

Contribution of Co-operatives on Women Empowerment

Ram Raj Pokharel, Ph. D

Lecturer, Faculty of Humanities, TU

Email: ram.pokharel240@gmail.com

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.3126/ppj.v3i2.66181>

Abstract

Cooperatives provide financial and social intermediaries, particularly for women and the underprivileged. Microcredit, micro savings, micro insurance, and micro remittance are among the financial services offered by cooperatives. The simple services of cooperatives attracted backward women, which may have pushed women in that direction. The empowerment of women has been identified by the researcher as the new horizon in this article. When women are empowered, they are independent, enjoy unrestricted movement, and can participate freely in the sectors and fields of their choice. When women achieve economic, social and political strength, the concept of empowerment acquires its full meaning. In this view, the investigation and identification of the role cooperatives have played in raising social and economic status are the main objectives of the study. In order to ensure the study's validity from a review of the literature, data from interviews with members of the Opi Saving and Credit Co-operative in Kirtipur Municipality Ward No. 6 in the Kathmandu District were used as a sample. There are 136 respondents in the sample. According to the study's findings, the co-operative's benefits to women have improved their incomes and raised their standard of life. As a result of their participation, communication, fund management discussions, cooperative power, and accountability, the study's member co-operative women are growing more physically and cognitively engaged.

Key words: co-operative, social status, economic status, living standard, empowerment.

1. Introduction

Nepalese society is male dominated society; women face many discriminatory laws, traditions, norms and values. The women are discouraged from taking part in social, economic and political affairs. Due to this practice the people are discouraged. They have felt they couldn't give their equal contribution to the state. Sustainable development is only possible if there is balanced development of men and women. So, to improve the status, relationship and to reduce inequality in society women empowerment is necessary in the society. Power or authority to act to dominated or suppressed people and reduces to have control or power over is only possible due to empowerment.

The serious problem of the third world country is caused by unemployment, poverty and gender inequality. There is little industrialization, more political instability, high population growth in the under developing country. It is the main reason for different types of social chaos. The obstruction caused by deformities like social unrest, quarrelling, theft, burglary, and robbery etc are increasing in society and are causing difficulty to maintain discipline in society. Hence, the saving and credit co-operative plays vital role in such context. It can

help women in empowerment and help them to get over poverty, unemployment and backwardness. It makes bridge between rich and poor, between man and women. The main view of co-operative is to focus on empower women through economic support and both male and female play an important role. The women empowerment movement increase the creativity, career, opportunity is only possible due to co-operative, Simple process of obtaining loan at low interest, insurance, reliable saving services through financial co-operatives have motivated women all over the world to establish cottage and small scale industries and develop self-dependent and successful to make themselves powerful empowered members (Senge et.al., 1999).

A cooperative is a type of business in which people from the same class work together to further their shared objectives. These are typically created by the underprivileged or marginalized members of society. It is a reflection of the impoverished people's wish to succeed on their own terms. "All for each and each for all" is the guiding principle behind the creation of cooperative societies. An organization of people that voluntarily pool their resources and run their business for the benefit of all members rather than for financial gain is known as a cooperative society. Customers own the company in this democratic style of organization, from the management to the clerk. Everyone is the company's owner, and none of the management is involved (www.study point.blogspot.com, 2011).

Health, education and employment are major components of women's empowerment and saving and credit scheme helps to empower women either through home based employment or self-employment or small scale income generating activities (Acharya, 1997). Envision credit is a key for poverty reduction. Credit facility to rural communities and women empowerment are the key concerns of 10th plan (2002-2007) too. The 11th three year interim plan of Nepal has accepted the importance of saving and credit co-operatives for economic and social empowerment of women. The plan has also stressed how important it is to integrate a gender perspective in the budgetary process, policy creation, development, and general economic environment.

As defined by the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2010), "Co-operation is as association of persons, usually of limited means, who have voluntarily joined together, to achieve a common economic end, through and formation of a democratically controlled business organization, making equitable contributions to the capital required and accepting a fair share of risks and benefits of the undertaking."

