

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of Study

Nepal Living Standard Survey report (2010/11) categorizes broadly 5 main sectors of employment: wage-agriculture, wage-non agriculture, self-agriculture, self-non agriculture and extended economy. Among 5 sectors of main employment self-agriculture sector takes 61 percent and 3 percent of wage-agriculture employee. However, remaining 3 self-non agriculture, wage-non agriculture and extended economy comprises 37 percent of people employment (CBS, 2011). Hence agriculture is the main sector of employment for Nepali men and women, but it is more important for women. The share of women in agriculture has increased significantly compared to past years. Agricultural work is the primary activity for almost 66% of working-age women (over 15 years) compared to 53% of working-age men (Maharjan, Bauer, and Knerr 2012). More women take over agricultural production and become the primary supporters of the household. However, in general, women have less access to productive resources and technical knowledge (Udry 1996; Goldstein and Udry 2008; Peterman et al. 2010; Aguilar et al. 2015; Kilic et al. 2015; Oseni et al. 2015; Slavchevska 2015).

Between 1991 and 2001, the incidence of agricultural employment among both men and women exhibited a downward trend but remained high. The trend served direction after 2001 for both men and women, but the increase among women is markedly sharper, implying a feminization of agriculture. Inability of subsistence agriculture to provide for basic household needs, which pushes households to seek alternative income-generating activities off the farm. In absence of decent non-farm employment opportunities in rural communities, massive migration of working-age adults has been taking place, which is the key driving factor for women's increasing role in agriculture (Maharjan, Bauer, and Knerr 2012).

Though the terms Madhesh and Tarai are used synonymously, it is important to note that Madhesh does not cover all parts of Tarai districts; it excludes Siwalik and mid mountain areas. Madhesh is a well-defined ecological region, which is approximately 885 km long from its western boundary, the Mahakali River, to its eastern boundary, the Mechi River

while its average width along its entire east-west axis is only 26 km varying from 4 km to 52 km. The region particularly contains plain lands, highly arable engaging most of the people in this region in the agriculture profession. More than 90% of the Nepalese agriculture products come from the region. Madhesh is generally considered to be its 'bread basket,' it is home to Nepal's industrial base and consists of the main transit points between Nepal and India. Similarly, due to bordering with India in most of the part, various large and small scale industries have been established in the region. Although being such a dominant region in the Nepalese economy, the living standard of the people and the infrastructure development lags far behind than what it should be.

Although gifted with high levels of groundwater and large tracts of cultivable land, the region ironically houses large concentrations of the poorest people in South Asia living in fragmented, fallow lands which are largely under-irrigated and agriculturally inefficient. The region's skewed under-development is persistent across national borders despite temporal variations in policies, investments and interventions. Not surprisingly, multiple poverty mitigating projects operate here, some with a gender lens. Nonetheless, an enduring poverty persists. Recent studies indicate new agrarian crises, in particular a 'feminization of agriculture': outmigration of a young generation of men from these poorly performing agrarian economies leaving behind women with restricted access to services, infrastructure, institutions and markets to manage productive [as well as reproductive] responsibilities (Sunam and McCarthy 2015; Tamang et al. 2014; Sugden et al. 2014; Singh et al. 2013; Datta and Mishra 2011; Uprety 2008).

Although gender relations have changed significantly in the region over the last few decades, particularly with respects to access to education, there are still deep rooted inequalities. Rankin (2003) argues that it is the interrelationships between spatial practices, economic strategies and gendered symbols perpetuate the unequal status of women in Nepal. Recent research in the Tarai/Madhesh region also indicate that sectoral interventions have neither served the purpose of agricultural development nor positively changed the lives of poor women and men (Lahiri-Dutt 2014, Sugden et.al 2014). A growing body of research points out traditional, old and new gender-specific challenges in agricultural in the Eastern Gangetic Plains (EGPs). These include low or no land-holdings amongst women and inequitable

access to agriculture extension services, infrastructure, markets and credit (Kishor et al. 2015).

More recently, growing male out-migration has resulted in new patterns of gendered vulnerability, with women often facing an increased workload, economic insecurity when remittances are sporadic and limited capacity to independently adapt to climatic and non-climatic stresses (Khanal and Watanabe 2006; Lahiri-Dutt 2014, Sugden et.al 2014). There are complexities though in the feminisation discourse. There are for example, also trends of out-migration of poor women, primarily to informal, unorganized sectors (Sunam and McCarthy 2015). Furthermore, the women who are left behind are differentiated by class, ethnicity and religion and experience quite different risks, challenges and opportunities.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Nepal is regarded as agriculture-based country because majority of the population (64%) have been engaged in agriculture sector including 61% self-agriculture and 3% wage-agriculture (CBS, 2011). While substantial debate surrounds rural transformations and the changes in family farming, one important issue has escaped attention—the expanding role of women in agriculture in many countries around the world. In the process of rural development and transformation, employment in the agricultural sector is expected to shrink, as employment for both women and men expands in other sectors. Yet while men may move out of agriculture, in many developing countries women stay (or move out significantly more slowly), and their roles in agriculture may actually expand, leading policy makers and scholars to evaluate the implications of these changes. The resulting impacts on rural women's employment vary across and within regions and across countries within the same region.

In Nepal 66% women of active age (15 years above) have adopted agriculture sector as the primary area of work where men of active age (15 years above) occupying agriculture as primary area of activity is 53% (Maharjan, Bauer, and Knerr 2012). Along with Nepal in several countries around the globe agriculture is feminizing, either because men move out of agriculture or because women engage in different types of agricultural employment. Rural women's employment in the sector characterizes agricultural feminization; sector; it the types and quality of jobs and activities that women undertake are equally important.

Male outmigration is a key factor that directly and rapidly alters women's roles in agriculture through the loss of male able-bodied labor. Successful migration and good remittances have the potential to boost agricultural production and women's empowerment, but not all male outmigration is successful. In many cases, the costs of migration are increasing relative to the benefits, and in many contexts the weight of the costs may fall disproportionately on women, who have to deal not only with the lost able-bodied labor but also with potential costs related to financing the attempted migration. When remittances are inadequate, women face higher workloads and financial difficulties, leading to women's disempowerment.

Based on the above mentioned statement it was quite necessary to add on some more scenario of the feminization of agriculture in Tarai/Madhesh. The block of the population is not studied feminization of agriculture in Siraha and Sunsari districts. Considering the above problems and facts, this research tried to analyze the answer of "What facilitates feminization of agriculture in Tarai/Madhesh particularly in Siraha and Sunsari districts?"

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

General objectives:

- To explore increasing role of women in agriculture in Tarai/Madhesh of Nepal.

Specific objectives:

- To study the gendered division in agriculture.
- To identify the reason of increasing role of women in agriculture.
- To explain the effects of increasing women's role in agriculture.

### **1.4 Rationale of this Study**

There are some rationales behind the selection of this study area. Increasing role of women in agriculture is widespread worldwide in general and in South Asian context in particular. There are different reasons behind the feminization of agriculture. In Nepal, particularly in Tarai/Madhesh area, agriculture process including cultivating, irrigating the land by woman is very tough which are putting extra-burden and hardship in the family and individual life of women. So, the first rational of this study is that this tough role of women has not been studied broadly yet by other researcher. Thus I want to know the reasons of prevailing role of

women in agriculture in Siraha and Sunsari focusing Fulkahakatti near to the East-West Highway and Bhagwanpur the south-east village at Nepal-India border in Siraha and Ekamba, the head end and Amaduwa, the tail end of Sitaganj branch of Sunsari-Morang main canal in Sunsari.

### **1.5 Organization of the Study**

The whole thesis is organized into eight chapters, including this introduction. Chapter 2 reviews the several bodies of theoretical and empirical literature which builds the analytical framework of this thesis. The chapter specifically incorporates theory of feminism and patriarchy, and agriculture in Tarai/Madhesh. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, and shows how the present research is designed. This chapter also shows the nature of the data, site selection and different data collection tools administered in the field.

