

 <p>ISSN 2631-2131</p>	<p>5. <b>COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION IN MICRO CREDIT AS A TOOL OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT</b></p> <p>– By <b>Bhandari N.</b></p>
Author(s)	Nirmal Bhandari
Association	Tribhuvan University (PhD Scholar)
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Email	nirmal2033@yahoo.com

### Abstract

*This article is about community mobilization in micro credit as a tool of women empowerment. It argues that women empowerment is a process and community mobilization is a tool for women empowerment process through micro credit programs. This article is based on the views of selected key informants' information through participation observation and a case study at Mahadevsthan Village in Dhading. Three local NGO managers and their three beneficiaries were conveniently selected for the sampling purpose. The main argument of the article shows that most of the females who received microcredit finally got socio economic empowerment through acquiring the access to capital, control over resources, self-esteem, confidence, decision making power.*

**Keywords:** community mobilization, micro-credit, women empowerment

### Background

Community mobilization is an organized process through which people receive the awareness. Regarding the present situation of community, it is a genuine question that how to bring positive changes within the community. Community mobilization is possible by using various resources. It is one of the strategic methods that helps people to attain maximum community development mobilizing from the level of political parties, social movement, and individual groups (Kabeer, 2001). In a similar way, empowerment is another development buzzword. There is limitation to any single definition of empowerment. However, empowerment means the capacity of individuals,

groups and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives.

In a sociological sense, the term 'community' has various meanings. We can define a community as a group of people living in a particular geographical area and they share their common values, interests and they follow a particular way of living. And the appropriate sociological meaning of community means a group of people or society helping each other having common belief, needs, interests, and number of other common conditions that affects the identity of the participants and their degree of cohesiveness. And in the development sense, proper management and utilization of resources is the best possible way for the development of the community (Jones, 2000). Community mobilization is always prominent for the development and upliftment of any community. For mobilizing the community people make their plans and then do the things accordingly. They take charge, transforming, developing their community and their lives as well. Community mobilization is a process which allows people in the community to identify their needs and problems and bring them together for a social action and their community development (Kabeer, 1999). In development sector and discourse, community mobilization as a method of participatory approach after 1970s become model in developing countries for development in general, and in particular community mobilization through micro finance becomes tools for developmentalist (Mosley, 2001)

Historically, women in Nepal under the patriarchy were/are excluded from socially and economically from the various resources compared to men. Needless to say, disparities between men and women prevail in education, health, employment and income opportunities, control over assets, personal security and participation in the political process that make women disadvantaged and less empowered, which limits the country's ability to achieve its full potential. The aim of this research is to shed the light on the impact of microcredit/microfinance with the empirical evidence to analyze and explore the linkages with credit of households to become the sustainable empowerment of poor women (Friedman,1992).

Women constitute 51.5 percent of the total population and 26.6 percent households are female headed. National statistics (CBS, 2014) shows that women's literacy rate is 57 percent while 75 percent to male and the national literacy rate is 66 percent. Women's involvement in technical and vocational education is also lower than men's. According to census 2011, only 10.7 percent of women have owned their house and having land in their name is only 9 percent. There are still 79.5 percent women have neither a house nor land in their ownership. The issue of women's

empowerment has become one of the high agendas of development discourse since the fourth UN Women Conference held in Beijing in 1995. The Government of Nepal has, over the years, given persistent emphasis in it. The annual budget of the Government of Nepal has started to allocate a budget dedicated for women's empowerment. Donor agencies, I/NGOs and other government institutions are also contributing in this endeavor. The Government of Nepal has been trying to operate various poverty alleviation programs since the first development plan in order to alleviate rural poverty but many rural poor people especially women have not benefited from traditional development programs and policies (Ackley, 1995). Different tools are introduced for the empowerment of women. Among them, microcredit has the prominent role.

### **Objectives**

To assess the economic empowerment of women involved in microcredit programs by community mobilization of Mahadevsthan village,

To find out the strategies to control over resources by the rural women

To find out the impacts of microcredit by community mobilization in decision making in household affairs

### **Methodology**

Two primary indicators from Longwe analytical framework are taken to understand the empowerment and microcredit relationship in Mahadevsthan of Dhading District are: Participation and control, basically nature of data of this study was mostly qualitative because nature of this research is based on find out the central phenomenon of women's empowerment; participation and control were the indicators of the research. To measure personal beliefs, perceptions and activities participation observation and case studies also were carried out to get a deep understanding of empowerment. There are nearly 20 NGOs and partner INGOs working in the relief phase of disaster in Dhading settlements. NGOs are taken because of community mobilization and MC are mostly provided by the NGO with collaboration of INGO and the nature of my research was to measure empowerment through community mobilization. All the NGOs are taken because all the NGOs are working collaboratively after the earthquake.