According to the ILO, cooperatives play a significant role in enhancing the living and working conditions of both men and women worldwide as well as providing basic services and infrastructure to places that are overlooked by governments and investor-driven businesses. Additionally, cooperatives have the ability to further the notion of decent works. (ILO website, 2010).

Since ancient times, various formal and informal institutions have been established. Cooperatives have a beneficial function in helping people in rural areas earn a living, gain access to financing, and sell their products. Cooperatives are becoming common in rural

Nepalese societies. Most members of the cooperative come from middle-class and lower-class families. Poor households have benefited from having access to finance and markets with fair benefit sharing.

The management strategy of providing employees with information, incentives, and authority is known as empowerment. In order for them to be able to take charge, make choices, and solve issues in order to enhance performance and service. Giving employees the knowledge, resources, authority, opportunities, and incentive they need to improve their competence and job happiness is the foundation of empowerment. They should also be held accountable for the results of their activities. (www.businessdictionary.com, 2022).

The act of conferring legality or sanction or formal warrant, to give power or authority to, authorize, especially legal or official means empowerment or the giving of an ability, enablement or permission, the act of granting authority to undertake certain functions. Authorizing subordinates to make certain decisions is known as empowerment (www.dictionary.reference.com, 2022).

Sociological empowerment focuses on removing members of groups that have been subjected to social discrimination from decision-making processes, such as those based on gender, race, ethnicity, handicap, or religion. The methodology of empowerment is frequently linked to feminism. American feminists promoted the action known as "consciousness rising," sometimes known as "awareness rising," in the late 1960s. Encouraging women to engage fully in all facets of the economy is crucial for bolstering national economies, accomplishing globally recognized objectives for growth and sustainability, and enhancing the standard of living for women, men, families, and communities. One of the most important allies in the fight for women's empowerment and gender equality is the private sector. Numerous studies show that gender diversity improves corporate performance and indicates that people with similar interests can unite. (en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/empowerment, 2022).

The women's empowerment principles were first introduced on International Women's Day in 2010 and are based on the Calvert women's principles. The Calvert women's principles were first created in collaboration with UNIFEM (now UN women), and they were introduced in 2004 as the first business code of conduct with a sole focus on promoting, investing in, and empowering women globally. (www.unwomen.org/.../womens-empower.. Dec 5, 2022).

According to Bulbeck (2010), women's autonomy, empowerment, and improvement of their political, social, economic, and health status are all very significant ends in and of themselves. Furthermore, it is necessary to achieve sustainable development. In order to be productive and reproduce, both men and women must fully participate and partner, including sharing responsibilities. This provides incentives for the current study on women empowerment that has been viable through Opi Saving and Credit Co-operative.

On the other hand, empowerment is also a process, under which conversation, discussion, community seminar and law are included. Empowerment is not only process but it is a result

as well. The powerless people must step forward for the medium of empowerment and this is related to human norms and values (Molly, 2006).

Feminists have considered women's self-organization and feminist international links with early anthologies of global sisterhood' and later collections concerned with various conceptions of international solidarity. According to Sue Wilkinson (2008) for millions of women their involvement with national liberation struggles was a basic necessity of developing a political system free from foreign domination. Early feminism in some countries and regions grew out of the same roots around the sometime, as nationalism. A viewpoint known as feminism promotes an openness to comprehending and elucidating social reality from the perspective of women. Up until now, the majority of men who were influential in their respective eras on the political, economic, and cultural fronts have shaped our understanding of the social realities. The feminist movement, which gained traction in the 1950s and 1960s, was the catalyst for women's voices to become more prominent and garner global attention. The academic facet of the feminist movement is feminist theory, which emerged in the 1970s.

The academy's feminist movement launched attacks on the canon of masculine theory, leading to what Bernard has dubbed the "feminist Enlightenment" Spindelman, (2021). Sexism was shown as a "invisible paradigm" that influenced every facet of women's lives by this "Enlightenment." There has been uneven success in the quest to revolutionize established academic thinking and practice.