Chapter 4 presents the research sites (Fulkahakatti, Bhagwanpur, Ekamba and Amaduwa) in detail. Chapter 5 is one of the main body of the thesis. It includes, gender division of labour and resources. Chapter 6 includes reasons of increasing women's role in agriculture. Chapter 7 deals with effect of increasing women's role in agriculture incorporating decision making and economic empowerment, access to water, and gender empowerment in Siraha and Sunsari districts. It also presents the causes of the prevalence of role of women which is triggering the women's personal life of enjoyment.

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter which presents the conclusion of this thesis. This chapter is very important because it co-relates the conclusion with its conceptual ground.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Theory of Feminism

Feminism is an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women's labour, fertility and sexuality, in the family, at the place of work and in society in general, and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation" (Bhasin and Khan, 1999: 3). It is a struggle to achieve equality, dignity, rights, freedom for women to control their lives and bodies both within home and outside.

Feminists have different political positions and therefore address a range of issues such as female suffrage, equal legal rights, right to education, access to productive resources, right to participate in decision-making, legalization of abortion, recognition of property rights and abolition of domestic violence.

In 1909 the Russian Alexandra Kollontai published a book "The Social Basis of the Woman Question" arguing that feminism was not just a matter of political rights, or rights to education and equal pay; the real problem was the way the family was organized and imagined. In England the women deeply engaged in fighting for women's rights, were regarded as feminists so their movements were called as women's liberation during 1960s and 1970s. Though the 'feminist' was the name given to the disliked or despised woman, much as 'man-hater' or 'castrating bitch', 'harridan' or 'witch', were used before the 1960s. This was often shortened, sometimes affectionately, sometimes in a derogatory way, however, the word 'feminism' began to bring into general use, and its meaning was extended. Though there was still a justified concern that civil and legal equality had not been fully achieved, the new movement tended to concentrate on problems specific to women in their reproductive and social roles.

Natasha Walter, in her book "The New Feminism (1999)", while admitting that women are 'still poorer and less powerful than men', argues that the task for contemporary feminism is to 'attack the material basis of economic and social and political inequality'. She further adds 'it is very important to work with men to change society and not against men therefore, we must join hands with one another and with men to create a more equal society' because after all, especially if

things are to change in the domestic arena, that's about men taking on a fair share of decision on household and external matter as well.

## **2.2 Theory of Patriarchy**

Subordination of women to men is prevalent in large parts of the world. We come across experiences where women are not only treated as subordinate to men but are also subject to discriminations, humiliations, exploitations, oppressions, control and violence. Women experience discrimination and unequal treatment in terms of basic right to food, health care, education, employment, control over productive resources, decision-making and livelihood not because of their biological differences or sex, which is natural but because of their gender differences which is a social construct.

Patriarchy literally means rule of the father in a male-dominated family. It is a social and ideological construct which considers men (who are the patriarchs) as superior to women. According to Walby (1990), "Patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women". The term 'social structure' is important because it clearly implies rejection both of the biological determinism and the notion that every man is in a dominant position and every woman in a subordinate one. Patriarchy is both a social structure and an ideology or a belief system according to which men are superior and in dominant position. She distinguishes between two different main forms of patriarchy: private and public. The former is based upon household production as the main site of women's oppression. The latter is based principally in public sites such as employment and the state (Walby, 1990:20). Under patriarchy, different kinds of violence may be used to control and subjugate women and such violence may even be considered culturally legitimate.

Different theory analyses patriarchy in different way but the discourse is subjugation and domination of female by male.

Walby (1990) has presented four theory of patriarchy very well. According to Silvia Walby Radical theory believes that "men as a group dominate women as group and are the main beneficiaries of the subordination of women. This domination is called patriarchy which is not the byproduct of any other system." Radical feminists prefer to see gender inequality independently related to the discourse of male and female. They believe that sexuality is the

major site where men dominate women and impose the notion of femininity on women. Women have not control on their own body. They are the puppet of male group.

Marxist drives the concept of gender inequality from capitalism. It believes that 'Men's domination over women is by product of capital's domination over labour'. Here, family is the unit which produces benefit to capital by providing day to day care of workers like food and clean cloths and produces next generation workers (children). But in return women get no wages except maintenance from their households. This is the way a capital benefits from unequal sexual division of labor within the home. However, there are sub-variations in Marxist where one is from material basis and another is from ideological basis.

Liberal does not believe the women's subordination in terms of overarching social structure. It mainly focuses that denial of equal rights to women in education and in employment are the main concerns of women's subordination.

The fourth theory that is dual- system theory is the synthesis of Marxist and radical feminist theory. Sylvia Walby has mixed the ingredients like wage work, housework, sexuality, culture, violence and the state are the point where patriarchy rooted and get enforced.

Socialist feminist argue that women do not simply face political and legal disadvantages which can be solved by equal legal rights and opportunities but the relationship between sexes is rooted in the social and economic structure itself. Women relieve men of the burden of housework and child rearing, and allow them to concentrate on productive employment. Thus unpaid domestic labour contributes to the health and efficiency of capitalist economy and also accounts for the low social status and economic dependence of women on men. But, unlike the Marxist feminists, socialist feminists look at both relations of production as well as relations of reproduction to understand patriarchy. Unlike orthodox Marxists who have prioritized class politics over sexual politics, modern socialist feminists give importance to the later. They believe that socialism in itself will not end patriarchy as it has cultural and ideological roots. Juliet Mitchell believes that gender relations are a part of the super structure and patriarchy is located in the ideological level while capitalism in the economical level (Mitchell, 1975: 412).



Towards the notion of patriarchy Gerda Learner (1975) states, “Today, historical development has for the first time created the necessary conditions by which large groups of women – finally, all women– can emancipate themselves from subordination. Since women's thought has been imprisoned in a confining and erroneous patriarchal framework, the transforming of the consciousness of women about ourselves and our thought is a precondition for change. She further says, “System of patriarchy is a historic construct; it has a beginning; it will have an end. Its time seems to have nearly run its course – it no longer serves the needs of men or women and in its inextricable linkage to militarism, hierarchy, and racism it threatens the very existence of life on earth.”

Gerda Learner (1975) is giving importance of history because history is such a storehouse where we can look our past and reinterpret into present. But this history from the very beginning is written by male and so they interpreted only the deeds of male.

About class struggle she asserts that the revolutionary ideas can be generated only when the oppressed have an alternative to the symbol and meaning system of those who dominated them. The cultures of oppressed consisted of collective memoirs of prior state of freedom and alternatives to the masters’ ritual, symbol, and believes. But in women case these things do not matter because within women there is no oppressed and oppressor. Learner says that vast majority of women could not confirm and strengthen their humanity by references to other females in position of intellectual authority and religious leadership. Very few noblewomen are seen in the history. And when there is no precedent, one cannot imagine alternatives to the existing conditions. And so she says that denial of their history had reinforced their acceptance of ideology of patriarchal and has undermined the individual women’s sense of self-worth.

Further Learner says that women of all class had less leisure time than the men due to child-rearing and family service function and what free time they had was not their own. And this is happening because of that women have educationally disadvantaged and deprived. She meant to say that thought is not based on sex but it is inherent in humanity and it can be fostered or discouraged but it cannot be restrained forever.

All most all the women before 18<sup>th</sup> century were discouraged for thinking as men. She says that creative women, writers and artists have struggled against a distorted reality. The Bible, the

Greek classics and Milton all have distorted the reality of women and buried the significance of women. In 19<sup>th</sup> century women's thinking was based on eighteenth century female novelists.

She further says that women's literary voices, successfully marginalized and trivialized by the dominant male but still exists. And in stitch, embroidery and quilting women's artistic creativity expressed an alternative vision. She says that 'revolutionary thoughts' have always been based on upgrading the experience of the oppressed. In this way peasant had to learn their significance of life before challenging the feudal lords; industrial worker had become 'class-conscious', the black as 'race-conscious' before challenging their oppressor. And in this way how women have also understood the significance of their life. But before that they have to leave the patriarchy thought and they should be women-centered.

