

Participation of Women in Post-Earthquake Reconstruction

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Abstract

Women's participation in development activities is in a meager condition, if not neglected. There are a lot more to do to accomplish in the path of participation of women in every landscape of society. Thus, the participation of women in post-earthquake reconstruction is a crucial subject at this time. In these circumstances, this study had been initiated. Empowerment is a situation where women have their self-dependency, free mobility, free participation on their own desired sector and field. The meaning of empowerment becomes meaning-ful when women become economically, socially and politically strong. In this regard, this study aims to explore the situation of women's participation in reconstruction of private households and to establish the key factors that enable or hinder women's involvement in post-earthquake reconstruction. The study has been based on primary source, data collected from interview schedule by fulfilling the validity from the review of literature with the sample from in Dhunibeshi Municipality Ward No. 2, Dhading The study concludes that the participation of women in the process of post-earthquake reconstruction has been outstanding. It has great impact on the ideology and the structure of the society. Although it was a rough ride for women to participate actively in reconstruction, their contribution will have been valued in the country's economy and society.

Keywords: participation, earthquake, women, reconstruction, empowerment.

1. Introduction

On April 25, 2015, Nepal was struck by a 7.6 magnitude earthquake. As recorded by Nepal's National Seismological Centre (NSC), the epicenter was at Barpak of Gorkha district. Due to that earthquake 8,790 people lost their life, more than 22,300 people become injured. Thirty one districts had been affected, out of which 14 had been declared crisis-hit. (PDNA, 2021)

The tremendous damage caused by earthquake resulting at least 498,852 private homes and 2,656 government buildings. Similarly, 25,669 private houses and 3,622 government buildings were partially damaged. In addition, 19,000 classrooms were destroyed and 1,100 classrooms were damaged. (NRA, 2016)

Out of 8,790 deaths, half of them were women. More than 8 million were affected across 31 districts. According to Oxfam Report 53% of victims were women. More than 117,000 people were displaced as of immediate reports. Loss and damage of physical infrastructure was severe, and over 850,000 houses were destroyed or damaged. Of these, 26% belonged to women heads of households. In addition, 375 out of 446 health facilities, covering 1.4

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million women and girls of reproductive age were affected. An estimated 93,000 among them were pregnant when the earthquake struck according to UNFPA.

After the earthquake, the government has been implementing a campaign to move on to national level reconstructions. For fund raising to reconstruction, donor conference was held on June 10.

'The National Reconstruction Policy' was drafted and implemented in 2015. This policy has also been arranged for the promotion of women's participation in rebuilding. In policy 8.3, special strategies have been made under 'Gender Equality and Inclusion'.

Shortly after the earthquake, the Nepal government started the reconstruction campaign. It is still working on rebuilding and rehabilitation work. It has also recognized the government not only physical but reconstruction of social relations.

The NRA, under its 'Recovery Framework', has not made recovery vision and strategic points of interest limited to physical construction. For example, the Recovery Vision (No. 6) addresses its gender aspects. Strategies have been mentioned in the title 'Gender Equality and Social Inclusion of Recovery'.

1.1. Condition of Women in Nepal

In Nepal, more than half of the populations are women. According to National Census 2068, the population of women in Nepal has been 51.5 percent (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Although the half of the national population comprises women, the condition of women is not pleasing. After ensuring at least 33 percent of women representation by the new constitution, 33 percent of the women Members of Parliament have represented in the Parliament. Similarly, women's representation in administrative areas is increasing as the reservation for female candidates is ensured by law. The participation of women is also increasing in the economic sector. However, due to different reasons the women's involvement in economic activity has not been as thought of.

The concept of Women in Development (WID) had been developed during the 1970s. (Rathgeber, 1989) Since then, Nepal has begun debate about WID in Nepal. However, given that the political system was not favorable, it was not possible to succeed as thought of. But after the restoration of democracy from the people's movement in 1990, women's participation and independence has increased in the economic, social, political, educational fields. After the political change of 2006, women's involvement issue has hit a historic scene.

