

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

Nepal is a landlocked country, surrounded by India on three sides and by China's Autonomous Region (Tibet) to the north. Its shape is roughly rectangular, about 650 kilometers long and about 200 kilometers wide, and comprises a total of 147,181 square kilometers of land. Geographically, the country is divided into three main physiographic regions, namely, Mountain, Hill and Tarai. The distribution of country's total land is 26.8 percent in agriculture, 11.9 percent in grazing, 42.8 percent in forest and 18.5 percent in other use.

As other countries of the Asia where agriculture is the major source of economic activities and livelihood, majority of the economically active population in Nepal, particularly in rural area is engaged in agriculture. Agriculture is the main basis of economy, which contributes to livelihood of the majority of the people. Nepal has a population of about 23 million. The male and female ratio in Nepal is 100.2 female to 100 male, indicating slightly excess of women over men. Majority of the population about, 81.4 percent depend on agriculture for their living. The proportion of women engaged in this sector is substantially higher (88.4 percent) than men (71.9 percent). Present agricultural production is dominated by food grain and among the total cropped, major area is under paddy which covers 53 percent followed by maize 20 percent and wheat 16 percent (CBS, Nepal, 2002). Grain legumes, oil seeds and vegetables are also major cash crops in the country. Nepalese agriculture is subsistence oriented. Land and labor productivity is low because of the low adoption of modern technology, slow pace of the technology generation, lack of system base approach in program planning and implementation.

Nepalese agriculture is labor intensive and both men and women are engaged in all aspects of agricultural production. However, women's role is always concentrated on crop production, care and management of livestock and poultry.

The farmer's decision making affects the farm production. Decisions related to what and how much to produce, what method and technology to use and what combination of inputs to use to produce certain levels and combination of the products and what to sell, when to sell and where to sell etc. affect the household production and income. Land, labor and capital are the inputs in the production process. The efficiency of the production process depends on the quality of the labor. As indicated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MoAC), Nepal, 2000, in Nepalese agriculture economy, labor only contributes 40-60 percent of the total cost of production and in labor component women's contribution is 55-82 percent. It shows that 30-40 percent of the total cost of production due to the women labor.

In addition to routine household works, women play a significant and predominant role in agricultural production. Women, almost exclusively perform activities such as weeding, harvesting, fuel, water collection, home gardening, livestock and poultry rearing. These are economically valuable and contribute substantially to household incomes. The economic contributions of women may be characterized more comprehensively in terms of the feminization of low-wage, low-skilled sectors. Women are concentrated mainly in unpaid or subsistence-oriented works. The situation in this sector has also worsened by a gender division of labor, where women perform most life-sustaining activities and women have restricted access to credit and capital, family income, wealth and paid employment. Factors associated for the above happening are women's limited access to education, information and productive resources. Many other factors such as rigidity in traditional cultural norms, lack of effective implementation of policies, inadequate enforcement of existing laws and inadequate attention from the policy makers and development workers, are further worsen the situation of the rural women. Even though, women are vital and productive workers in the national economy, their participation in the labor force and their economic contribution is under-reported and women's labor goes largely unrewarded and unrecorded as a productive resource.

This is because most of the work that women do in subsistence farming and in the household. These works of women are not taken account in economic measurements and their contribution still remains invisible in the country's GDP. There is a distinct link between women and agricultural development, and their level of knowledge on production technologies, participation in agricultural extension programs, access on productive resources, and share in family income. All these factors are crucial to accelerate the pace of agricultural development.

Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MoAC), Nepal 1994 cited that, in principle, women are considered as critical productive agent in agriculture, key contributors of household economy, and major actor of the poverty alleviation strategies. However, their needs, interests and constraints are often neglected in the governmental and non-governmental policies, programs and projects. Access to and control over the productive resources and benefits are closely related with the gender. As gender is the socially constructed roles to men and women, which often takes the form of sexual division of labor that allocates to women most tedious and labor intensive works and limits their access to and control over the productive resources. Information regarding improved agricultural practices rarely reaches to the women farmers and women farmers are rarely targeted along with male farmers. This accounts for gender inequality and women's subordinate position in economic and social rewards and participation.