Feminism is a broad and multifaceted collection of concepts and, in fact, behaviors rather than a single, monolithic philosophy. Wendy (2016). Hence, by putting gender issues into the public eye for more discussion, feminist analysis and activism seek to strengthen the forces that are weakening systems of male control. Given that many women lack a feeling of self-worth, self-respect, and self-confidence, the feminist movement can aid women in creating a sense of who they are. The current study on women's empowerment through cooperative lending and saving offers incentives related to women's difficulties, thanks to the feminist approach.

2. Objectives

Finding out the social and economic impact of the Opi Saving and Credit cooperative on women's empowerment in Kirtipur Municipality ward no. 6 Kathmandu District is the main goal of this study. In the same way, the study's main objective is to discover how cooperatives affect women's empowerment.

3. Methodology

Primary data from interview schedules and secondary data from published books, other relevant literature, and earlier research were used to prepare this study.

Opi Saving and Credit co-operative has been conducting financial activities since 17 years at Kirtipur Municipality ward no 6. Total 562 male and female members are associated in

Opi saving and credit co-operative. Out of which 281 are females. Among them 136 female member respondents were chosen for the study based on purposive sampling method.

4. Discussion and Analysis of the study

4.1 General characteristics of the respondents

The general characteristics of the respondents, the female members of the co-operative are described. The features of the detail information of the respondents is significant as it reflects the features of the individual to identify their background. The demographic behaviour consists of age, religion, caste/ethnicity, occupation and education status are discussed to find out the knowledge of the respondents about co-operatives and their function.

4.1.1 Age of the Respondents

This part mostly covers information pertaining to the respondents as well as a description of the study site. Different socio-economic characteristics of the respondents like distribution of respondents, caste, ethnicity, educational background, religion, age, main occupation, income sources are discussed in this section. The following table shows the age group of the respondents who were undertaken in study.

Table 1: Age of the Respondents

Age Group	Numbers	%
20-40	46	33.8
41-50	58	42.6
51 +	32	23.5
Total	136	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The population composition by age group at a given age interval is referred to as the age composition of the population. It shows the group which has more population (frequency). Generally, the people of 15-59 years of age are called the working force but all the people of this group may not be called active population from the economic point of view. Therefore, the economically active population refers to those engaged in income generating work.

The above table 1 depicts the age level of the respondents. All the respondents are independent population (15-59 yrs). There are 46 respondents from the age between 20-40 years age group which means this age group consists of 33.8%. There are 58 respondents from the 41-50 years age group which means this age group consists of 42.6% of total respondents. Respondents above 51 years are 32 in number or 23.5% percent. It shows that frequency of the age group of 41-50 is higher than that of 20-40 and 51+ age group. Elderly population is more than that of young and adult or old. Maturity in age helps to take rational decision and cope the society too.

4.1.2 Occupation of the responds

Occupation refers to trade or profession. Agriculture, industry, trade and services are kinds of occupation. Types of occupation depend on the development and prosperity of the country. It also connotes whether there is unemployment problem in the country or not. The

economic progress of the nation is also known from it. (Oxford dictionary, 2012) In Nepal according to 2011 census there were 65.7 percent population engaged in agriculture, and non-agricultural involvement was 34.3 percent.

Respondents were asked to state their occupation, and the result is presented below in the table 2. Though the majority of Nepalese people are engaged in agriculture but the attraction towards non-agriculture sector is increasing due to more and easy earning in non-agriculture sector which include trade, service, business etc. and also due to lack of cultivable land on other hand in urban areas and also because of youths to foreign countries.

Table 2: Occupation of the responds

S.N.	Occupation	Numbers	%
1.	Housewife	64	47.05
2.	Employee	39	28.67
3.	Business	33	24.26
	Total	136	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The occupations of the respondents are shown in table 2 as belonging to four distinct sectors. i.e. Agriculture, Housewife, Employee and Business. It clearly represents that there are 47.05 percent housewives there are no respondents engaged in agriculture whereas 28.67 and 24.26 are in service and business respectively. Most of the women are not engaged in any productive sector neither in agriculture nor in any jobs. They depend on their husband.