Both above great feminist thinkers have provided the concept of patriarchy which is still working in every society in certain variation of its degree. Patriarchy is the very strong factor for the occurrences of all kinds of violence in the societies where one dominates, oppresses and subjugates other. And since the patriarchy is rampant, of course a female is always the victims for every kinds of violence occurring in the society.

### **2.3 Agriculture in Tarai/Madhesh**

Gangetic plains of Nepal known as the Tarai/Madhesh, is a region with a deeply inequitable social structure (Karn 2011; Lal 2002). Central to the reproduction of poverty in this region are the deeply entrenched semi-feudal class inequalities, with a high incidence of inequitable landlord-tenant relations. Land tenure and ownership is one of the most significant challenges facing agriculture in the Eastern Gangetic Plains (Sugden 2013, 2014). On top, much of Tarai/Madhesh is economically marginal and land inequality within communities is deeply engrained. The primary axes of inequality is between the larger land owning farmers from the upper and middle castes and a large class of landless labourers, marginal farmers and tenants at the base of the agrarian structure (Sugden et al. 2014 and 2015).

Two-thirds of a population depends on agriculture for employment and livelihood, even though the total agriculture production contributed about one-third of households. Nepal's Tarai plains region of 23 percent of the area of residence, where more than half the population of agriculture, livestock, fisheries, including the potential. However, millions of young in foreign country, food

shortages, malnutrition, poverty, food complex problems, such as foreign money is running the state.

## **2.4 Feminization of Agriculture**

Rural women have been involved in agricultural production since the invention of agriculture. The type and depth of participation has varied widely over regions and culturally differentiated areas. While women have increased their work time in agricultural production, there has been little change in the gender division of labor within the household with regard to reproductive work: men are not assuming reproductive and domestic tasks, even as women are increasing their participation in on-farm and off-farm productive activities. There has also been a tendency over the last few decades for women to broaden and deepen their involvement in agricultural production as they increasingly shoulder the responsibility for household survival and respond to economic opportunities in commercial agriculture. An FAO document (1999: 12-13) shows that while the proportion of the labor force working in agriculture declined over the 1990s, the proportion of women working in agriculture increased, particularly in developing countries. In some regions such as Africa and Asia, almost half of the labor force is women. This trend has been called the feminization of agriculture.

Broadly, the feminization of agriculture denotes to women's increasing participation in the agricultural labour force, whether as independent producers, as unremunerated family workers, or as agriculture wage workers. According to Deere (2005:17), an increase in women's participation rates in the agricultural sector, either as self-employment or agricultural wage workers is regarded as feminization of agriculture. He further adds that percentage of women in agricultural labour force is greater than men, either because of more women are working and/or because fewer men are working in agriculture is feminization of agriculture.

Expanding role of women in agriculture in many countries around the world has not being paid adequate attention in significant debates on rural transformations and the changes in family farming. In the process of rural development and transformation, employment in the agricultural sector is expected to decline. Yet while men may move out of agriculture, in many developing countries women stay and their roles in agriculture may actually expand. Women are pushed into agriculture by increased food insecurity, the limited alternative income-generating opportunities,

and the labour shortages generated by male outmigration, the economic crisis, and political instability. Therefore, male outmigration and gendered ideologies (social norms discouraging women from working away from home, especially in the absence of their husbands) are an important driving factors of the feminization of agriculture in Tarai/Madhesh.

## **2.5 Conceptual Framework**

This research mainly focuses on the feminization of agriculture in the context of increasing women's role. The concept for the women's role is deemed reality with the theory of feminism and patriarchy deeply rooted particularly in South Asia. The thesis builds up its concept that due to male counterparts out migration, feminization of agriculture is very commonly prevailing everywhere. In addition, men friendly agricultural instruments also sprouted because of patriarchal society and since feminization of agriculture, irrigation practice mainly held with hard work it is a kind of putting extra burden. Further it believes since feminization of agriculture creates extra burden and work from early morning to late night.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Selection of the Research Area

Fulkahakatti near to East-West High-way and Bhagwanpur at south-east corner of Siraha district and Ekamba is the head and Amaduwa is tail end of Sitagunj canal in Sunsari district. This irrigation scheme is implemented under the Irrigation and Water Resources Management Project (IWRMP) funded by foreign grant assistance of the World Bank (WB), along with direct contribution of Water Users Associations (WUAs) and the Government of Nepal (GoN). This project works for rehabilitation/construction of Farmer's Managed Surface irrigation sub - projects in 40 districts under Western, Mid-Western and far Western regions of Nepal and development of ground water resources. It has been working towards improving agricultural productivity while making an improvement in the irrigation facilities with the aim of supporting the national goal of reducing poverty through increased food security. The project targets transfer of the management of schemes to farmer's community of some existing agency managed irrigation projects (Kankai, Sunsari-Morang, Narayani, and Mahakali). Irrigation need of Ekamba and Amaduwa is linked with Sitagunj and Ramgunj canal under IWRMP project.

Increasing role of women in agriculture and irrigation is rampant in the whole Tarai/Madhesh. Most of the agricultural works are done by women because of male out migration in Tarai/Madhesh. Siraha and Sunsari are the concentrated areas of Madheshi community along with other districts in Nepal and most of the women depending ground water and surface water to irrigate their land and are involved in their house hold cores. Moreover, villages like Fulkahakatti (close to East-West Highway), Bhagwanpur (South-east village of Siraha on Nepal India border) of Siraha, and Ekamba (head end of Sitaganu canal, IWRMP) and Amaduwa (tail end of Sitaganj canal, IWRMP) of Sunsari are selected as research site for data collection of this study.

#### 3.2 Research Design

The study is primarily based on qualitative approach since the nature of the study is very sensitive issue on women discourse. The study is based on both descriptive and explanatory

method. The situation about the increasing women's role prevalence in Madhesh is described and the different reason behind this agriculture and irrigation prevalence is explained following critical social science and feminist approach.

### **3.3 Sources of Data**

Data refers to a collection of natural phenomena and its descriptions including the result of experience, observation or experiment. Collecting data is connecting link to the worlds of reality for the researcher. Data provides base for seeing quickly all characteristics of the chosen area. For this research, the data is gathered from both (primary and secondary) sources.

#### **3.3.1 Primary**

The primary data were collected by using interview, case history and questionnaire survey. The key informants for interview were done with social activists, women and farmers.

#### **3.3.2 Secondary**

In addition to primary source, the books, newspaper, article, unpublished research, the history about Madheshi women, online portals, journal and online information and other unpublished reports will be consulted and used as secondary sources of data.

### **3.4 Tools and Techniques of Data Collection**

Given the complex nature and multilayered issues and problems of women engagement in the family and community, field research was carried out while using a qualitative research design, particularly using 'multi-sited' ethnography as methodology. This methodological approach was particularly informed by anthropological insights (Falzon 2009; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Marcus 1997) that explore the meaning of woman within a socially and culturally structured framework. Various tools of qualitative design were administered, intending to engage in discussions about gender relations in agricultural activities in Siraha and Sunsari districts of Nepal.

Qualitative data were collected from individuals in the community in a natural setting. Various techniques were employed to collect the data that included case study, key informant interviews, personal experiences, introspective notes, life stories and informal and formal interviews that

described routine, problematic movements and meanings in individual lives. To identify potential informants in the community, semi-structured interview schedule was administered to collect baseline data of the village. In each village there were 12 interviews were carried out while using random sampling method.

Key informant interviews were conducted with gate operators in the cases of IWRMP and head of WUA, farmer associations members, local political leaders, ethnic leaders, school teacher/health post in charge, women leaders, cooperative members; DADO, 'social scientist' from Sunsari-Morang Irrigation office and Input dealers. Also formal and informal interviews were carried out with villagers and other influential people in the villages in both the districts.

During the field work, case study, focus group discussion and interview methods were applied in order to generate the necessary information for this study. For all these different methods, different checklist/tools were administered for collecting the different area of information. All the discussions and interviews were recorded in tape recorder so that their valuable information would not have missed while analyzing and writing the report. The researcher was aware about that he may not be able to note and jot down all the information shared by the informants and cases. Therefore, with prior consent with them recorded the information and captured some snaps in his camera as well.

