

Gender Status in the Community School of Nepal

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Abstract

This paper focused on government and community schools are those schools management responsibility handed over either to the school management committee, or to the local government bodies or to other local organizations for the purpose of improving the quality of education through the active involvement of local communities. School Management Committee (SMC) is the executive body to manage community school. Involvement of local communities in the management of primary and secondary level education is common in South Asia. Much of the enthusiasm of involving communities in the form of decentralisation has come from the assumption that it will empower marginal sections of the society, particularly women to participate in development and governance process of community school development. The study is complemented by both qualitative and quantitative data collected from the selected case study sites and backed by the review of the education policy development processes in different time horizons and also other relevant documents related to the school sector where local communities are being given the responsibilities for managing schools as part of nationwide educational decentralization program. The purpose was to identify factors (both structural and agency related) that constrain or enable women's participation in community school management.

Keywords: Community School, Women's Status, Policy Implication and Gender

Introduction

In Nepal, community management of school education has a long history. Community managed schools existed even before the state decided to manage school education in early 1970s. But then due to inherent limitations of the centralized management, the public expectation of the quality of education and access was not met. In the meantime, pressures for decentralization mounted, especially from the international donors, and communities again were given power and responsibility to manage schools since the beginning of the new Millennium (2015).

However, the emphasis on decentralized education along with decentralization in different development sectors grew after the inception of multiparty democracy in 1990. Local Self Governance Act of 1999 is one of the key milestones to authorize local government bodies

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to manage and support the government managed schools in their respective territory. In Nepal, Community School program is implemented throughout the country. By 2007, there are 5919 of schools handed over to community management of which 2858 are secondary, 1772 are lower secondary and 2858 primary level.

This report presents the findings of 9 case studies and a survey conducted with 174 men and 168 women in the community managed schools. In the second section, an overview of the case study sites is presented followed by background knowledge of community school management in the third section. Major research findings are presented in the fourth section, and discussions and recommendations/conclusions are presented in the fifth and sixth sections respectively.

Objectives

- To find out status of women community managed school
- To find out policy implication and gender identity in CFMs

Methodology

The study is complemented by both qualitative and quantitative data collected from the selected case study sites and backed by the review of the education policy development processes in different time horizons and also other relevant documents related to the school sector.

Researcher selected nine schools, out of which eight are managed directly by the communities and one is managed by the Municipality. These schools were selected in such way that they could represent all development regions of the country in six different districts along with ecological zones- Terai, Mid hills and high mountains- covering verities of socio-cultural dimensions. The studied schools include: 1) Shanti Bhagvati Higher School, Morang 2) Bhanu Primary School, Morang 3) Chaitanya Secondary School, Kavre 4) Shringeri Lower Secondary School, Lalitpur 5) Sarbodaya Hogher Secondary School, Dang, 6) Sidhanath Higher Secondary School, Dadeldhura 7) Samaiji Primary School, Dadeldhura 8) Chhairo Primary School, Mustang and 9) Janashanti Secondary School, Mustang. See case study overview for specific details of each site. A survey was carried out with 342 individuals covering around 50 households in each of the nine schools studied. Out of 342 respondents, there were 168 women, 174 men (including 68 dalit persons – 29 men and 39 women) and women members of school management committees. A total of 47 members of School Management Committee (SMC) were interviewed. Apart from the quantitative data generated from the survey, narratives, stories and experiences of the interviewees have also been captured through interviews. In addition, key informants' interviews were also conducted. The key informants were selected on the basis of the knowledge and information

they have. Focus group discussion (FGD) was also the important tool used to collect the information. All together there were 36 focus group discussions carried out with 7 women only groups, 22 SMC groups, and 7 male only groups (including teacher groups. Observation was another important tool used by the researchers while in the field. Apart from empirical data collected from the research sites, published literatures related to educational laws, historical documents, research documents and reports were used as the source of secondary data source. Information collected from the above-mentioned sources was analyzed using different tools. SPSS was used to analyze the quantitative data come from survey.

Results

Findings of the study are organized according to the four conceptual blocks of the research (see main scientific report): a) status of *women participation* in community school management; b) *women's agency* in relation to participation in school management, c) the effect of *social structure* on women participation in community school; and d) the effectiveness of *policy* instruments in forging women's participation. After we briefly summarize the status of women participation, we then provide an explanation of the participation status by highlighting specific issues and constraints in relation to women's agency, social structure and policy (see conceptual framework outlined in the main scientific report for an explanation of how these analytical elements are interrelated).

Status of Women Participation in Community School

Participation in general assembly

As shown in Table 1, out of the 168 women respondents surveyed in six research sites 45 percent of the respondents said that they have participated in general parent assembly and almost 55 percent said that have not participated.