4.1.3 Education status of the respondents

Awareness is increased by education. A person can use the knowledge, attitude, and skills acquired via education to improve the quality of life for members of their family. Those with education may find it easier to find employment and make money. Family members with education can easily meet their basic needs as well as their additional ones. Similarly, education makes it easier for people to make use of contemporary services and amenities, which raises their standard of living. The following table 3 shows the literacy rate of the respondents.

Table 3: Educational status of the respondents

S.N.	Educational status	Numbers	%
1	Primary Level	40	29.41
2.	SLC	36	26.47
3.	Higher Secondary Level	16	11.76
4.	Bachelor passed or above	18	13.23
5.	Literate	26	19.11
	Total	136	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The education level of the respondents is displayed in the above table. Among the respondents 36 members are educated up to SLC which is 26.47 percent, 40 are literate up to primary level which is 29.41 percent. Bachelors level passed or above are in 13.23 in

percent. Overall, it depicts that less members have completed their higher education and majority are educated up to primary level only and can read and write only.

4.1.4 Marital status of the respondents

In any community, marriage plays a significant role. Since male and female relationships have been the foundation of the marriage system since ancient times, marriage is often seen as a cultural and social institution built on mutual understanding of opposite sex. It is a union between two people of different sexes as defined by law, society, and religion. UNO (2001) defines marriage as the legal union of individuals of the opposite sex, the validity of which may be proven by civil, religious, or other methods approved by national legislation.

Table 4: Marital status of the respondents

S.N.	Marital status	Numbers	%
1	Married	96	71
2.	Unmarried	23	17
3.	Single (widows)	17	13
	Total	136	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The above table depicts the respondents according to marital status. Most of the 71% respondents are married, 23 are unmarried and 17 are widows. Married respondents are taking care of their family members, busy with household chores and some are job holder to attain the quality life. Single (widow) have heavy burden of managing the family affairs. Married women with their husbands abroad have the extra responsibility of external works. Hence expressive (internal) role and instrumental (external) roles are the part of their life. Hence, internal vs. external dichotomies.

4.2 Contribution of co-operatives on the women empowerment

The research is focused on to analyze the difference in women empowerment after joining the co-operative in the study area.

4.2.1 Purpose of Joining Co-operative

People choose to become members of cooperatives for a variety of reasons. The motivations are always centered on finding solutions, whether it's seeking out greater value for your money or a group of like-minded people to assist with particular requirements. This post explains why you should join one and how it can advance your personal and financial goals. An organization that is jointly owned and operated by its members, who split any earnings or benefits, is called a cooperative society. They have to turn a profit and are mostly founded to address a specific demand. The respondent's purpose of joining co-operative is presented in table 5.

Table 5: Purpose of Joining Co-operative

S.N.	Purpose of Joining	Numbers	%
1.	Saving	68	50
2.	Credit /loan for business	34	25
3.	To be self-reliant /personality development	3	2.20
4.	Investment	15	11.02
5.	Economic help	16	12
Total		136	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 5 depicts the purpose of joining co-operative by respondents. Majority of respondents have joined for saving i.e. to save money and utilize in domestic as well as emergency case which is 68 in number (50 percent) .25, 2.20, 11.02 and 12 for credit facility, to be self-reliant, investment and economic help respectively. Respondents seek economic help and credit facility from co-operative to tackle the problems. It encourages people to build up the saving habit. In this way, the sudden problems can be solved inside the house itself. Rest of the money can be again used in profit making and increasing income generating activities.

4.2.2 Experience of Respondents after Joining Co-operative

The process of acquiring knowledge or skills by observation and action over time is called experience rather than through studying. An event or activity that affects one is some way. The respondents experience after joining the co-operative has been illustrated in the table.