Nepal has also prioritized women's participation in terms of periodical development plans. Current 14th Plan (2073-1973-7575) has taken a goal to build a decent, fair, safe and civilized society empowering and mainstreaming women through ensured equitable participation in social and economic opportunities. (National Planning Commission, 2015) In any activity of development, the guarantee of women participation has also been mandatory through various legal and procedural provisions. Therefore, the condition of women's participation can be seen improving.

According to Human Development Index of the UNDP, the female HDI of Nepal is 0.552 and male HDI is 0.598. Similarly the Gender Inequality Indicator (GII) is 0.480. The Labor Force Participation rate of female is 82.7 percent and the male's 85.9 percent. (UNDP, 2018) From the analysis of this statistics, one can conclude that women's participation in development activities is in a meager condition, if not neglected. There is a lot more do accomplish in the path of participation of women in every landscape of society. The participation of women in post-earthquake reconstruction is a crucial subject at this time. In these circumstances, this study had been initiated.

Berger (2008) analyzed the varying ways in which different actors and stakeholders conceptualize and operationalize gender in the Pakistan post-earthquake context. The affected areas from the 2005 October 8 earthquake then found themselves in a reconstruction setting.

Chaudhary (2015) explored the concerns of women from different status, such as; concerns of women as caregivers, concerns of pregnant women & new mothers, work burden in makeshift shelters, property ownership, personal safety and sanitation, women & violence.

'International actors played a significant role in providing relief, but Nepali women were often the first responders in communities affected by the disaster.' (Applebaum & Mawby, 2017)

Likewise, Tamang (2017) has written, women have been actively participating in the physical reconstruction of houses and infrastructures. She has reported for BBC about the scenario of Nuwakot district. "Women in different villages of Nuwakot are carrying sand and bricks, to digging foundations".

Similarly, Pant(2018) has told the story of women in Rasuwa and what they experienced as participated in reconstruction process. The women he studied have told that they 'felt liberated' and they have been 'making money, being self-sustained. Rigby (2017) has stated that many Nepali men working overseas, women are learning new skills to help rebuild the country from the rubble. In this way, news stories have been reported from across the earthquake affected localities. It shows the state of women's undue keenness in becoming an agent of national campaign of reconstruction & recovery.

2. Objectives

The overall objective of this study is to find out the scenario of women's participation in reconstruction of private households. Similarly, the specific objective of the study is to establish the key factors that enable or hinder women's involvement in post-earthquake reconstruction in Dhunibeshi Municipality Ward No. 2, Dhading.

3. Methodology

This article is prepared by using primary data, collected from interview schedule and secondary data were taken from previous studies, published books and other related literature.

4. Sampling Procedure

Sample had been taken out of total population of the proposed site, Dhunibeshi – 2 of Dhading district. The total population is the total household units victimized in earthquake, which is 838 household in Ward No. 2 of Dhunibeshi Municipality. Through purposive sampling methods 35 were selected as a sample of the study. The findings have been presented on the basis of the data and information gathered from above sample. Simple random sampling has been used to decide the sample among the entire population. Purposive sampling has been used for collecting qualitative data from the respondents who had been participating in the reconstruction process. Key informants interview was also conducted to know the participation of women.

5. Discussion and Analysis of the Study

5.1. Socio-economic Condition of the Respondents

According to local key informants and government data, greater part of the population of this ward involve in farming. So agriculture is the core occupation of the people of the area. However, these days many involve in other types of occupations like service, teaching, masonry, trade, etc. as well.

The study has focused on women participated in the reconstruction process, that's why it would be a good idea to know about the socio-economic condition of the respondent also. Mostly, women involve in farming throughout the year even though they hardly ever get economic advantage from it. Women's involvement if farming is only for subsistence. That's because economic condition of women can be said pitiable. Economic condition obviously affects the condition of education. It is obvious in the case of the women in Dhunibeshi-2. That's the reason why women don't have broadened areas of occupation other than farming. Although some skillful women work as mason these days, the number of such women is found to be very few. So, they are economically found to be mostly dependent on their husbands, sons, and brothers – male members of family. Most of the respondents are married, thus they are likely to be economically dependent. They get gendered roles at home and in society.