The Human Development Index (HDI) rank of Nepal in 2004 was 140th out of 177 countries indicating a low life expectancy at birth, low educational attainment and low income. This demonstrates the difficult development challenges confronting Nepal in human resource development. The Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) rank of Nepal in the same year was 116th out of 177 countries. This shows that the human development gap is further aggravated by substantial gender disparities. The difference between HDI rank and GDI rank is -4, indicating that the country performs relatively worse on gender equality than on average achievements alone (UNDP, 2004).

Although, His Majesty's Government of Nepal has expressed its firm commitment to a gender sensitive approach to development, there is lack of gender sensitive program planning and also effectiveness in implementing policies and programs with respect to training and transfer of technology to women. Most of the planners have not paid adequate attention to women's role in the agricultural programs and projects. Inadequate attention to gender differences to women's roles in the agricultural programs and projects have resulted in the failure of the projects to achieve their goals.

The recent gender concern therefore, can be viewed as an effort to understand women's roles and recognize them as farmers rather than the farmer's wives or sisters (Maria, 1983).

1.2 Rationale of the study

To make women's participation in development more meaningful and increase their contribution in national economy by reducing their workload and improving their access to and control over productive resources, it is essential to have enough information and data on gender and gender related issues. The availability of valid data about economic activities and their involvement in agriculture helps formulate gender related policies. Further more, detailed information about rural women's roles, participation in agricultural decision-making and their access and control of productive resources and benefits constitutes key instrument for gender mainstreaming.

In a subsistence based agricultural system both male and female play their roles in maintaining, altering and promoting the system's form. The investigation of the gender participation in production activities will indicate problems, opportunities and areas of concern, which are able to contribute to the success of agricultural activities. Women's role in the developing world is influenced mainly by the reproductive role, and socio- cultural factors (Saito, 1992).

Therefore, study of household activities and factors currently constrain more productive participation by women is also important for making their work efficient and productive and increasing production efficiency of the household in term of strengthening empowerment of all family members.

Quantification of housework by women helps the government in having background information to issue suitable policies to support women (Binh, 1997). It is not enough just looking at what women do we must also examine their rights of access, control and decision making over resources. This helps to reveal the reason or women's activities and decisions. The research on gender roles in decision making, access to and control over resources can contribute to improve the productivity of system in general and household in particular. Region by region, country-by-country, ethnic group by ethnic group, detailed studies documented that women's labor and women's decision making are absolutely crucial to agricultural production and development (FAO, 1982). The first step towards women's empowerment and full participation in the rural development process and food security is the collection and analysis of gender related data in order to know gender roles and differences (FAO, 1997).

The key role played by the valid data regarding women participation on different activities is crucial. The rural women cannot be dealt in a meaningful way without having detailed information about them. Only through the availability of such data, it is possible to establish the crucial and productive role played by the women poor households and to mobilize the interest and support of policy makers, planners, donors etc. The presentation of this information about women to policy makers, and donors would help to initiate to improve the situation of women and to take actions for the effective intervention for the eradication of rural poverty.

In the light of the above facts, it is essential to study the gender roles in agricultural production, their access on and control over the productive resources and benefits and factors that constraints access on those resources for effective formulation and implementation of plan and programs. There is virtually no study on

women's role in the district and lack of information, knowledge and data on gender issues, which ultimately result in the poor performance of the development plans/programs/projects in the district. Therefore, this study on gender roles in management resources of agricultural system is necessary and useful for gender related policy formulation and planning in the district.

1.3 Objectives

1. To identify the gender based division of labor in agriculture.
2. To explore the women access to and control over productive resources.
3. To identify the causes that hinders the women access to and control over productive resources.
4. To identify relevant agricultural policies that help to improve the roles of women in agricultural production.