Table 6: Respondents' Experience after Involving in Co-operative

S.N.	Experience of the respondents	Numbers	%
1.	Happy	93	68.38
2.	Unhappy	17	12.5
3.	Satisfactory	26	19.11
Total		136	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The respondents' experiences after joining a cooperative are displayed in the above table. 93 respondents out of total sampled respondents are happy which is 68.38 percent. They are happy with the service and facilities provided by co-operative. Respondents are making money from the loans taken from co-operative and able to manage and utilize the income source. 17 respondents were unhappy because they think co-operative doesn't provide skill-based training, nor provide credit facility in simple and easy access, sometimes they were not informed about the activities because they were elderly people. Some respondents are quite satisfied. Though, the majority respondents are happy and show willingness to do something.

4.2.3 Benefits/Changes observed by the respondents

To notice the change people, need to change his/her attitude then only changes can be observed or noticed. Development brings positive change in society. Industry/factory creates employment opportunities which form the secure society. It is deduced that this co-operative has brought positive changes in the life of people by providing financial and technical help. It makes them to do something different and provide the idea to do something too.

Table 7: Benefits/ changes observed by the respondents

S.N.	Changes observed by the respondents	Numbers	%
1.	Increase in Peer circle	68	50
2.	Speak and do something in society	36	26.47
3.	Able to suggest institution	22	16.17
4.	Able to present individual problem openly and get solution of it.	10	7.35
	Total	136	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 7 shows the benefits or the changes feel by the respondents after being the member of co-operative. 68 respondents out of total sampled 136 women feel that their peer circle has been increased in the society which is 50 percent. Likewise, 26.47 percent respondents are able to speak about gender equality, women violence and copes the problem. 16.17 and 7.35 percent respondents were able to suggest institution and present individual problem openly and get solution of it. This helped to understand poverty and problems by showing the path. So, in this way, changes have been noticed.

4.2.4 Training/income generating skill learned after involvement in co-operative

Training or income generating skill helps to raise the income. It makes people able to earn money. Uneducated people also can acquire training. This type of human resource is known as short- term human resource. This contributes for the development of the society and nation. Even though, the members want income generating training from co-operative but this co-operative has not provided the training to its members yet. Not a single respondent had learned training. They feel training is necessary to raise their income. Moreover, this co-operative is planning to provide income generating skill training to its members in future.

4.2.5 Perception on training

Perception signifies the ability to see hear and understand the things. Respondent has not taken any training from this co-operative. During field study it was noticed that many respondents feel training necessary.

The below table shows the respondents perception about training. 64 (47.05%) of the respondents feel training as necessary and 43.38 percent respondents does not think training necessary and 13 undergo stagnant condition. They will be happy if training is provided and will have no problem if not because they feel they are elderly people so training is not mandatory and useful for them.

Table 8: Respondents Perception on Training

S.N.	Respondents perception	Numbers	%
1.	Training necessary	64	47.05
2.	Not necessary	59	43.38
3.	Stagnant condition	13	9.5
	Total	136	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

4.2.6 Areas of loan used by women

In the study area only 61 women took the loan for different purposes. After taking loan sampled respondents have used the loan in different aspects to run their livelihood, to uplift economic condition, to reduce poverty etc. Sectors where loan amount is used are as follows:

Table 9: Areas of loan used by women

S.N.	Areas of loan used by women	Numbers	%
1.	Business	17	27.86
2.	Retail shop	12	19.61
3.	Foreign employment	17	27.86
4.	Household expenses	15	24.59
	Total	61	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 9 shows the areas of loan investment/utilization. The above scenario depicts that respondents have invested in different sectors like business, retail shop, household expenses; foreign employment etc. 61 respondents out of 136 chosen respondents have used the loan in various sectors. Respondents have used loan in productive sector in business which is 27.86 percent. In this way, for foreign employment (27.86), retail shop (19.61), household expenses (24.59) percent have been used.

4.2.7 Perceived benefits from co-operative activity

There are two influencing factors to impact i.e. positive and negative. Positive change the people whereas, negative depress the people. As Opi co-operative is concerned, respondents have positive expectations from co-operative activity but some respondents have negative experiences. The following table 12 clarifies the perceived benefits from co-operative activity.