The present study is mainly based on the primary information collected through case study, interview with key informants and household survey.

### **3.5. Data Analysis and Interpretation**

All collected information had orderly been analyzed. All information is presented descriptively and explanatorily. Qualitative data which were collected through case history, key informant interview and survey methods are analysed thematically. I have followed the descriptive and explanatory methods to interpret the collected data.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Since the study is based on critical social science and feminist approaches, feminization of agriculture issue is highly sensitive so the ethical consideration is highly important. In this study,

data collections were preceded only with informed consent of the informants. Informants were coned as they are free not to take part, or to withdraw from the study at any point. Data were collected and stored with no personally identifying information. The tapes of qualitative interviews are kept confidentially. All computer files are password protected to ensure confidentiality. All study participants were given information about, and access to the findings of this research as per requirement.

### **3.7 Limitation of the Study**

The study is carried out in Fulkahakatti and Bhagwanpur of Siraha and Ekamba and Amaduwa of Sunsari districts. This study focuses on ground water and surface water irrigation system. For ground water irrigation, Fulkahakatti close to East-West High-way and Bhagwanpur at the east-south corner of Siraha have been focused. Moreover, the head end (Ekamba) and the tail end (Amaduwa) of Sitagunj branch of Sunsari Morang Irrigation Project in Sunsari have been focused. This study covers migration, role of women and access to irrigation in Siraha and Sunsari. The research has adopted ethnographic qualitative method and is also based on small area therefore the findings cannot be generalized to the whole nation.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH SITES

#### 4.1 Fulkahakatti, Dhangadi Mai Municipality

Fulkahakatti the earlier VDC is located at a distance of 3 kilometers to the south of East-West highway. The total area of it is 21.3 square kilometer. It consists of total 10302 population including 5081 males and 5221 females. The total household number of the village is 1795 where average household size is 5.74. The literacy rate is 50.6. Most of the people are farmers though labour migration to the Gulf is high in number. In this locality almost all the families have one or two out male migrant to the Gulf either at present or in the past.

It is highly dominated by Kamat caste. There are 108 households of Kamat out of total 120 in Motiyahi where the research was focused. Mahato, Sah and Danuwar are minimal in this village. This village is recognized as vegetable farming pocket of Siraha district. The main reason of farmer's attraction towards vegetable farming is Kamat and Mahato caste group who are traditionally regarded as expert of vegetable farming. Also vegetable farming fetches instant cash and contributes to livelihood means. Although it needs more hard work, expensive fertilizers, pesticides, seeds and irrigation, yet people are involved in vegetable farming which they see as income generating activity.

When it comes to gender role division men appear mostly involved in hard labour intensive activities in agriculture like ploughing, spading and irrigating etc. whereas women spend their time in household chores and agricultural activities which may not require heavy amount of labor but are time consuming and requiring more patience. On top, women take lead in selling vegetable produce in local markets. Mainly women do trading of produced vegetables in the nearby markets like Ghurmibajar, Mirchaiya, Golbajar, Chainpur and Sukhipur. Nevertheless, at times, male family members support female in transporting vegetable produce to the market if it is a high volume of produce to be transported.

Motiyahi is well connected with deep and shallow tube-well irrigation facilities, either provided by respective government offices or installed privately by farmers. Hence, even though study traces that this area of central Tarai is becoming draught prone due to disruptive climate

fluctuation, yet farmers of Fulkahakatti are able to have good yields including vegetable farming as well as other harvests.

Culturally, dowry system is one of the issues that grab family member's attention if there is a girl child in the family. People suggest that in the last 15 years, the cultural pattern of marriage system has reversed when it comes to gifts sharing in the marriage. Previously, it was groom's family who had to pay grain and cloths to get a bride for the son, but now it is bride's family who had to pay heavily to get an appropriate groom for a daughter. This is seen as a social problem in the society.

#### **4.2 Bhagwanpur**

Bhagawanpur is an old settlement situated at the south-east corner of Siraha district. In the east, it is parted from Saptari district by Balan River and in the South it connects to Indian border town of Laukaha, Madhubani district of Northern Bihar. It is 13 km away from East-West Highway town of Lahan and also connected with Hulaki Highway, an oldest road connection designed before East-West Highway. Especially South-East of the market is connected with ward no-3 where this study was carried out. This village is spread in around 8.7 sq. km with a total population of 4157 including 2113 female. The total household number of this village is 733 of which ward number 3 consists of 132 households with an average household size of 5.66. However, the prevalence of joint family system is still visible in many families. The literacy rate of this village is 51.8 per cent (VDC Profile 2013).

Most of the houses in this locality are made of mud, straw, tiles and bamboos. Nevertheless, there is an increasing trend of modern brick houses in recent days. People use hand pump water for drinking and other household purposes. The Public Health Center (PHC) & government schools are located in the market. Ward no-3 is originally called Bhagwanpur which has a locally vibrant market. Trading of rice grain and other agro-products produced in the area including vegetables are brought for trading in the market. '*Palla*' (moving grain collection stall) at Bhagwanpur Market and *Hattiya* is one of the major trading attractions. This is a movable stall where people sell their crops and grains in exchange of money - a traditional practice of local marketing in Tarai's agrarian society.

Apart from local trading that takes place in the market, people of Bhagwanpur and of surrounding areas prefer to go to Laukaha, a local market across the border in India for all other and every types of daily use items including food ingredients, clothing and so on. They also visit the market for machine parts and for maintenance of pump set, bikes and other materials. This Indian border of Laukaha is hardly two and half kilometer away from Bhagawanpur and people find necessary goods cheaper than goods in Lahan market and hence most of them prefer doing marketing across the border.

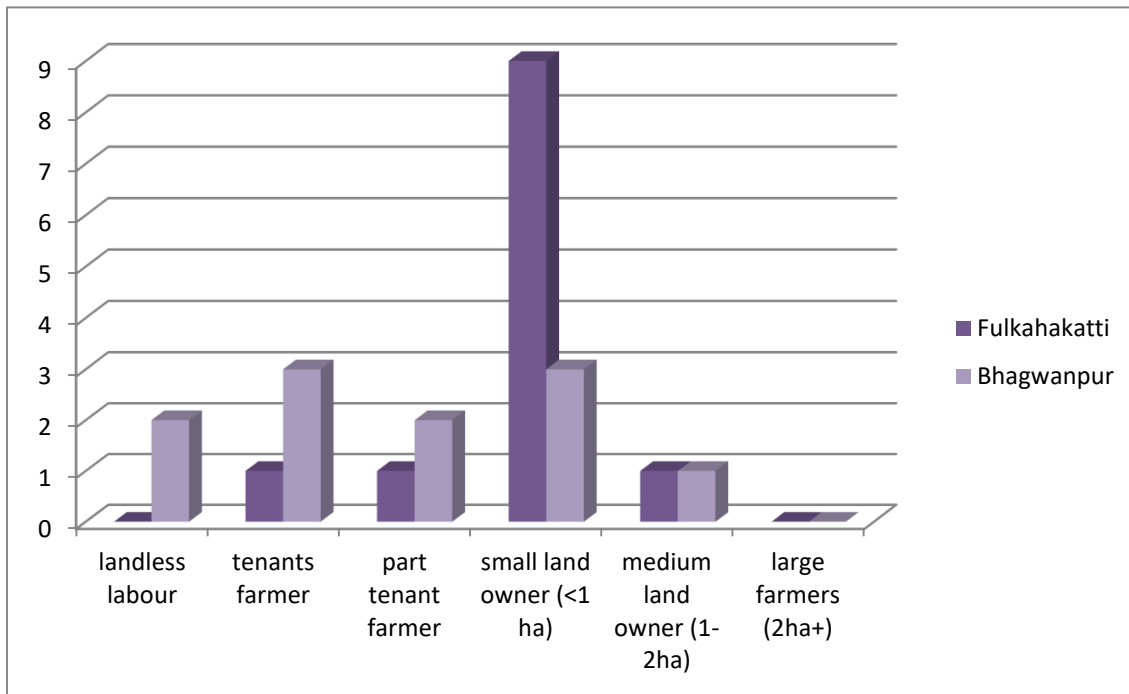
Although Bhagwanpur is highly dominated by Yadav, nevertheless, other caste groups and Dalits are also in good numbers. Ward number 3 where this study was carried out however presents a heterogeneous group in terms of caste divisions. It has combination of all caste groups including high caste Brahmins, middle caste Giri and Sah as well as lowest at the ladder Ram (earlier Chamar/Mochi). Bala Sundari Bhagwati temple is the oldest in the area and a matter of pride for the people of the VDC. Further, the people of this VDC were seen observing most of their traditional rituals and customs.