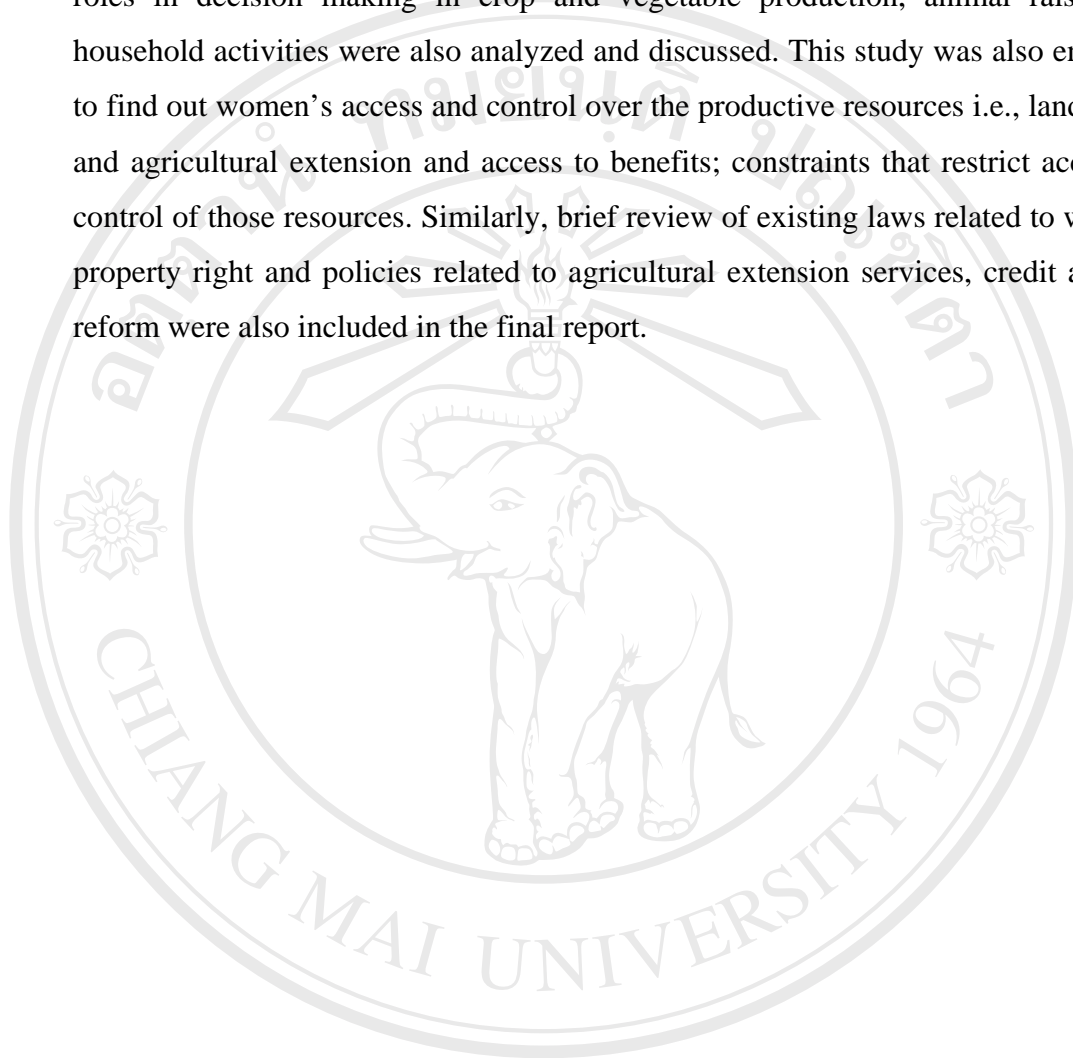
1.4 Usefulness of study

Having enough information on gender issue at district level it is helpful to formulate gender related policies to enhance women's status by providing them equal opportunity in productive resources and other benefits. The results of this study would be useful to formulate plans and programs which are best suited to the needs, interests and problems of the women.

1.5 Scope of the study

This study was carried out in Jhapa district of Nepal during March- April, 2004. The information was gathered from Chakchaki, Champagne, Dangibari, Ananmani and Garamani village Development Committees of the district. Agricultural is the main occupation of the people in the district. The population of district is broadly composed in to two communities viz. local and hill migrated communities.

Therefore, this study was focused to community wise gender participation in food grain production, vegetable cultivation and animal rearing. Men and women's roles in decision making in crop and vegetable production, animal raising and household activities were also analyzed and discussed. This study was also envisaged to find out women's access and control over the productive resources i.e., land, credit, and agricultural extension and access to benefits; constraints that restrict access and control of those resources. Similarly, brief review of existing laws related to women's property right and policies related to agricultural extension services, credit and land reform were also included in the final report.



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