5.2. Areas/Forms of Women's Participation in Reconstruction

Women could have been involved ranges of activities related to reconstruction. But only few areas have come across during the study. Some areas women have been involved in are listed as follows:

5.2.1 Masonry

Some women were found to have been working in reconstruction process as masons. The organization named National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET) had given masonry training to the residents of Dhunibeshi-2. Some of the women also had taken part in the training. Afterwards, they have worked in building houses destroyed by earthquake. Eight respondents out of 35 have been found to be masons.

5.1.2 Co-worker

Women in the study area were not taking a leading role in reconstruction process. Most of the women were involved in the process of reconstruction, but they do things as support to the men. The respondents stated that they didn't have much skill to work in building houses. Most of the respondents have not worked in community level reconstruction; they only helped while building their own family housing. They carried bricks and stone, prepared clay and cement. They cooked for the masons. They looked after the livestock. In general, they did jobs those are counted as of subordinate level. However, most of the single women have been running not only their family as head of the house, but also carried out whole process of their houses damaged by earthquake.

In this way, women are found to be reduced to assistants even though they have keenness to be a powerful part of reconstruction process. However, most of the masons and single women household heads did their commendable job being exemplary of women 'empowerment'.

5.3. Leadership of Reconstruction

In the process of study, women's leadership in reconstruction process was aimed to find out. It is important because every phenomena of participation is incomplete without meaningful leadership of related group of the people. In this line, women's participation cannot be entitled as complete participation with no leadership in the process of reconstruction. That's why leadership has been taken into account.

Women have been found to be involved only in their private household construction. Women's participation is apparently neglected in decision making process related to reconstruction. During the study all the respondents were asked if they took a lead in the reconstruction process of their houses. The result is unimpressive. Only 4 out of 35 respondents were the leaders of their own house reconstruction as they did all the initiation about reconstruction. They took leadership in taking relief provided by governmental/non-governmental organizations. They carried stones, rods, and zinc-roofing materials. They arranged money by their own for reconstruction. All the other 26 women actively contributed in reconstruction of their own house and the reconstruction of their neighbor's houses, but they were not found to be the decision makers. They only worked as the decision made by the male household heads; fathers, sons, brothers, husbands etc. They, who didn't take any part in decision-making told that it was a burden to make decision. However the ultimate decisions about reconstruction were made by the male family members, women were invited on discussion over the matter of reconstruction.

Ownership of the land and house is also a very crucial issue while talking about the condition of women's participation. Most of the Women of Dhunibeshi-2 were seemed to be deprived of enjoying the property ownership. No respondent have their own property registered in their own name. Thus houses and property they call theirs are not actually theirs. The key informants say that this is one of the most important reasons behind the non-participation of women in decision making.