There is a distinct gender role division exist in Bhagwanpur area. The private spheres mainly belong to female whereas the public sphere has high dominance of male members. Women perform all types of reproductive roles and activities including social or community but majority are not engaged in any productive work. Women mainly depend on male members for economy. The percentage of literate women with higher education is very less compared to men that restricting women to compete and perform any work outside the home to sustain their livelihood.

The marriage system is based on traditional custom which takes place within similar caste. The trend of early marriage is a normal one. Girls have to marry the guys whom their parents or relatives choose. Girls consent is not a matter of importance in marriage. Nevertheless, this trend is changing slowly. Dowry system is also practiced in this village. A girl to whom her parents offer more amount of dowry views herself superior to other girls with less amount of dowry. The custom of *Ghumto Pratha* (veil system) is still prevalent in this area. But at this time, it is limited only to newly married women. These newly married women are usually not expected to go out of their houses or to the market. However, during the '*Hattiya*' one could observe equal number of women selling the local products including vegetables, fruits and other food items.

When it comes to land occupancy in these two villages, it is contrasting in nature. While in all three villages including sites in Sunsari show that a good number of farmers are landless, Fulkahakatti of Siraha presents a different picture. A bar diagrams of land occupancy shows the pattern of land distribution in two villages of Siraha. In terms of land ownership in these two sites, it is interesting to note that although Bhagawanpur show similar pattern as indicated in the Sunsari sites where land occupancy is very dispersing and a large 18% of the farmers are landless.

Figure 1. Land and tenancy in Bhagawanpur and Fulkahakatti of Siraha



However, in contrary, in Fulkahakatti, not a single household reported landless. Almost 90% of the households in this locality suggested that they fall under small land owner that is less than 1 hectare of land. Fulkahakatti is a new settlement and developed only after the construction of East-West highway since settlement in this locality is constituted of mainly migrant from down south who acquired land through clearing forest during settlement.

### 4.3 Lohani, Ekamba (Itahari Sub Metropolitan City-15)

With the total area of 12.5 sq. km, the population of Ekamba is 8861 including 4149 male and 4712 female. This area is dominated by the Tharu ethnic group. They are the majority in the village that is 5846 followed by hill Brahmin 756. The total number of household in this village is 1983 while the average household size is 4.47. The literacy rate of the village is 67.9 percent.

*Lohani* is also a predominantly *Tharu* village of around 160 families, including two *Sah*, *Magar*, *Sarki* and *Damai* household each. It appears that villagers are mostly dependent on agriculture and they largely grow *dhan* - paddy and *rabi fasal* (lentils). Village fields are well connected with *Sitagunj* canal, and a river called *Sukumai khola* also run through the village.

People mostly harvest two season plantation. Wheat and maize are not harvested as it requires lots of effort in the field and costs quite a lot. On top, cold water that run through canal are not helpful to have good harvest of wheat. Moreover, *Tharus* mostly use rice as daily intake and therefore not obliged to harvest wheat. Most of the families in this village are self-sufficient in terms of main grains that are rice and lentil. However, it is noteworthy that almost 75% of the land in this locality is owned by *Pahadis* especially *hill lahures* of Itahari, Dharan and Biratnagar. *Tharu* people repent that these lands were previously owned by *Tharus* only, but over the period of time they have sold out most of their lands and now they are mainly marginal land holding farmers. Villagers recall, the families who had 40 *bighas* of land 20 years ago have now less than half of the land and in most of the cases, a family would have 3-5 *bighas* of land. People from the hilly areas especially '*lahure*' have major share of land in the village. However, these lands are cultivated by the local *Tharu* farmers on lease or as a share cropper.

There are also families having no land and are either dependent on the migrant's remittance or they go to work as a daily wage worker in the nearby markets such as Itahari, Jhumka and Biratnagar. There are availabilities of seasonal labour work in the village but that is mostly limited to agricultural work during planting and harvesting seasons. In addition, there are a few families who run grocery shop in the village. An extensive trend of labour migration to the Gulf countries is observed in this village. Almost all the families have one or two male persons in the Gulf countries for labour migration whereas only one person of the village is in the government job.

Settlement of village houses are scattered but close clan association is followed. Houses of immediate relatives are closely located. It can be observed that families belonging to same lineage (three generations) have their houses together at one place. *Tharus* are primarily an agricultural community hence one can find a few animals tied in their sheds next to their houses. This is usual in the sense that the families in Nepal those who are dependent on agriculture rear a few animals parallel to agriculture. *Tharus* of this area are heavy meat eaters and to fulfill the demand, most of the families keep duck, chicken, pigeon - '*parewa*' bird and goat. Also, there are quite many small and big fishponds available in the community which is owned by the villagers depending on the land a family holds. These animal husbandry and fisheries are the alternative source of income for the family which fulfils the demand of meat of the family. Most of the time, villagers sell these products especially fish during festivals time which also fulfils their own demand of fish and generate extra revenue for the family.

Especially *Tharus* celebrate '*Maghe Sankranti*' and fish is the dish that they prepare to celebrate this occasion hence this is the time when they harvest fish from their ponds. Similarly, the other big festival for them is *Tihar* in which they slaughter goat and celebrate the festival. It was interesting to learn that they do not celebrate *Dashain* as preciously as *Tihar*. In the early November while researcher was in the field, he could find farmers busy in harvesting paddy as they suggested they needed rice grain to have beaten rice for the upcoming *Tihar* festival. It could be observed that young youth including both teenage boys and girls were quite busy in dancing practices. Basically in the night, youth used to gather together in the courtyard and practiced dancing for '*Deusi-Bhailo*'. This was indicative of gender relations in the community which was guided by equality principles. This is also a sign, that these *Tharus* are basically farmers and hence season of paddy cultivation is an appropriate time for celebrating the joy of the harvest. This is the time when new grains especially rice is harvested therefore one can see the mood of happiness and cherishment in the family after a long season of paddy plantation and cultivation. Also, apart from *Maghe Sankranti*, and *Tihar*, *Jurseetal* is another festival that they celebrate with zeal. This also correlates to the caste notion of Hindu '*Vern ashram*' where they suggest that *Brahmins* are for *gyana* and hence for *Brahmins Janai Purnima* is the festival which is precious, for *Chhetris* to have courage and protect people and for the *Chetri* it is *Dashain* that is important. For the *Vaishya* – it is business and for them it is *Tihar* that is important. Finally,

for the *Sudras*– the service men, is *Fagu Purnima* that they celebrate where they share love and affection.

Also, in the evening, a large number of men and women can be seen returning to their homes in bicycles from Itahari. Itahari is the commercial market which is at a distance of about 4-5 km from Ekamba. Many men and women from this area are engaged in wage based labor activities like art, carpenter, tools and machinery, construction, etc. So, on a working day, a huge number of people can be seen returning from their work to the village in the evening. Women are also engaged in agricultural works like paddy re-plantation, weeding, sowing etc. activities. In a few families, without male members women also spade the land for irrigation and so on. However, ploughing is only done by male members. A household without a male member often hire labour to plough the field and less labour intensive work is done by female members.