Table 10: Perceived benefits from co-operative activities

S.N.	Perceived benefits	Numbers	%
1.	Advantages	105	77.20
2.	No disadvantage	31	22.79
	Total	136	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 10 shows perceived benefits from co-operative activity to respondents. Many respondents say the activity like religious tour, interaction program, conference, dissemination campaign are advantageous for them and very few respondents feel disadvantageous because that is not their cup of tea to sip, they are busy doing their household chores and are old. They can't give time nor do they participate. So, 22.79 percent are in disadvantage.

4.2.8 Rise of strength of respondents

Strength is the quality of being strong or the good qualities or abilities that a person or a thing has. After joining the co-operative respondents' strength level has increased. Rise of strengths of respondents has been shown in the following table.

Table 11: Rise of strengths of respondents

S.N.	Rise of strength	Numbers	%
1.	Increase in self-confidence	20	14.70
2.	Social and economic change	13	9.55
3.	Awareness about Gender equity	12	8.82
4.	Saving	60	44.11
5.	Business Expansion	20	14.70
6.	Acquiring Assets	11	8.08
	Total	136	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 11 shows, raising strengths of respondents. Majority of the respondent's biggest strength is saving which is 44.11 percent. 20 respondents' confidence levels boosted, 8.82 percent respondent are now aware about gender equality and status of female. There has been alteration of socio-economic status; acquiring assets (9.55) and (8.08) percent respectively with the utilization of money, respondents have owned luxurious and technological goods like laptop, etc.

Conclusion

The majority of respondents believed that their economic situation had changed and that they had participated in skill-training programs. The study concludes that the Opi Saving and Credit cooperative had a beneficial impact in women's empowerment and the improvement of their socioeconomic status. Similarly, 61 women were found to have taken out loans in their business expansion through cooperative lending. The survey also finds that after participating in the Opi Saving and Credit cooperative, 77.20% of women reported benefiting from the cooperative activities.

References

- Acharya, M. (1997). *Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women*. A Status Report Submitted to UNFPA, Kathmandu.
- Aref, A. (2011). Rural Co-operatives for Poverty Alleviation in Iran. *Life science Journal*, 8 (2), 38-43.

- Baral, N. (2010). *Woman's Role in Household Decision Making: A Study Based on Rural Women of Purunchaur VDC*, Kaski. Masters degree thesis submitted to the department of Sociology/Anthropology, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara.
- Bharadwaj, B. (2011). Conceptualizing Poverty and its Reduction in Nepal. PRASASAN, A *Nepalese Journal of Public Administration*, 117 (2), 105-119. Kathmandu.
- Bulbeck, C. (2010). Un-popularising feminism: 'Blaming feminism' in the generation debate and the mother wars. *Sociology Compass*, 4(1), 21-37.
- Co-operative Futures, (2006). *Fact sheet C/*. [www.co-operative](http://www.co-operative.coop) futures. Coop.
- Mali, P.M. (2005). Co-operative movement in Nepal and its role in rural development: Innovations and challenges. A paper presented on "Program on Development of organized by CITAB in Kathmandu, August 16. <http://www.cmfnepal.org>' paper, CICT AB @20 coop% 20 movement.doc.
- Mishra B (2013). In Articles, Assignment Term paper: Economic Implication of co-operative movement in Nepal.
- NRB (2010). Micro Economic Indicators of Nepal, Nepal Rastra Bank Research Department, Kathmandu.
- Pant, R. P, (2012), 'Social Science Research and Thesis Writing', Buddha Academic Enterprises Pvt. Ltd. Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Yunus, M. (1993). *Overcoming Poverty through Credit: The Asian Experience in Replicating the Grameen Bank Approach or Reaching the Poor*. Bangladesh.
- en.m.Wikipedia. org/wiki/empowerment, 2022
- Oxford dictionary, 2012
- www. Co-operative futures.coop, 2006
- www.Business dictionary. Com, 2022
- [www.the free dictionary.com/empowerment](http://www.the-free-dictionary.com/empowerment), 2003-15
- [www.unwomen. Org/.../women-empower...Dec5](http://www.unwomen.Org/.../women-empower...Dec5), 2022