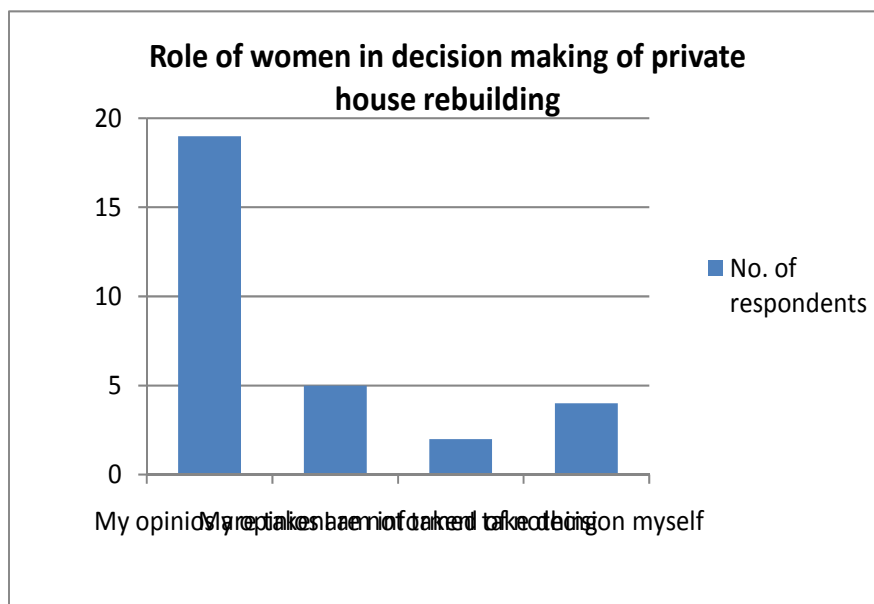
5.4 Income Generation:

In post-earthquake reconstruction, there were many income generating tasks that women could be engaged in. Masonry, social mobilization, engineering, trainer, etc. are some of the apparent jobs that could have been the most attractive income generating task for women. Sadly in the study area, no respondent is found to be involved in those arrays of jobs other than masonry and co-working. The eight respondents were the masons who had been trained by the proficient trainer. The trained 8 respondent masons have also worked as mason in the reconstruction shoulders to shoulders with the men masons. Most of the mason women worked less than six months. They earned less than 50 thousands by working as masons. They built the houses in their own neighbors. When the process building all the houses are over, they returned back to their own regular farming and other occupation.

In order to understand the situation of participation of women in reconstruction, a few questions had been asked to the respondents. Those questions had been asked as questionnaire.

Here, it would be better to present a data dragged out of the result of a question in the questionnaire to better comprehend the situation of women's participation in reconstruction. The question asked and the result of the survey on that question is presented below.

Figure 1- Role of Women in Decision Making



In this question, as presented in the figure, respondents that answered 'my opinions are taken'in the process of decision making are the highest in number. Out of 35 respondents, 19 stated that their opinions were taken in the decision making process of their private household building. Five women answered that their opinions are not taken in the process

of decision making. Two respondents were not even informed of anything about the rebuilding of their own family house. And four women who took a decision of their own were the single women and household heads.

Thus, many women are listened while taking decision about the rebuilding private houses. Even women themselves make decision in the case that they are heads of the households. Women who make decision by their own are likely to be single women. Most of the women whose husbands are out of the town are also the decision makers of reconstruction of their houses.

5.5 Obstacles Faced by Women in Reconstruction

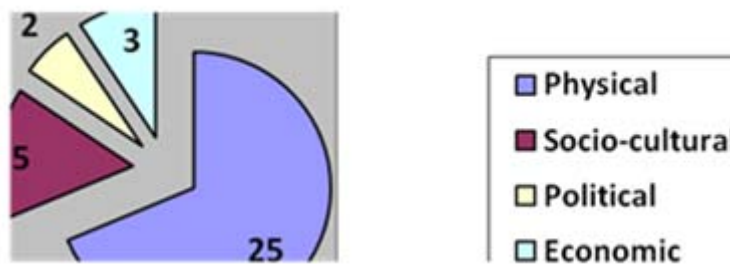
Women in reconstruction not only had supportive environment. Many unfavorable conditions were also faced by them whole working the process of reconstruction, as reported by the women of Dhunibeshi-2, Dhading. The hindrances had been of many kinds. Women of Dhunibeshi-2 Dhading still think the hardest of all barriers is women's own physique. The result of the survey shows most of the women themselves think their physique is the one which obstruct them from enhancing their status. Moreover, others aspects were also stressed by respondents. As expected, socio-cultural aspects have also been stressed by women.