Women's status in the society is improved one in Ekamba compared to the other research sites. Ekamba being a Tharu community, female folks are experiencing greater freedom in terms of mobility. Young girls and ladies are found riding bicycle to commute to daily wage work in the nearby market. This has also contributed in income generation and a greater level of independence. However, work burden demonstrates no change. It is true that women have share in productive activities but this does not mean that they can escape from household activities. Women keep on doing work from the early morning to late evening. They don't have time to gather and play cards like most men do, which is at times also not culturally desirable for women to do. Nevertheless, at times young ladies too find time to play cards. The reproductive activities like cooking, cleaning, washing, household maintenance, child caring, etc. all belong to female. Women manage their time to perform all the activities be it productive, reproductive, social or agriculture related.

#### **4.4 Kharitole, Amaduwa**

Amaduwa is located at the South East corner of Sunsari district, the tail end of the Sitagunj canal. This is situated at the border of Nepal and India. The total population of the village is 9,216 out of which 4,699 are male and 4,517 are female. This locality is also a predominantly *Tharu* community with 2,732 followed by Muslim 738. Amaduwa is spread out in 19.9 sq. km

area with 1,837 households. The average household size is 5.02 while literacy rate is 53.5 percent.

*Tharus* of Kharitole say that they belong to the lineage of the *Tharus* of Rajbiraj. Ladies like to call them ‘*puchhar Tharuni*’ and make joke of self. This is a particular type of dress pattern where they put a *lungi* (white cloth) or a *saya* (petticoat) and cover it with white sheet or a sari. Half body they cover with a sari up until shoulder and cover their chest with a blouse while lower abdomen they keep uncovered. Although a few ladies would cover their lower abdomen with sari as well while covering around hip and keep a tail on the back and that is how they call themselves *puchar tharuni* who basically called as Rajgariya *Tharu*, initially belonging to Rajbiraj of Saptari. However, in this community there are also Saptariya and Amariya *Tharu*, along with one Yadav, a few Amat and Krishidev (Dalit-Musahar) households.

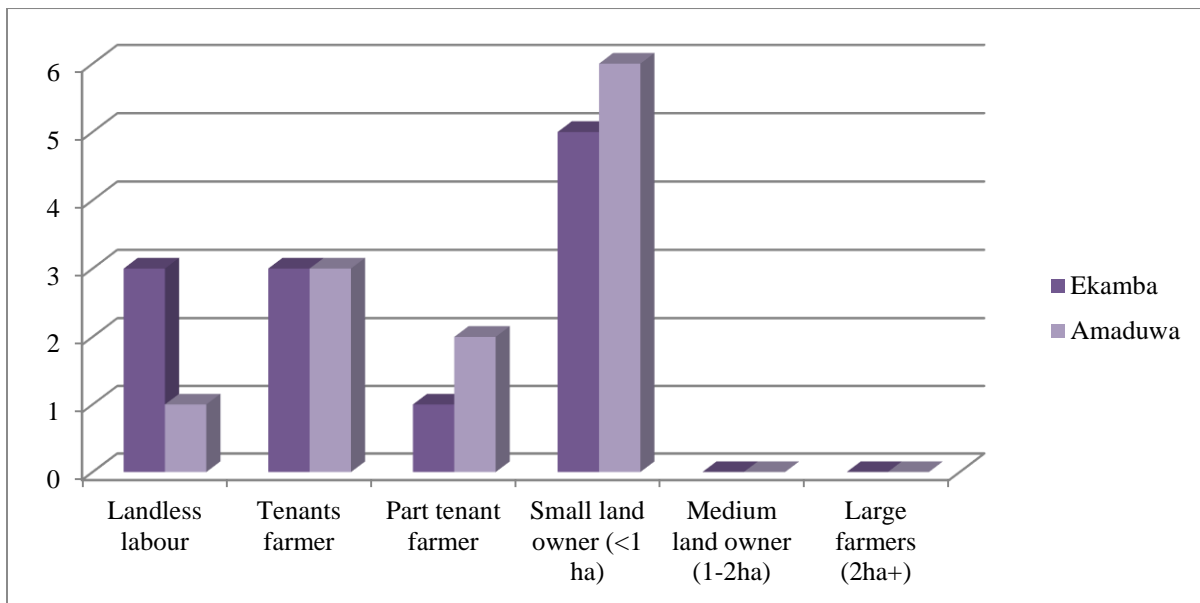
In the village one can see only the remains of the structure of canal which runs through *Tharu* land. Most of the people say that they have not collected the compensation of the land from the irrigation department yet and as water does not run in the canal they had decided to work out land for farming than to leave it as abandoned structure of canal. Nevertheless, a few people also agree that they have collected their compensation and complain that people are such that they have deleted the structure of canal itself. They question how it will be re-managed. At present most of the structure of tertiary is not visible in the village. However main canal can be seen redundant as it has not been cleared for years. At places, farmers have removed soil from canal bed and have made it a farming land to cultivate. Many others have built houses besides the canal bed and a few have filled the canal track with soil.

Most of the people who had encroached canal land suggested that water does not flow through canal, since there is no point keeping the land barren. They have therefore claimed their land and started ploughing it. Some of them argue that they want their land back from the irrigation department as ownership of canal land was done through land acquisition but not used for the said purpose. On the other hand, people also talk about renovation of canal and if it is done whereby water will flow through canal for irrigation, people would be able to clear their houses from the track or clear the track that is filled with soil. People give example of clearing canal track and bed at both the sides on the main canal from Khanar to Chatara where department of irrigation bulldozed brick made pakka houses as well.



Amaduwa also comprises of *Tharus* in high number while some of the people are involved in small business, a chunk of others are farmers. Farmers of the village suggest that the agricultural growth in this village is in deteriorating graph as they do not have alternative irrigation system apart from pump set which is costly and the whole area is suffering from draught since last few years. There are out migration in the village but relatively less than Ekamba. The main reason of migration to the Gulf countries, as people suggest is due to farming related issues as well as unemployment. Below presented bar diagram as figure-1 presents land ownership pattern of surveyed households in Ekamba and Amaduwa.

Figure 2: Land ownership pattern in Ekamba and Amaduwa



In both the villages, people suggested that household with 2 *bighas* of land can feed six family members and on top they sell on an average 100 *mana* of rice grain of NPR 100 thousand. However, household data suggests that out of 12 households interviewed, none fall under large or medium farmer categories. Data indicate that a large 42% of the households are small farmers with less than 1 hectare of land.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### GENDERED DIVISION

When it came to gender role division, it was different for male and female irrespective of Sunsari and Siraha districts. It was assumed that men would do hard work compared to female. The differences can be located in various ways. This chapter presents the gendered division in labour and resources.

#### 5.1 Gendered Division of Labour

Apart from reproductive work, women were involved in all other activities of household and agriculture like planting seeds and seedlings of vegetable, cultivating, harvesting and selling them in local markets whatever they could carry on their head in the sack or basket. However especially in farming related fieldwork, role of male and female were clearly marked. For example, female performed work like plantation of rice, sowing and harvesting of paddy (*dhan ropne, katne* etc.) while male member would do ploughing and transportation of collected raw paddy bundles. This put extra pressure to the families with female household.

In addition, irrigation of the field was solely the work of men. However, there were exceptions in this role as well. Thus activities in which women put their labour on daily basis indicated a combination of roles to be performed including reproductive, productive as well as socio-cultural and religious. In this sense, women's roles in the villages appeared one of multitasking. This was also expressed by men at several occasions. For instance, Mr. Kapil Dev Kamat, a local resident of Fulkahakatti viewed that men must thank women for their contribution in the family what he said '*women are never tired*'. He accepted that men cannot do farming by themselves, because men do not work more than 25 percent in comparison to women. Women's contribution in the development of a family is beyond comparison. Since it is female who manages family, Kapildev was of the view that men's role is to complement women while managing family as a unit. Although, while in discussion, in rural family male and female were not seen an isolated entity, yet their remained differences when it came to equal treatment of men and women in the family and community.