After the Gorkha earthquake, Many NGOs and humanitarian organizations started their intervention for the relief and betterment of the Mahadevsthan. Shanti Nepal provided water reservoir, Bikas Chautari provided seeds, FOCUS Nepal helped women to run agriculture cooperatives. Women cooperative group first produced the vegetable and sold it through the cooperative. All the Mc

intuitions are working in the rural area to enhance the women status. The prime business model of microcredit institutions is providing micro loans to the poor women in groups. Managers from three NGOs (Shanti Nepal, Bikas Chautari, and FOCUS Nepal) and their three (one each) beneficiaries were selected conveniently. Data were collected through key informant's interview and participation observation as a case study with the selected respondents and households.

## Discussions

In my research area, most of the respondents are under SLC, however, their involvement in MC and community mobilization has helped to get empowered. Empowerment means earning, access to capital, control over capital, making arguments with others without hesitation and participation in the decision making process in households as well as community affairs participation in different posts and committees. This has covered the measures of empowerment of Sara Longwe's indicators of control and participation which I have taken to examine the empowerment indicators of the research. In my research area, there are more than six local NGOs and INGOs working by partnership with local communities and NGOs. Madevstan is remote, however, Lots of organizations play a vital role for women empowerment. Women of my research area think they are empowered because of the microcredit programs. In their previous life they didn't have a role in making decisions in the household as well as community affairs. Even, they could not argue with others in the society. But now they are able to earn, to make decisions inside the home and at the community level, to participate, to argue and people listen to them. And they believe it is because of microcredit (VDC, 2070).

To know the empowerment status, I have developed three questions. The answer of the question one attempted to measure the economic empowerment of the respondents on the basis of access to capital, control over resources and decision making in household affairs. Similarly, from research question two, the roles of other empowering elements have been tested and from the last research question, respondent's participation in societal activities have been measured. The following section presents the status of women participating in microcredit programs and their changing status after joining the microcredit group in the research area.

In this research, 'participation' means involving women in the process of making household decisions. To find out the process of empowerment, the participation was analyzed before joining the MC and after the involvement in MC. Participation only cannot indicate women's role and position involved in the decision making process. Who controls decisions or who has the role of finalize is most important. Therefore, it further analyzes women's control over the decision making

process. How are women influencing household decisions and there is equality of control without either side dominating? I have applied the concept of participation and control of decision making as per Sara Longue (1990) framework of women's empowerment. Apart from Longue (1990), I concentrate on working women's involvement in the household decision making process and status of equality of control in household resources rather than decision making in policy-making including administration and control over factor of production with benefit sharing.

### **Participation in HH Decision Making Process**

Women's participation in decision making roles depends on their family type, education level, and their own position in the household. There is a link between these diversities among women and household decision making processes. The experience, skill, education and household position play an important role for women's diversified decisions. Overall, senior and higher educated women have greater influence in household decisions than junior and lower educated women. Not always only do male dominate household decision-making; older females dominate over the junior female members. In general, older household members are expected to dominate household decisions as they have traditionally. At the individual and household levels, other important indicators of empowerment have been used, Within the domestic domain, for example, the relative value of a woman's economic contribution is used much less often than the simple fact that she brings in an income or has control over resources. Kabeer describes "the conceptualization of empowerment that informs the research touches on many different aspects of change in women's lives, each important in themselves, but also in their inter-relationships with other aspects. It touches on women's sense of self-worth and social identity; their willingness and ability to question their subordinate status and identity; their capacity to exercise strategic control over their own lives and to renegotiate their relationships with others who matter to them; and their ability to participate on equal terms with men in reshaping the societies in which they live in ways that contribute to a more just and democratic distribution of power and possibilities" (Kabeer 2008).

Decision making is an important feature of women empowerment. Decision making about the resources mobilization for household activities and participation in societal affairs has also the value in women. After joining the MC, the percentage of decision making of women in HH reached 44 percent whereas only six percent women participated in the decision making process before the joining MC.

### ***Participation in Decision making in HH***

Before the participation in MC	respondents	Percent
Participated in HH decision making	6	6
Not participated in HH decision making	94	94
<b>After the participation in MC</b>		
Participated in HH decision making	66	66
Not participated in HH decision making	44	44

(Source: field survey 2016)

The table shows that participation in HH decision making before the participation in MC was only six percent and 94 percent HH decision was made by the male, however, after joining the MC the women's participation in HH decision making increased and reached 66 percent which almost 60 percent increased. It is a great achievement in women's empowerment. The participation in HH decision making processes was increased because of the involvement in MC. MC played a vital role not only for economic progress, however, for all-round development.