Table 1: District wise participation of women in parent assembly

SN	Name of the districts (sites)	Participation in assembly				Total
		Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage	
1	Morang	24	14.28	16	9.52	40
2	Kavre	4	2.38	21	12.50	25
3	Lalitpur	22	13.09	3	1.79	25
4	Mustang	4	2.38	11	6.55	15
5	Dang	3	1.79	17	4.97	20
6	Dadeldhura	19	11.31	24	14.28	43
7	Total	76	45.24	92	54.76	168

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

Participation in school management committee

Out of the nine community schools studied we found that there is at least a woman in the SMC in all community-managed schools. Only in three schools the number of women in the SMCs has increased up to three. Not surprisingly, in all the studied groups, none of the key positions - chairperson and member secretary - are occupied by women. Though the policy does not prohibit women to be selected as chairperson and as a member secretary, we did not find any women holding these positions in our research sites. Since the head teacher of the respective school becomes the ex-officio member secretary of the SMC, it shows that none of the school is headed by women. Table 2 below shows the detail composition of School Management Committee. It shows that all the 15 interviewed women members were elected unopposed.

The following table shows the selection criteria of men and women in the committees

Table 2: Selection Criteria in the SMC and PTA by Sex

SN	Criteria of Selection	Women	Men	Total
1	Elected	0	0	0
2	Nominated	0	2	2
3	Unopposed	15	30	45
Total		15	32	47

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

As shown in the Table 2, the average number of women participating in the SMC is around 16 percent, against the minimum 10 percent quota set by the government. The highest percentage (30%) of women is found in Bhanu Primary School management committee, Morang. As shown in the same Table 7 the inclusion of non- parents in the SMC is also remarkable in some schools. The determining factor for the inclusion of more non-parents is directly correlated to the level of urbanization and availability of the private schools in and around the research sites. For instance, in Mustang district which is the remotest research site and is far from the city centers, there are no private schools available. This has forced the parents to send their children to local community schools even some households can afford the cost of private school if they are located in the district. Here the parents sending their children to community schools also hold almost all positions in SMC. In contrast, in the research sites closer to the urban areas, where private schools are available, local people who can afford have sent their children to private schools and also occupy the position in SMC.

Table 3: Composition of School Management Committee

S N	Name of the school	Total SMC members	Number of males	Number of females	Number of non-parent	Key position occupied
1	Shanti Bhagavati Higher Secondary School	10	9	1	5*	Male
2	Bhanu Primary School	9	6	3	4	Male
3	Chaitanya Secondary School	9	8	1	3	Male
4	Shringeri Lower Secondary School	8	7	1	5	Male
5	Sarbodaya Higher Secondary School	8	6	2	2	Male
6	Siddhanath Higher Secondary School	9	7	2	2	Male
7	Samaiji Primary School	8	7	1	1	Male
8	Chhairo Primary School	9	8	1	0	Male
9	Janashanti Secondary School	9	8	1	0	Male

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

Unfortunately, the poor parents are the ones who send their children to local community schools but occupy no positions in the SMC. Even if they do, their presence is limited. This

indicates that in urban areas, local male elites in the name of community schools are enjoying key positions and imposing their decisions to the poor parent.

SMC members who are mostly men and are from non-parents category increase the fees of the students every year. They don't take care whether the poor parents can afford the increased amount or not. It might be a low amount for them as they send their children to the private schools often many times expensive then the community schools.

Contrary to this, in remote schools of Mustang, the parents of the concerned schools are taking the lead in managing the school. Apparently women's participation was found to be high in generating money from organizing cultural and other groups. All the women in the area organized in the form of AmaSamuha. Annapurana Area Conservation Project (ACAP) is the key organization to form and support AmaSamuha under the broader framework of Conservation Area Management Committee (CAMC).

Table 4: Views on hindrances for women participation in decision making by gender

SN	Hindrances	Gender				Total
		Male	Percent	Female	Percent	
1	Patriarchal social structure	56	16.37	56	16.37	112
2	Lack of education/awareness	71	20.76	71	20.76	142
3	Hesitation/language problem	16	4.68	13	3.80	29
4	Poor economic condition	15	4.39	7	2.05	22
5	Don't know	16	4.68	21	6.14	37
6	Total	174	50.88	168	49.12	342

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

Other constraints of women participation observed during focus groups discussion was that women were not recognized as parent to take part in school related affairs. Contrary to the usual practice to recognize male members as head of the respective households, the SMC of Samaiji Primary School has already started to write the letters or any notice to women's name as well recognizing that the women are also the head of the households.