Females were seen to be exceeding the number of laborers in compared to men. There were also 8 households who employed only female laborers, maximum up to 50 in number during monsoon season. For instance, Ram Kumari Chaudhary of Amaduwa also headed family in absence of her husband, explained, “*my workload has increased. I have to perform role of my husband too. I feel hard to do heavy works like, maintaining tube-well or cutting bamboos. I feel hard to take decisions alone. Before, we used to decide together and also earlier I used to go to the market for purchasing goods together.*”

At another instance, Sonadevi of Fhulkahakatti of Siraha explained how it was difficult to find labourer to do farming in absence of a male member. According to Sonadevi, due to labour crisis, she usually faced problem in timely cultivation and harvest of crops or vegetables. However, she suggested she worked for others and in return she got exchange labour and managed farming. This strategy, especially a cultural one, was helping these women to cope with the situation of labor deficiency.

It is not only Ramkumari or Sonadevi who faced difficulties in absence of their husband. Rather this was the experience representing all most all female headed households in the districts. Nevertheless, there were cases however, where in spite of migration women’s workload remained under control. Or it was presented that even though they were facing difficulties yet they managed farming. Relatively wealthier households purchased labour from outside. On an average, if the number for male laborers was 4, the number of female laborers went to 7. Especially, a female living in a joint family performed more work than in a nuclear family. This labour discrimination was similar in the studied cites. In addition, labour contribution of women was more extensive especially in Siraha where families were engaged in vegetable cultivation.

Especially in regards to new generation, situation is changing slowly when it comes to increased work load for female. One of the women involved in discussion expressed how there is a change taking place in regards to new generation. This informant called back her memory and expressed when she was a child, even if she was in the school her parents used to call her from school to work at house and to take animals away for grazing. She contemplated, ‘*now she knows the value of education and would let her daughter to go to school*’. At the same time, in the case of Nepal, for instance, study carried out in Lamjung and Kavre (Tamang 2014) also suggest that it is not

clear whether feminization of agriculture is geared towards economic empowerment of women or it is only about increased number of women involved in agricultural activities.

A similar conclusion can be drawn from the way in which increased gendered role is discussed elsewhere. An earlier IWMI survey has also showed that there has been a rise in women headed households. A 23% of rise in female headed households were seen in a sample from Dhanusha, of which 83% were from small owner cultivator (<0.5ha), landless labourer or tenant households, and 10% in Morang, of which 83% of whom were also from the poorest group. The over-representation of poorer households is likely to be because they are more dependent upon migrant labour, and thus send more family members outside to work, leaving only the women behind – reminding one of the role of class in shaping migration patterns. This also adds to the fact that while discussing gender role one must also take into consideration its class implications in which these gender roles emerge.

One informant contemplated, *“I wish I was a son. Women's life is of misery. They have more workload. Sons are free. I work staying far from my home and villagers doubt on me but I am there to earn money in honest way. Our community misinterprets women's role and work. They think women cannot work outside. I even wanted to apply for police job and people discouraged me saying that I will die. Women are weak and backward than men because in some cases, they feel self-demotivated while at another, society creates barriers. Weakness or mistakes of men are ignored but society keeps eyes wide open on every activity of women. Women are not unequal but society makes them unequal.”* Anu Chaudhari, Ekamba.

These narratives indicate that when it comes to defining gender role, it is constructed within socio-cultural expectations and experiences. This leads to a situation where female accept societal norms even though they being uncomfortable with the practices. This phenomenon is eventually contextualised within units of social institutions. Furthermore, boundaries are clearly defined in terms of outside and inside work when it comes to male and female respectively. Interestingly, these boundaries are stretched further whereby labour migration outside the village and community is largely seen as domain of male.

## **5.2 Gendered Division of Resources**

Based on caste, ethnic and religious belongings gender role differences vary that has obvious gendered implications across the groups in Nepal. Therefore, in a heterogeneous Nepali

population gendered relations are structured in multiple ways. In the past, from Hindu high-caste women (including Madheshi women) are mostly observed limited their presence in the private sphere, to the Thakali women known for their business acumen and skills, to Limbu women who has a greater level of freedom to divorce and remarry as widows, women and men in various communities in Nepal have historically structured their relations very differently (Tamang 2009). Moreover, when it comes to gendered role in agriculture, there is this irrigation policy of Nepal 2070 B.S, which clearly states in its “Gender Equality and Inclusive Development policy” that irrigation programs for gender equality and women empowerment shall be organized so as to end gender biasness in irrigation sector with 33 per cent participation of women representation in creating WUAs. Also there is provision for subsidy and discount by the government targeting socially disadvantaged, minority groups including women. These policies are crosscutting across the cases including IWRMP and GWRDB.

These differences were seen in terms of wage payment. For men, daily wage was NPR 500 whereas female got NPR 300 a day. It differed in terms of skilled worker who got relatively higher that was NPR 700 a day as wage. For instance, in terms of food supply while at work in the field, men did get food (breakfast, lunch and dinner) if they worked in the field which was provided by the family for whom they worked. Also, at times male workers were provided with liquor as energy drink. However, in the case of female worker, practice was not the same. Female worker managed their food by themselves. Female worker suggested that they would prepare their food first. They would have breakfast and keep their lunch ready. They would then start their work at around 8am in the morning; they would take a break at around 12.30 pm for lunch and again would go to the field to work until it was dark. However, this difference in payment and food supply was not seen problematic as women themselves suggested that “ladies do not eat while at work. Men are men of course. They have to be engaged in hard labour work while ladies work is relatively easy” said 55 years old wife of Sibendra. This practice can be justified within cultural norms that are set differently for men and women.

In most of the cases, women acknowledged these practices as normal. For example, one woman reflected, *“although women work more than men, they are far behind compared to men. Gender differences are due to the community and society. If woman goes ahead than men, the society cannot bear this. If a woman works outside, society thinks odd about her. Men have freedom. I*

*don't think equality is possible in rural areas but there can be equality in the cities. Educated women are financially secure. Informal education has also helped them to talk and be forward. I am educated and I feel empowered, but the society creates barrier. This makes me disappointed sometimes. Even if woman is educated, she will be confined inside house.*" Sita Devi Chaudhary, Amaduwa.

Sita had bought a few *katha* of land in her name. Some money Sita got from her husband who worked in Biratnagar as a construction worker, other she got as loan from the microcredit where she is a member. She sold one buffalo and put all money together and bought 2 *katha* of land. She happily expressed that her husband himself told and allowed her to have land registered in Sita's name. This was also an acknowledgement of Sita's hard work and contribution to the total amount of money to buy the land. Also, as land was registered in her name, they paid less tax than otherwise they would have, if registered in the name of a male member. Sita said she did farming in 25 *katha* of which 8 *katha* she owned.

At another occasion, when researcher asked a lady informant, who is the guardian of your family? The women replied, *'both of us (husband) are the guardian of our house'*. However she said, *'right now, women are more forward than men as they have been involved in saving credit activities with different saving and credit and finance institutions'*. Most of the women in the village suggested that on an average they maintained at least NPR 15-20 thousand saving. The men and women both worked together to clear loan. Especially the women of Amaduwa prepared rice wine and sold it in the local market. On an average, women prepare 10-15 bottles of wine in a day and sell it at a cost of NPR 50 a bottle.

