where hope of increase in the near future is also looks bleak.

The informal sector in Nepal consists of all unorganised works - industrial and craft works, construction, garbage cleaning, forest product works, animal product works, agriculture, and various other informal services like:

- Workers in enterprises employing less than 10 workers,
- Self employed in agriculture, services and various family business,
- Wage workers outside the enterprise structure – daily wage, contract, piece rate, etc,
- Factory associated but home based workers.

On the one hand a significant proportion of female workers are employed in agriculture sector as an informal sector worker on the other the total female workers involved in the non-agricultural sector (86.5 percent) are in the informal sector employment where male workers in this sector are two thirds. The informal sector consists of about three fourth of total employment in non- agricultural sector too. This also proves that the Nepalese economy is strongly dominated by informal sector.

Out of the total workers involved in different occupation besides agriculture the share of female workers in formal sector job working as professionals, technicians and clerks is insignificant where it is remarkable in other occupations (Table 3).

Table: 3 Non-agricultural Workers Working in Informal Sector by Occupation

(Figure in percent)

Occupation	Male	Female
Total	67.4	86.5
Professionals	11.6	4.5
Technicians	22.6	9.4
Clerks	3.7	4.9
Service workers	91.9	97.3
Craft & related workers	87.7	93.3
Plant & machine operators	54.6	92.7
Elementary Occupations	69.1	91.5

Source: NLFS, 1999, table 11.2, p 62

The picture of the involvement of workers in formal and informal sector will be little difference while considering the workers involved in market agriculture as formal sector workers. Thus the total workforce in the formal sector in a broader sense is 9.28 percent and overwhelming majority of 90.78 percent is engaged in informal sector. Looking from this criteria only 4.73 percent females are in the formal sector where rest more than 95 percent in the informal sector (GEFONT, 2003:12).

Table: 4 Workers in Formal and Informal Sector

Workforce	Broad Formal	Broad Informal
Total	9.29	90.71
Male	13.83	86.17
Female	4.73	95.27

Source: GEFONT, 2003, Table, 1.2.

The involvement and contribution of women workers in various sectors of work is highly significant in every country. However, the recognition and accounting of their contribution differs from place to place and country to country. The contribution and accounting as such differs in accordance with the nature of work visibly in the modern formal sectors in comparison to traditional informal as well as agricultural sectors. In addition, rural urban differences of treatment at workplace also create differences in the degree of recognition and accounting. The case of Nepal is not an exception to this reality.

Women in Wage Employment and Self-Employment

The proportion of women workers in paid job is less than one tenth whereas it is slightly less than two thirds are working under the status of unpaid workers as well as attach family workers mainly because of involvement in household works. On the other the self-employed female workers are also seems slightly more than half in comparison to male (Table 5).

Table: 5 Women Participation by Type of Labor

Type of Work	Male	Female
Paid	24.3	7.7
Unpaid	23.3	63.4
Self-employed	52.4	28.9

Source: GEFONT, 2003, Table, 1.3.

The proportion of female in unpaid work is high only because their activities are not considered as and not counted in national income accounting. As a consequence hardly 8 percent female labour force is in paid employment.

The share of women workers in paid job in each sector of employment does not exceed 20 percent of the total employment in the corresponding sector. The private sector companies and NGOs encouraged female employment compared to other sectors of employment.

Table: 6 Women in Paid Job by Sector

Sector	Male	Female
Government Service	86.53	13.47
Public enterprises	85.71	14.29
NGOs	80.77	19.23
Private companies	80.78	19.22

Source: NLFS, 1999.

Looking at the posts hold by the female workers involved at paid job it is around one tenths to the total employment of that posts with a few exception.

Table: 7 Status of Women Workers in Paid Job

Status	Male	Female
Senior Officers & Professionals	89.74	10.26
Technicians	83.61	16.39
Low paid officials	89.52	10.48
Service sector workers	89.09	10.91
Vocational agriculture	90.91	9.09
Cottage industries	87.56	12.44

Source: NLFS, 1999.

Labor force Participation Rate

Labor force participation rate (LFPR) of women in Nepal was very low in the past but since last few decades it seems to be increasing. The LFPR was around three-fifths in the early years where the LFPR reported by the NLSS for women reached 70.6 percent in total and 66.4 percent for female labour force and it reached 71.3 percent as of NLFS, 1999. This increased LFPR of women is truly indicative of their increasing involvement in informal sectors of work, as there is very limited scope for them to enter into formal sector. The very low fraction of women involvement in paid job particularly in organised sector gives a clear indication that the increased labour force participation of women naturally flows towards informal sector.

Discrimination Between Man and Women

The discrimination against female starts from their own family and widespread in society and country as a whole. Workplace is not an exception from discrimination. Feudal socio-economic relations are reflected even in the laws and hence the entire legal structure is full of gender bias provisions. Lack of parental property rights for women is one of the examples in this regard. It is also because of the fact that political parties are less gender sensitive, which is directly reflected in policies, programmes and plans of the government and election manifesto of the political parties.