Women are not recognized as parent

Female parent are not recognized as legitimate parents of their Children. Out of the nine community schools studied in eight schools women's name is not registered as a parent only

in Samaiji Primary School, Dadeldhura has registered women parent in the parent list. In eight schools, as a normal practice, father's name is registered in the school as a parent of the respective child. In practice, women's name is not even known in the village, said head teacher of the Samaiji primary school. Women in general in the village are known by their male family members - their father, father in law, husband or as mother of their own children. In early age they are known from their father or elder brothers; later they are known by their husband and father in law and at latter stage of their life they are known by their sons and brother in laws. Women spend most of their life time in their husbands' house and yet are not often addressed by their own name. Sometimes they have to even remember what is their own name, said one of the female parents from Samaijii Primary School, Dadeldhura. These are the rules of constituting the women's identity that pre-structures the scope of the involvement of women's agency in any social field, including school management. This symbolic identity of women is similar across all economic classes but varies to some extent according to the ethnic groups.

The manifestation of this subordinated identity of women is visible in different practices of school governance. A clear example is related to women's participation as a parent. While parents are invited in school related activities, in most of the cases, the invitation letters to participate in the meetings are written in the name of male parent. In the case of our research sites in Dadeldhura, generally male members of the family have migrated to India for employment and women are the *de facto* household heads but the community school still continues to send letters in the name of the male parents who are absent from the village for several years. One of the mother parents, MsHari Devi Bhat, a parent of Sidhanath School said:

I am not the head of my house though my husband is out for employment for about eight years. When I go to school to admit the child, to pay dues or to do other related tasks about my childrens' education, the school administration first ask the name of my husband and write it in the appropriate register but they never ask my name and they even don't know my name. I am managing all requirements of the children (monthly fees, dresses, stationeries, food and medicine when they fall sick) but I am not the parent to be consulted or invited in school affairs. When they invite the parent to attend school meetings, they write the letter in the name of my husband. And when I visit school they ask me when my husband comes from India instead of talking with me.

The issue of recognition goes further in terms of readiness of male to listen to women members. Table 10 shows that the proportion of male perceiving that their voice is heard in the meeting is higher than that of female.

Table 5: Perception of Respondents about Being Heard/Listened to by Others

SN	Perception	Female	Male	Total
1	Heard	34	57	91
2	Not heard	3	8	11
3	Don't know	131	109	240
Total		168	174	342

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

But in the case of Samaiji Primary School, they have started to write the invitation in the name of mother after they repeatedly found that nobody participated from the respective households. The head teacher of the school shared with the research team that since they have registered the name of the mother of the respective child it has become easier for them to write the invitation letter in women's name. The reason behind registering also women's name as parent is because of the World Food Program (WFP) where cooking oil is distributed to the mother of the school going girl child. Apart from cooking oil for female parent, the school also gets flour for making day snacks for all the school children. To get the oil and flour female parent has to bear the added responsibility of carrying these items from the nearby road head point (approximately two hours walking)

Conclusion

Gender consideration started only through policy changes made in 2002. For the first time in the history of the development of education in Nepal Education Act 2002 has provided for mandatory provision to include at least one female parent in the School Management Committee (SMC) of the community managed schools. The nine case studies demonstrate that the level of women participation is still very limited. Despite the legal requirement that at least one woman should take part in the governing body of the school to voice the concerns of women as well as to empower their own agency, often the participation of women is limited in their physical presence.

Another important way through which local men and women participate in school management is through the position of 'parents'. But women are not usually listed as parents, and are hardly invited in the school management activities. The increased participation of women involves greater costs or burdens on women at household or other arenas of social life. This means that addressing gender in one domain may lead to increased gender inequality in another domain of social life. There is still a lack of comprehensive gender policies in place to tackle gender discrimination in holistic way. The low

representation of women is related to both limited gender sensitivity of education policies as well as the highly entrenched cultural relations of gender. Policy seems to be ignorant of the complexity of gender dynamics, and takes a mechanistic approach – such as specifying percentage of required representation, and overlooking the importance of addressing cultural dimensions of change. The households and community institutions by and large are andcentric in Nepal.

Educational institutions are important vehicle that reproduce gender imbalance. Male, bahun, Sanskrit teachers are the gatekeepers of discriminatory gender traditions. The rhetoric of gender balance propagated by development agencies only pays lip service. Women representatives are nominated by males to further legitimize masculine hegemony. The agency of women is also inscribed within the masculine doxa. Even when women decide to pro-actively participate in public arenas, their deliberative competence is not adequately strong to voice their concerns. Nepali language competency is weak among the janajati and Newar women. Likewise, gender intersects with caste. Dalit women suffers from the added interactional effect of gender and caste. Even when women speak out in the meetings, their voices are often ignored, largely because women are not considered capable to contribute new ideas. There is a fear that once the schools are handed over to the community, government may withdraw its support and the whole responsibility may have to bear by the community itself like in private school. Student of Maoist party is also consistently raising voice that schools management is to be done by the government themselves not by the community. Teachers seemed even more afraid that if the government does not pay the salary of the teachers but paid by the community, their future profession will be jeopardized.

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