



Gender Dynamics in Agriculture: A Path to Livelihood Sustainability at Changunarayan, Bhaktapur

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Article Info

Abstract

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Agriculture plays a vital role in Nepal's economy, with women, particularly in rural areas, comprising a significant portion of the workforce. This paper explores gender dynamics in agriculture in Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, focusing on women's roles in food production, resource management, and decision-making. Despite their substantial involvement, women face disparities in asset ownership and access to resources. Based on field observations and surveys of 60 households, purposively selected from two agriculture dominated communities located in two different wards of selected municipality, the study reveals that women are primarily responsible for key agricultural tasks, labor managements, and financial decisions. However, their contributions are undervalued, and they often lack tools to boost productivity. The findings emphasize the need for equitable resource distribution and greater recognition of women's roles for sustainable agricultural development. The study concludes that future strategies should prioritize equitable access to resources, ownership rights, and tools that empower women in agriculture.

Keywords: Agriculture, disparity, gender equity, resource management

Introduction

Agriculture has long been a cornerstone of rural economies worldwide, with both men and women playing pivotal roles in food production, resource management, and the preservation of ecosystems. However, gender dynamics in agriculture are shaped by social, economic, and cultural factors that often result in unequal access to resources, decision-making power, and economic opportunities. While women account for a significant portion of the agricultural workforce, particularly in smallholder and subsistence farming, their contributions are frequently undervalued, and their access to land, credit, technology, and training remains limited in many regions. Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO] (2022) pointed out that among the various sectors, agriculture contributes at least 4 per cent of global GDP whereas it occupies roughly one-quarter of developing economies. Since, sustainable and inclusive food provision are considered to be fundamental requisites of healthy global development, agriculture is be taken as a most powerful weapon to cut down extreme poverty and hunger, boost income and food security for about 80 per cent of rural and poor farmers and assumes to be 2 to 4 fold more effective among the various sectors (World Bank, 2024). Similarly, FAO (2019) postulates that over three-quarters of women are engaged in agriculture, however, their actual share of contribution to the sector, as part of the paid or unpaid labour force, has not been adequately recognized nor quantified in terms of the economic contribution to rural development at large. Women's involvement is very high in voluntary production activities, whereas men's participation is very high in direct cash-generating activities such as crop production and livestock sales into the market.

The participation of women in agriculture is distinctive due to the variety of activities that they perform in a long course of time. Rural women with compare to men in agricultural activities are highly influenced by external forces such as migration to outside the village, involvement in the industry and services like non-agricultural occupations. That is why, women's contribution to farm output in most of the developing countries like Nepal is becoming more and more important as a result of abandonment of male members of the family to urban areas for education, job, and increasing number of males are being absorbed into non-agricultural sectors. Thus, rural women make up the majority of food producers (Ranjan, 2006; Sapkota, 2022).

Nepal is primarily an agricultural nation, with its economy heavily reliant on agriculture. Over 65 per cent of the population is still engaged in agricultural activities. The sector employs nearly 80 per cent of the workforce and plays a crucial role in the country's export revenue. Agriculture accounted for 36.8 per cent of the Nepalese GDP and considered to be more than one-third of national GDP until 2005 (Giri, 2023), however it has been declined to the 23 per cent by the year 2022 (MoF, 2022, p 64). The agriculture sector has been a major source of production, income and employment opportunities in Nepal. Keeping this in mind, the government of Nepal is giving continuously high priority to development of agriculture sector, but Nepalese agriculture is still very much primitive, traditional and subsistence in nature. In general, the method of cultivation is purely manual and labour intensive and farm holdings are small. Use of modern agricultural implements is very low. As Bakhunchhe (2021) pointed out that being fundamental source of family earning and rural livelihood, agriculture is a priority sector of local government in recent days. However, the employment in agriculture has dropped from 73 per cent in 2005 to 62 per cent in 2021. Despite the sector's significant contribution to GDP and widespread engagement, the government allocated only NPR 58.98 billion budget to agriculture in the fiscal year 2023/24, which is just 3.36 per cent of the total budget (Pradhan, 2023).