Overall; women's participation in domestic decision making is satisfactory at only purchasing of daily necessities in nuclear households. Female's participation and involvement in daily purchasing is found meaningful and they have greater influence in control over such type of decision making process whereas all types of decisions of extended households are decided and controlled by either parent in law or husbands. Yet, women have participated in decisions related to large purchases and important events but male have an important role for finalizing these decisions. Women are identified as involved in the discussion process, not as the final decision maker. Respondents were asked about who controls the final decision or who says yes finally in the decision making process. Almost all responses were on male's role in finally saying "yes" in decision, however, in this research final decision also was made by the women which was interesting. Similarly, shows that participation means equal participation in each and every sector e.g. policy, decision making economic and planning. where she states that all the Mc intuitions are working in the rural area to enhance the women's status. The prime business model of microcredit institutions is providing micro loans to the poor women in groups. The formation of women groups is taken as collateral against the loan. She tried to examine whether the women from her research area have access to loans or not? How difficult is it to borrow a loan? And how many MC institutions do they have

access to for loans? It showed that MC helped women empowerment such as participation in HH decision making, control over decision making, running the HH activities, children' education etc. It also showed that before MC those respondents reported that they were not able to participate in the HH decision making process and were able to participate after the MC.

### Case Study

***Kamala Tamang Pseudonym** (43) has three sons' one daughter and a husband. Their family was poor and they were not able to support their children's education. Her husband used to work as daily labor in Malekhu Bazar. When Kamala joined the MC, she learned not only as at saving but also about many other things such as offseason vegetable farming. Now her children go to good school. She has good savings and she is now working in her own farm and her husband is also working with her by leaving the wage labor out of the village. Now she took command in her HH. How to save, where to invest and when to invest all the decisions now made by her. She has brought a Ghaderi (a piece of land to build a house) near to VDC headquarter. At first they lived in difficult situations and rarely maintained their hand mouth problem by working agricultural work and wage labor. When she became a member of the cooperative and took a loan of Rs. 12 thousand. For that amount she bought chickens and at the same time she invested some money preparing seeds and sold it. Within a year they added some goats and continued their seeds preparing. She said that she is very honest to pay the loan amount in the time because she earned and invested and she wants to see others in the same way.*

*She has earned lots of money as well as dignity. Before the involvement in MC her condition was poor and she had to say yes to what her husband commanded, however, now the situation has changed and she is the commander of her house. All her family is happy and I met her husband also when I was talking with her wife, he added some more interest in favor of her which seems that she has earned lots of respect and dignity through her involvement in MC. MC not only fulfilled their basic needs and economic upliftment, however, she got empowered. I argue that Kamala economic empowerment leads the women empowerment because when she started to earn, her husband also obeyed her and started to follow.*

(Source: Field Survey, 2016)

This case showed that MC has played a great role for women empowerment. Empowerment is the process and multi-dimensional phenomenon. MC increased the economic condition, social status, awareness. This case also shows that community mobilization (MC) plays a vital role for women empowerment.

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2005 as the year of International Microcredit to recognize microcredit's contribution to poverty alleviation (Sharma 2011). The United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have galvanized the development committee with an urgent challenge to improve the welfare of the world's neediest people. Empowerment is one of four important pillars of human development approach. It was also one of the important elements of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper that shaped Nepal's development priority during and after the Tenth Plan. Hence, it is highly imperative that we examine whether and to what extent women in rural Nepal have been empowered through various ways. This research plans to take micro credit as a case in point to examine women's empowerment initiatives.

### **Micro credit in Nepal**

Microfinance is necessary to overcome exploitation, create confidence for economic self-reliance of the rural poor, particularly among women. The present study was carried out to meet the objectives i.e. to analyze the contribution of women entrepreneurs to change the life style, to evaluate the socio-economic activities and to assess the effectiveness of microfinance on improving women's living standard.

In the past two decades, Nepal introduced various microcredit programs with diversified methods and modalities including: public vs. private sector modality, project based modality, wholesale lending based modality, community and deprived sector based modality, etc. The programs such as Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW), Micro Credit Project for Women (MCPW), Grameen Bikas banks (GBBs), etcetera come under gender-based programs. Likewise, the programs namely Program in Western Terai (PAPWT), Third Livestock Development Project (TLDP), Community Groundwater Irrigation Sector Project (CGISP) etcetera come under project based micro credit programs. The activities of Rural Self Reliance Fund (RSRF), Rural Microfinance Development Centre (RMDC), Sana Kisan Bikas Bank (SKBB), etc. are solely based on wholesale microcredit modality. Likewise, the microcredit activities of Saving and Credit program (SACCOs) and Financial Intermediary NGOs (FINGOs) fall under the modality of community/rural based (NRB,2013).