Some important things women think barriers, can be recorded as follows –

- a) Physical barriers
 - Responsibilities of domestic chores
 - Child care responsibility
- b) Socio-cultural barriers
 - Attitude towards women
 - Cultural and religious beliefs
 - Women's own frail mentality
 - Patriarchal structure of the society
- c) Political barriers
 - Political bodies are still not inclusive
 - Political leaders are biased
 - Women's involvement in decision making is not satisfactory
- d) Economic barriers
 - Women's subordinating role in household income
 - Multi-dimensionpoverty
 - Unskilledwomen

The result of the survey carried out in field research 2022ADhas been presented as follows. The 35 women respondents were asked, 'what they think the most important obstacle in the reconstruction process.

Figure 2- Obstacles faced by women in reconstruction



These factors are the major aspects respondent reported during survey and interviews. As shown in above chart, most of the respondents think the physical part is the hardest obstacle for women to participate in reconstruction process. Out of 35, 25 respondents think that the physical aspect is the biggest issue in their path. Still a few women think that socio-cultural aspects are the biggest of all obstacles. From this data, we can see, the political environment has become more favorable than ever. This constructive circumstance has become easy drive for women to participate in the process of reconstruction.

Besides, other aspects also came out to be the barriers faced by women while involving in the process of reconstruction. Some other aspects women stated were educational barriers, technical barriers, religious barriers and the like. During interviews and focus group discussions those additional kinds of barriers came out as stated by the women and other stakeholders.

6. Conclusion

At the outset, the research was to find out the situation of women's participation in reconstruction of private households. While studying the situation of women's engagement, such as enthusiastic participation in women was shown as other places hit by the earthquake. The work of rebuilding can be considered to have been effective with the participation of women. Women found themselves in a physical, economic, social role. Women have experienced the development of a new structure of the power in society. They have begun to experience themselves self-reliant. It seems to be that Nepali social structure has been changing in terms of belief that respected male as superior being. Women could make their space in making decisions. Even though it is a microscopic scenario, it also plays a role in constructing, deconstructing and restructuring of a macro structure of power. Therefore, this rebuilding is not just about rebuilding houses, but also the reconstruction of power structure between men and women within a household as well as in the society. This can be believed that this process will be contributing to the formation of equitable power structure in terms of gender roles and responsibilities.

While talking about engagement, one thing that cannot be forgotten is the decision making process. It is also important for women's participation in decision making process, which was in a very weak condition. Actually, the change in laws and principles can also be said to have less impact on the actual life of women. From this, it has been clear that women have not been fully experience the change. Women only do the job to follow man's

decision. Information about what is going on in the society is less likely to be accessed by women. They have also been deprived of equal access to information. The question of the property ownership of a woman is also a complicated question. A clear picture of patriarchal social structure can be seen in this regard. Women are still deprived of being entitled to property. They work, but they do not own the house they build. They are more involved in non-income generating tasks than in the tasks that draw wages or income. From this we can find out that women have been given the subordinating roles. Women have a lot of labor in the unproductive sector. Or the value of their labor is not counted anymore.

Women have experienced the prospect of society's changing traditional beliefs and attitudes about women's ability. Their involvement shows that they are physically capable equally as men. A huge lesson has been taught to the society that mentally and administratively, females cannot be lesser than males. The belief that women equally can learn technical subjects has now been stronger. Women say that the society and the family are becoming flexible now in giving responsibility to daughters and daughters in laws. On this basis, anybody can see the indication that there will be more lights on the path of the women in the future, it's Silver Lining. Some religious and cultural beliefs can be seen changing its rigidity.

Women have had active participation in the reconstruction after earthquake; there is no argument in this point. However, this situation is not even easier. Women have made their participation overcoming various obstacles. Patriarchal ideology and structure of the society has still become a blocking wall of female engagement. Women have also faced various religious and cultural superstitions and ill beliefs. Women are naturally less educated. Right to property has not been able to be consumed by women. They are given culturally secondary roles in the society. The effect of all this is in their performance and participation. In many cases economic and in some cases, even political factors have been seen as a problem by women.

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