The female population in Nepal is slightly higher than the male population. The overall development of the nation cannot be achieved without the active participation of women because they occupy more than half of total population. Active participation of women in all kinds of development activities is essential for the overall development of the nation. Through various studies about the status of women we find that the situation of women in developing countries like Nepal is different from that of the other developed nations (Upadhya, 1996). In Nepal, due to illiteracy, ignorance, conservative perception, poverty and superstition women are treated as second class citizen and they are not given opportunities to make contribution in development and economy. The legal, social and economic status of women is also not uniform throughout the country (Gautam, 2021). Their position differs from place to place and community to community depending upon the socio-economic condition, geographical location and a number of variables imposed by the wider national society in terms of legal framework. Dahal (2017) concludes that unless female are treated equally as male in the household, the status of any individual household remains almost static in terms of socio-economic change. The census 2011 has recognized about 11220697 people as being economically active of which 44.96 per cent are women. According to the census, only 36.84 per cent of women in Nepal are economically active and their employment is also not uniform in all sectors. Data from National Statistics Office demonstrate that there are about 70.4 per cent people are usually active within which 78.6 per cent male and 61.3 per cent of female are usually active. Out of the total active population 64.8 per cent of female are in agriculture whereas only 50.6 per cent of male in the same sector (NSO, 2022). This figure shows the growing trend of female to the agriculture sector.

Agriculture is major sector of employment in Nepal, comprising more than 65 per cent of all workers. Agriculture provided 24.1 per cent of total employment in urban areas and 85.5 per cent in rural areas in 1991. In that year, 92.8 per cent of all economically active rural women in contrast to 80.4 per cent of economically active rural women were engaged in agriculture sector (FAO, 1986). Workers in Nepalese agriculture can be classified roughly into two categories: unpaid family worker (who enjoy right over what they earn, the system called as Parma labour system) and paid workers. Timalsina and Singh (2020) pointed out that empowerment of women is essential in all the sectors to eliminate the gender gap and equal treatment should be maintained so that they can equally contribute for the growth and all-round development of any country concern. Realizing this fact, all the Sustainable Development Goals are formally or informally taking concern on gender sensitizations through which sustainable development seems possible.

Several studies over the years have clearly indicated that the labour contribution of women in Nepalese agriculture appears to be higher than that of men and most of the agriculture work is done by women. In additional works, they also have to perform many other household works like caring children, food preparation, shopping, housekeeping, and family health care and so on. They are active in farming preparations, compost preparation, land sowing, hoeing, storing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting and storing. Their involvement in farming system is affected by interplay of socio cultural, economic and environment factors (NSO, 2023).

Nepalese farm women can play a very crucial role in determining the future development of agriculture. Many recent studies have revealed that farm women are strong force not only in various agriculture activities but also in agriculture decision-making process. It is mostly the women, decision about the type of crops to

be planted, use of improved seeds, use of manure and fertilizers etc. Thus, women can play active roles both as participation and as decision maker in works related to agriculture, particularly in food crop production. Upadhyay, (2005) in her case study from selected part of India and Nepal came in to the conclusion that the involvement of women outweighs to male while using most of the natural resources such as; water, agriculture, forestry, livestock, and fishery. However, they must be accountable to male in most of the cases. Therefore, the disparity persists in most of the developing world which should be ended for sustainable livelihood in rural areas.

Agriculture in Nepal is primarily subsistence-based, focused on food production, and lacks diversification. Food crops play a crucial role in the country's agricultural system. With Nepal's population continuing to grow, the demand for food has increased significantly, placing immense pressure on agricultural output (Khatri & Timsina, 2023). Despite the rising population, the government's efforts have not been sufficient to meet the food needs of the rapidly expanding populace. Women are central to agricultural development in Nepal, given their multifaceted roles, yet they often face discrimination (K. C. & Race, 2020). Though women are vital contributors to agriculture, their work is frequently undervalued, either unpaid or poorly compensated, as it is seen as voluntary. Modern agricultural technology is typically targeted towards men, despite women contributing more to the sector. Men continue to hold dominant power over women in areas such as land rights, decision-making, and property ownership. In rural areas, women are often confined to domestic roles within the home, while men are encouraged to participate in developmental activities. As a result, women are consistently denied equal opportunities and access to resources. The economy of Nepal is larger concentrated in agriculture sector where women play a major role by participating actively in various forms (Upreti et al., 2018). It is important because women shouldn't be just limited within the four walls but they should also be involved in each and every aspect which will help the women to gain various technical, practical ideas. The study made an attempt to study gender discrimination which is one of the major issues in the context of agricultural development. Rural women's vital work in the Nepalese agriculture sector can't be ignored.