According to Longwe equal participation and role on decision making on household as well as societal affairs indicates empowerment. But in my research area, women's role in household affairs has become significant in comparison with society. In comparison with their past life they are able to speak in the group, to make arguments, to organize, to share their feelings and problems within the groups, to attend women's meetings etc. In fact, it was beyond their imagination to participate in an argument, to raise a question, to share their opinion with the high ranked and respected persons of the community. They highly value and are happy with these achievements.



Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Women's empowerment is a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources, access to money and control over decision-making in the home, community, society and to gain power. And women empowerment process should be understood through a holistic approach because it is the most used and contested phenomenon.

In the 1990's, five development banks were established as a replication of the Bangladesh Grameen Bank model of microfinance delivery. Later as a result of the promotion of private sector's participation in microfinance, Nirdhan, Centre for Self-Help Development (CSD), Chhimek and other organizations came into existence. Some government's donor-funded directed programs (TLDP, PAPWT, CGISP, etc) have been implemented in Nepal in coordination with NRB. The common features of such programs were: (i) targeted to the specific sectors and people with low income, (ii) extend collateral free credit on group guarantee basis, (iii) program includes other support services along with credit, (iv) principal aim to alleviate poverty (NRB, 2013). As we mentioned, many programs are launched as micro financing programs in Nepal. Among them The Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW), Microcredit Project for Women (MCPW) and Rural Development Banks are gender based programs which have been focused on rural women's empowerment.

One of the main objectives of Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF) established in 2004 is to reach out to the poor and vulnerable groups socially excluded based on caste, ethnicity and gender (poor women, Dalit and indigenous people). Subsequently, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2005 as the Year of International Microcredit to recognize microcredit's contribution to poverty alleviation (Sharma 2011). The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have galvanized the development committee with an urgent challenge to improve the welfare of the world's neediest people.

### **Linkage of Microfinance, power and empowerment**

A gendered debate Empowerment is defined as the processes by which women take control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices. Thus, it is the process of acquiring the ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability has previously been denied. The core elements of empowerment have been defined as agency (the ability to define one's goals and act upon them), awareness of gendered power structures, self-esteem and self-confidence (Kabeer, 2001). As long as the disadvantaged suffer from economic deprivation and livelihood insecurity, they will not be in a position to mobilize. The word empowerment is used in many different contexts by many different organizations. For example, literature about empowerment is found in the fields of education, social work, psychology as well as in the work of feminist and

development organizations. There are a variety of understandings of the term empowerment due to its widespread usage. Although the term is often used in development work, it is rarely defined.

Understanding of power and empowerment have come from many different movements and traditions, Perspectives on empowerment, The Human Development Report 1995, stresses that empowerment is about participation. Development must be by people, not only for them (Badal, 2017). People must participate fully in the decisions and processes that shape their lives but at the same time promotes a rather instrumentalist view of empowerment; Investing in women's capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choices is not only valuable in itself but is also the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development.

## **Conclusion**

Skill based training, Awareness training, society activities etcetera also encourage women to empower themselves. Though education is taken as a major element of empowerment, it has not had a substantial impact on respondents. All the interviewed women mentioned that because of MC loan they have started their own business, earned money, they can argue and participate in discussion without hesitation, they have built self-confidence on them, have got chances to participate in various training and representation in local institutions. Along with the microcredit other above-mentioned elements have them able to actively participate in their household as well as social decisions. Their self-confidence has definitely increased.

Their small enterprises; their dependency on male for money is reduced. Women's confidence and social status has increased after involvement in MC programs. Not only confidence but also women's prestige and status in the eye of husband and neighbor are promoted by the microcredit program. Women have realized their capability; i.e. through the microcredit they have become successful in the enterprises that were supposed the field of only men. Microcredit has been proved to be the most significant facilitators to poverty reduction and women empowerment in many studies proved. However, women in hardcore poverty seem less suitable for microcredit. For those trapped in chronic poverty with no assets base microcredit seems to be less effective and household decision making due mainly to their income support. My study shows that MC has played a vital role for women empowerment. Participation in MC means getting training, skills, loan and information for the investment and upliftment. MC has contributed in twofold, one is financial support and another is women confident building. before the joining the MC the percentage of women participation in HH decision making was only six percent, however, after

the joining the MC the percentage increased in 44 percent which is great achievement of women empowerment

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