Similarly feudal socio-economic relations are stronger among the employers. The feudal mentality is to some extent changed because of the laws and regulations in formal sector, but in the informal sector restriction and regulations through labour legislation are almost nil and hence the feudal mentality of employers is in more visible in the informal sectors. So discrimination is more common in informal sector employment.

The differences in monthly income of women workers in comparison to their male counterparts are indicative of discrimination in wages. Heavy discrimination can be observed everywhere in informal sector employment and severe is the case of agriculture, construction,

cottage industries. However even in the formal sector like tea estates of Nepal there is legal discrimination of wages of men and women workers.

In connection with the terms of employment, discrimination in formal sector is visible on recruitment, training and promotion. Employers do not like to employ women in key posts on the one hand and do not like to employ in lower jobs too mainly because of their family obligation and reproduction possibilities. So women employment in causal category of jobs has been higher than in other categories and hence the issue of job security is more relevant for women workers in comparison to males. In agricultural field women are discriminated not only wage and employment they are also discriminating even in providing breakfast/Tiffin, lunch/dinner (Khaja and Khana)

Women and Working Conditions

Sexual harassment is one of the key issues even in the formal sector enterprises whether public or private. Sexual harassment is naturally more visible in the informal sectors of work. In addition, women trafficking for commercial sex mostly from working families of informal sector particularly from farm families are a very important current issue. Maternity protection provisions are basically concentrated in the formal sector and labour laws do not cover the informal sector. Thus from the female workers in this sector have been gained some facilities regarding maternity protection only in those sectors where unions are strong. Similarly, childcare arrangements and reproduction health care as well as occupational safety and health related provisions of the workers also depend on union strength and bargaining power of the workers and their unions mainly at enterprise level.

Low level of wages, long hours of work, no fringe benefits, no incentives and fast increasing home based character are the major features of working condition in informal sector, which victimize female workers first than male workers.

Organisational Framework of Women Workers

Three types of mass organisations- peasant organisations, women organisations and trade unions have been working for organising women workers since their establishment. The peasant organisation have been organised about 6 percent working women while women organisations have not given priority to working women. They do not have any approach to workers organisations and mainly they are active in gender and political motivation. On the other the workers organisation themselves also could not organise women workers as expected. Of the total union members (both legally registered and unregistered) number of women workers do not exceed 17 percent, where the number of active members is estimated about six percent in the total union activists.

Since last few years, especially with the restoration of multiparty democracy in the country NGOs have also started to organise women workers in the form of small groups for income generating activities or various other skill development training as well as human

rights and awareness campaign. However, most of the NGO's activities are concentrated to organise them under their project activities, which do not seem to go with a long-term vision. While a few genuine NGOs have done good efforts their coverage remains very small but the coverage of the NGOs activities is very limited and mainly focused on accessible area.

Despite various efforts by different organisations the active association of female workers is very limited. It is basically because of the triple responsibility of women- household work, reproduction & child care and work outside home to support their family on the one and on the other our society discourages the involvement of women in outside activities due to traditional belief in the society. Similarly in many organisations key responsibility is not assigned to the female leaders where only representation of women has become natural. Thus they could not perform their competence in their organisation.

Impacts of Globalisation on Women Workers

Both the positive and negative impacts are observed on workers as a whole and women in particular. The positive impacts are listed as – increased awareness, increased trade union organisations, increased trade union activities in rural and urban sector, increasing NGO's activities on labour issues, expanding coverage of labour laws, development of right based movement, increasing regional as well as international relations, etc. But it is to be noted that these positive effects have emerged in process of resistance against the adversities imposed by globalisation and liberalisation. So the negative impacts are the key points in this regard, which are more visible creating adversities to the lives of thousand and thousands of women workers (both self employed and wage earners). Some important negative effects are as follows.

- Increasing job losses,
- Decline in the micro-enterprises and small and cottage industries being unable to compete with the foreign cheap products as a result of import liberalisation in the name of trade liberalisation,
- Hardship to maintain family caused by increased male migration,
- Decline in formal workers and increased in home based worker,
- Increase in girls trafficking mainly for the sex trade.

Conclusion

Size of labour force in Nepal is increasing day by day. At present it is estimated that annually it is increasing by 2.3 percent where employment growth is very low compared to the labour force growth. The country is facing the problem of unemployment and underemployment. Underemployment problem is more serious compared to the unemployment in the country. Female employment in Nepal is very low compared to the male employment.

The size of female population in Nepal is slightly more than the males. Contrary to this they are very low in the labour force compared to the males. On the other most of the women workers are belongs in the informal sector where employment security and other labour rights are almost nil. Overwhelming majority of females is working as unpaid workers and slightly less than one-third are in the self-employed job. Despite the ILO conventions regarding to equal remuneration for equal work the wage rate of the female workers is low than their male counterparts mainly in the informal sector where it is valid legally in the tea estates, which belongs in the formal sector. Women workers are suffering from various problems caused by our socio-cultural beliefs. Female workers are not tortured from the society the torture starts from their own household or family. On the one the volume of women workers is low on the other among them only few workers are involved in any social or labour organisations and insignificant workers are able to work actively in such organisations. Globalisation and liberalisation of the economy had affected all the Nepalese working class where female workers are affected much negatively.

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