Economic Survey (2018) states that with growing rural to urban migration by men, there is 'feminization' of agriculture sector, with increasing number of women in multiple roles as cultivators, entrepreneurs, and laborers. Globally, there is empirical evidence that women have a decisive role in ensuring food security and preserving local agro-biodiversity. Rural women are responsible for the integrated management and use of diverse natural resources to meet the daily household needs. This requires that women farmers should have enhanced access to resources like land, water, credit, technology and training which warrants critical analysis in the context of India. In addition, the entitlements of women farmers will be the key to improve agriculture productivity. The differential access of women to resources like land, credit, water, seeds and markets needs to be addressed (MoF, 2018). As mentioned by Dahal (2017), unless female are treated equally as male in the household, the status of any individual household remains almost indifferent in terms of socio-economic change.

Past planning efforts failed to recognize and utilize women's equal and full contribution to agricultural development. In Nepal, many development strategies have so far bypassed the primary needs and interests of the rural women. They are not in a position to increase their agricultural product and income through the use of different support service provided by the concerned institution as there are still a number of socio-culture and traditional values which are less supportive to the advancement of women (Shrestha, 1997). Our agriculture largely relies women labour force. In food crop farming, women are involved from sowing the seeds to managing the family's consumption. They are performing these activities with the limited technical ideas of crop production. By analyzing gender dynamics within agriculture, the aim of this research paper is to examine the contributions of women in farm production, identify the barriers they face, and explore policy solutions that foster gender equity, leading to more inclusive and sustainable agricultural development.

Materials and Methods

This paper is prepared in the descriptive research design depending on the data collected from both qualitative and quantitative types, sourced from both primary and secondary materials. Secondary data are obtained from the records of the Municipality office in Chagunarayan and other relevant organizations along with digital platform such as; Google scholar, ResearchGate, JSTOR, Science direct, NepJOL, and so on whereas primary data are gathered through a mailed survey and interviews with key informants along with field observation to cross validate the information, using both structured and unstructured questionnaires so that the study is also supposed to be more reliable and valid. The researcher employed convenient technique for selecting two wards

3 and 5 of Changunarayan municipality of Bhaktapur district where agriculture and animal husbandry is highly concentrated as the study area. Since, the total number of household of two wards according to census report 2021 is 4106, out of which 598 household from two areas of municipality namely Jhaukhel and Chhaling are considered as study population (NSO, 2022). A total of 60 households were purposively selected representing about 10 per cent of total study population as sample units from both of the areas. Simple descriptive statistical tools such as percentages and averages are used for analysis of the collected data. Both of the primary as well as secondary data are analyzed and interpreted depending upon the aim of the research paper.

Results and Discussion

Recognizing and valuing the role of women in rural and sub-urban areas is essential, not only because they constitute nearly half of the formal global food production workforce, but also because rural women play a crucial role in small-scale food production, preserving biodiversity, reviving agro-ecological practices, and ensuring food sovereignty. Their contributions are vital for maintaining sustainable livelihoods at the grassroots level in many developing societies. Nepalese agriculture in recent days increasingly depends on women mainly because of the absence of the male member in household.

Changunarayan municipality, being one of the historic and religious place of Kathmandu valley situated in northern part of Bhaktapur district, highly composed with the farm practices for livelihood. It not just produce for the food requirement of its own people, but to supply to the entire Kathmandu valley. The municipality has taken its motto as “*Krishi, Paryatan ra Samajik Purbadhar; Samriddha Changunarayanko Mul Adhar*” [Agriculture, Tourism and Social Infrastructure; Fundamental basis of advanced Changunarayan]. Therefore, the municipality has given high priority to the agricultural development and allocate about 15 million annual budget in an average to this sector along with different targeted, entrepreneurial and empowerment oriented program especially for female by realizing the crucial role of the women (Changunarayan Municipality, 2078BS).

However, the statistical figure where this research has been concerned looks an unfair to female in the ownership of fixed assets. The census report shows that there is insignificant ownership of most of the fixed assets by women in Changunarayan municipality even though women have dominant contribution in agricultural activities and nutrient supply which is crucial in livelihood support in everywhere. The actual ownership status of fixed assets by women in Changunarayan are shown in the table below:

Table 1: *Ownership pattern of fixed assets by female in Changunarayan*

S.N.	Category	Ownership percent of women
1	Housing unit only	3.1
2	Land only	9.4
3	Both (housing unit & land)	13.5
4	Neither housing unit or land	73.3
5	Not stated	0.8
	Total	100.1

Source: NSO, 2022

Table 1 clearly demonstrate the ownership domination by the male member in the household even if they are absent in the resident currently. Even if women are dominantly contributing agricultural output and income, nearly three-quarter of the female are beyond the ownership of neither house nor land is really a disappointing fact. However, people argue that as a result of favourable legal provision in land and other property registration to women, the situation is gradually increasing in recent days.

Gendered practice of Various Farming activities

The farmers have varieties of work to do in the agricultural farm before, during and after the crop production. Out of all, some of the selected works to be performed and its gender composition of prominent workers are given in the table below.

Table 2: Gender based distribution of various agro-activities

Various agro-activities	Prominent workers			
	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage
Land preparation	42	70	18	30
Transplanting	54	90	6	10
Harvesting	47	78.83	13	21.67
Ploughing	15	25	45	75
Irrigation	27	45	33	55
Total in average	37	61.67	23	38.33

Source: Field Survey 2024

Table 2 clearly shows that almost all the preparation, transplantation and harvesting activities are crucial and performed by the female members of the household. Whereas ploughing and irrigation activities are mostly carried out by the male members. In an average, all most 62 per cent of the agricultural activities are controlled by female. That means, female are willingly or unwillingly performing most of the agricultural activities since long back without any empowering tools.

Role of women in workforce management

The role of women in managing agricultural labor is crucial. While family members contribute significantly to agricultural activities, they are often insufficient to handle all the tasks required for timely completion. Consequently, individual households must rely on additional labor to meet their agricultural needs. Women often play a key role in overseeing and organizing this extra workforce, ensuring that tasks are completed efficiently and on schedule. That can be clearly shown in the following table.

Table 3: Agricultural workforce management of household

Members of HH	Number	Percentage
Female	33	55
Male	15	25
Both	12	20
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey 2024

Table 3 shows that women play a significant role in managing agricultural labor. In many households, more than half of the respondent argued that women are primarily responsible for coordinating the workers to ensure that tasks are completed efficiently on time. While in some cases, both men and women share these responsibilities, it is evident that women's involvement in worker management is particularly high, highlighting their critical role in the agricultural labor force.

Involvement of women in budget management for agricultural activities

Financial resources are essential for completing various agricultural tasks. The table below shows that above 50 per cent of the female respondents argued that they are responsible for managing the budget for agricultural activities. Additionally, some 23 per cent of respondents indicate that both men and women share this responsibility.

Table 4: Agricultural budget management practice of the respondents

Members of HH	Number	Percentage
Female	31	51.67
Male	15	25
Both	14	23.33
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey 2024

From the above table we clearly understand that female had major role in arrangement of financial resources for farm activities and they have high involvements with compare to male on most of the household.

Storage of agricultural products

After the harvest, some households choose to sell their agricultural products in the market, while others store them at home for future use along with storage for seed making. To understand who takes on the responsibility for storing these products, a question was posed to the respondents. The table below reveals that half of the respondents believe that female are primarily responsible for storing agricultural products, rather than male.

Table 5: *Distribution of respondent regarding the storage of agricultural product*

Members of HH	Number	Percentage
Female	30	50
Male	20	33.33
Both	10	16.67
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey 2024

From the table 5, it is clearly understand that female have important role in storage of agricultural products for making seeds and further consumption whereas male occupies only one-third of the task. That means women are responsible from field to the feed in agricultural system in the research area.

Marketing on Agricultural products

The people of the sample households used to sell the excess amount of agricultural production such as; crops, fruits and vegetables to the nearest market. Data from the field shows, out of 60 households only 40 (66.67 per cent) could produce excess agricultural product even it is varies in quantities to sell in the market whereas 20 (33.33 per cent) could produce equal to or less than their regular food requirement.

Gender distribution of marketing practices

Variation in agricultural practise among male and female is not limited in the field related activities, rather it looks different in marketing practice as well. This gap exist either due to the absence of working age male member in the household or as a result of passive involvement in the marketing activities of male. However, respondent argued that the earning from the selling does not remain under the control of the female only is the issue to be discussed.

Table 6: *Distribution marketing practices of the products*

Members of HH	Number	Percentage
Female	27	45
Male	13	21.67
Both	20	33.33
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey 2024

Table 6 indicates that male family members tend to have less responsibility when it comes to selling agricultural products. Instead, women are more actively involved in marketing activities. However, in households where the entire income relies on agriculture, marketing efforts are typically a cooperative endeavor involving both men and women. The agricultural products commonly sold in the market include cereals, beans, various vegetables, fruits, and similar items.

Means of transportation

The transportation of the agricultural production up to the nearest market is not so easy task for some of the respondent household. Due to weak economic condition for having private vehicle and lack of road facilities for all season, some of the farmers are still in the problem. However, after the active involvement and allocation of local budget by representatives in infrastructure like road, their market access has been increasing day by day which can be shown in table below:

Table 7: Uses of transportation for agricultural production

Means of Transportation	Household	
	Number	Percentage
Carrying	35	58.33
Vehicle	25	41.67
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

As shown in the table 6, among the total households, more than 58 per cent farmers have to carry the product themselves up to the nearest market whereas about 42 per cent of them transport the seeds, fertilizer and their agricultural production via public or private vehicles.

Discussion

The study highlights the crucial role women play in Nepalese agriculture, particularly in rural and sub-urban areas. Women are not only key contributors to small-scale food production but are also integral to preserving biodiversity, maintaining agro-ecological practices, and ensuring food sovereignty. Their involvement is essential for sustaining livelihoods at the grassroots level, especially as Nepalese agriculture increasingly relies on women either due to the absence of or engage in nonfarm activities outside by male members (Sapkota, 2022). Realizing this fact, the municipality has adopted a motto emphasizing the importance of agriculture, tourism, and social infrastructure as the foundation for its development. Additionally, recognizing the critical role of agriculture, the municipality prioritizes agricultural development by allocating an average annual budget of 15 million NPR to the sector. Similarly, the municipality implements various women targeted entrepreneurial and empowerment-oriented programs, particularly aimed at supporting women in agriculture.

However, the data reveals a disparity in the ownership of fixed assets, with women holding minimal ownership despite their dominant contributions to agricultural activities. In Changunarayan municipality, nearly three-quarters of women do not own housing units or land, which is fair enough given their significant role in agriculture. The study also examines the gender distribution of various farming activities. Women are predominantly responsible for tasks such as land preparation, transplanting, and harvesting, which constitute nearly 62 per cent of agricultural activities. Men, on the other hand, are primarily involved in ploughing and irrigation. Despite women's significant contributions, they often perform these activities without access to empowering tools or resources.

In terms of workforce management, women are found to be the primary managers of agricultural labor in many households. They oversee and organize the workforce, ensuring that agricultural tasks are completed efficiently. More than half of the respondents indicated that women are chiefly responsible for this role, highlighting their critical involvement in agricultural operations. Similarly, financial management for agricultural activities also falls largely on women, with over 50 per cent of female respondents reporting that they manage the budget. Women are also primarily responsible for the storage of agricultural products post-harvest, with half of the respondents assigning this task to women. Their role extends from the field to the storage of seeds and food for future consumption, demonstrating their comprehensive involvement in the agricultural process. When it comes to marketing agricultural products, women again take on a more active role compared to men (K.C. & Race, 2020). Although some households engage in cooperative marketing efforts, particularly when the family's income is entirely dependent on agriculture, women are more frequently involved in selling produce in the market.

The study also addresses the means of transportation used by households to bring products to market. Due to economic constraints and inadequate road infrastructure, 58 per cent of farmers have to carry their products to the nearest market themselves, which posit to the women's burden, while 42 per cent use public or private vehicles. This highlights ongoing challenges in market access despite recent improvements in infrastructure. In this regard Upreti et al. (2018) recommend the need of specific policy provision by the government side to cope with the difficulties faced by women in agriculture.

Overall, the results underscore the indispensable role of women in Nepalese agriculture that contribute for livelihood sustainability in the peri-urban areas in Bhaktapur where they are connected to agriculture from

managing labor and finances to marketing and storage, even if they continue to face significant challenges in asset ownership and access to resources.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the crucial role that women play in agriculture in Changunarayan Municipality of Bhaktapur, Nepal. They contribute significantly to food production, biodiversity conservation, and livelihood sustainability, yet continue to face persistent challenges, particularly in terms of asset ownership, with nearly three-quarters still lacking access to land or housing rights. Despite managing over 60 per cent of agricultural tasks, including labor, financial management, and marketing, women remain marginalized due to deep-rooted gender disparities. The municipality has initiated empowerment programs to support women, but these efforts are insufficient to fully address the systemic inequalities they encounter. To ensure long-term, sustainable agricultural growth, future development strategies must prioritize equitable access to resources, secure ownership rights, and provide empowering tools and opportunities that enhance women's contributions to the sector. Only by addressing these gender inequities can agriculture in Changunarayan and beyond realize its full potential.

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