At another instance, Kamal Chaudhari, a 29 years old female put her story remarkably. In reply to a question - what you do so that there would be development? Kamal responded in laughter. She replied, *"we can only think of development when all children compulsorily go to balbikash. If they do not have note book and pencil, provide them with these basic materials. If we can educate our children than only we can think of development."*

At first instance one may wonder from where she was coming but later it appeared that it was Kamal's learning while being a member of the management committee of the Balbikash Vidyalaya Byabasthapan Samiti (Early child care development centre). She explained how she

learned while being a management committee member to run Balbikash Kendra. She said, *“I had taken training of various types. Even at times I used to keep my daughter at my mother’s place and participated in training. Trainings were mostly provided by World-Vision an INGO which was supporting child care centers in the district of Sunsari.”* She recalled, *“as I am outspoken, I got selected by village women as a member of the management committee. While being in the committee, I was provided with various training including first aid training, training on upgrading the quality of education in the school.”*

She recalled that from the training she saved money and bought *paijo* (ornament women tie to her bottom ankle of leg). *“This was the time when I started thinking that if I get engaged in earning, I would be able to contribute to the family livelihood as well as I will have capacity to decide over my own needs and I can spend accordingly. Saving from training gave me confidence and hope that I can do a lot more and earn. A saying, previously talked by ladies in the village became a reflective ground.”*

*“Bhaiga ka kiye jebe, Gal Baja aa raj kar, Dail chaur khoij ka la aa kho”.* *“Why you run away from your husband’s house. Give heavy reply and argue if there is an issue in the family and win it. Search for lentil and rice cook and enjoy. Why you need to escape?”*

Basically there is an old saying she had heard while being a girl child in her village. This saying was often used if an old lady had to convince a young one to return back to her husband’s house, while after an argument or due to domestic violence that would have taken place at her husband’s house and the young lady if have opted to returned to her mother’s house. While giving reference of the saying aged one used to convince and motivate young ladies to act as if it is her own house and she should have influence to run the house. This is her kingdom and she should rule it. How to do it is to argue and argue loudly so that others become party to your argument and thus you would be able to rule.

In this case, Kamal was referring to love marriage which in-laws did not accept for a long time. Hence she had no other option than to be isolated in the family. It was this old saying that drawn her to reflect and helped her to gain her space in the family. In this instance talking and arguing gave her confidence and respect in the family. She said, she had a long interest to open a shop. Therefore, she first started collecting stuff from Jogbani (India) and delivered it to the shops in

the local market in Itahari and surrounding areas. Later she realized that she was not getting enough commission to sell her products as she was carrying a risky job while transporting stuff illegally from other side of the boarder. Hence she decided to open grocery shop next to her house. She called her migrant husband from Malaysia for a holiday and took his help to initiate a grocery shop next to her house. She repented, she would not have called her husband but her in-laws did not give her space to open the shop but agreed when her husband came. This is how she became successful in organizing her life and livelihood.

This indicates a growing concern for women's priority to have access to finance – priority is on moving towards a better lifestyle by setting up enterprises etc. Although, while engaging in income generating activities, they are indirectly empowered to take decisions, yet decision making as such is less of a concern and workload is not considered a problem. Access to land is also considered a priority – particularly buying new land in women's name. Fear of husbands marrying someone else, access to higher loans etc. appeared facilitating. Furthermore, there is a hope of having better livelihood options for the coming generation hidden in it which guide women invisibly.



## CHAPTER SIX

### REASON OF INCREASING WOMEN'S ROLE IN AGRICULTURE

With a demand of quality life, women's role is increasing to contribute in household and agriculture simultaneously. Increasing migration of male family member has directly and/or indirectly created space for the women to explore the way in which they could contribute to livelihood means of the family. Government policy regarding the taxation process of land entitlement has also contributed to increase women land entitlement which puts feeling of ownership and attracts to engage with it. This indicates that the agency of women has transformed in recent years.

#### 6.1 Migration and its Impact on the Gendered Division of Labour

When yields are already low due to climate stress and weak irrigation infrastructure or institutions, migration is increasingly a necessity for households to meet their minimum needs and make up for shortfalls on the farm. This trend was discussed in other studies, for instance, a study carried out by Sugden et al. (2014) suggest that a few marginal and tenant farmers in the Morang and Dhanusha study reported that they could meet their grain needs off the land alone, and most had to also purchase staples from the market. Managing cash needs for buying grain is itself increasingly difficult when tenants have to pay high fees for irrigation, not to mention rising costs of living. It is for this reason, that wage labour is increasingly important to supplement these fragile livelihoods. In the light of limited labouring opportunities locally at a time of rising agrarian stress, migrant labour is increasingly the norm for marginal and tenant farmers (Sugden et al., 2014).

As of 2011 census 26.3% of households in the Eastern Tarai have an 'absentee' member either in India or overseas. This is likely to be considerably higher when one considers the under reporting of seasonal migrants (Khatiwada, 2014). An IWMI study in Dhanusha and Morang found that the proportion of households with migrants was three quarters and a third respectively (Sugden et al., 2014). Migration to the Gulf is by far the most prominent, accounting for 61% of the migrants from interviewed households in Saptari and Dhanusha in a separate IWMI study (Sugden et al., 2015).

Migration pattern in the study sites showed similar trend as explored earlier. The household data suggested that migration rate was relatively higher in Siraha compared to Sunsari. Out of 24 households that was considered randomly for survey, In Siraha, all 24 household found a migrant member from the family compared to Sunsari where out of 24 households only 18 household were found with at least one migrant member.

*Table 1. Migration pattern in (Fulkahakatti and Bhagwanpur) Siraha*

| Type of migration |    | Age group |    | Marital status |    | Remittance spent on |
|-------------------|----|-----------|----|----------------|----|---------------------|
| Permanent         | 24 | 21-30     | 11 | Married        | 22 | Land purchase       |
| Seasonal          | 0  | 31-40     | 10 | Unmarried      | 2  | Loan payment        |
|                   |    | 41-50     | 3  |                |    | Food                |
|                   |    |           |    |                |    | Education           |
|                   |    |           |    |                |    |                     |

*Table 2. Migration Patterns in (Ekamba and Amaduwa) Sunsari*

| Type of migration |    | Age group |    | Marital status |    | Remittance spent on    |
|-------------------|----|-----------|----|----------------|----|------------------------|
| Permanent         | 17 | 21-30     | 10 | Married        | 13 | Education              |
| Seasonal          | 1  | 31-40     | 4  | Unmarried      | 8  | Loan payment           |
|                   |    | 41-50     | 7  |                |    | Food                   |
|                   |    |           |    |                |    | Home construction      |
|                   |    |           |    |                |    | Marriage and festivals |

At another instance Kumari Chaudhari of Ekamba argued: *“there are positive aspects to migration, but migration of my husband have also brought other impacts and difficulties to me. Especially in the patriarchal society like ours, life is not that easy for the married women when their husbands are not with them. ...situation is not the same as it used to be when my husband*

*was with me. When we were together, we would do anything together hence work would be done very easily. Now, it is too difficult for me to carry heavy loads from the market. If any hard work is needed, I have to call my father-in-law. Sometimes, I feel, I am giving trouble to my father-in-law. But if the things are challenging to me then, I obviously have to seek for their help. My father-in-law also takes care of all the agriculture and cultivation related activities. I do not have to do any agricultural works. He manages everything by himself.”*

This indicates a new set of challenges that women farmers face at a time of agrarian stress and out-migration. It is not only limited to woman contributing more labour; or a large number of women are being engaged in agriculture. Moreover, it is about women being caught into the contradictions of choice and compulsion to which they require to respond. It is clear from the narratives that both, a choice and the compulsion force women to contribute extra labour in agriculture. Choice in the sense that family as a unit requires collective effort if progress is to be made. In the process, at one hand women chose to contribute with extra labour. On the other hand, in absence of a male member, it becomes a compulsion to take care of the family matters. Hence, women to contribute in agriculture related labour force is a compulsion transforming into choice. This is dependent on desire to improve livelihood means which is mostly guided by competition. It could be this reason that even though women contribute more time and labour in agriculture, yet they do not appear complaining. This is reflective in the way in which they suggest that in the village people are working and competing with each other on the basis of comparison. In local lingua they call it people working on ‘*Jida-jiddi*’. This explains the ways in which labour contribution of women in the family is discussed.

## **6.2 Land Entitlement**

Land is seen as a resource in many ways and entitlements to land were viewed important which give a sense of empowerment to women. Women claim that compared to earlier days, at present, there is a growing trend that people buy new land in the name of a female family member. Men see greater assurance in their wives and therefore they promote their wife as an owner of the newly purchased land. Survey data suggests that out of total 24 households in Sunsari, 15 female headed households reported that they had land in their name. Of which 13 households had ownership after new land purchase whereas 2 households had land in female’s name as

inheritance. Somewhat similar situation was reported in the case of Siraha as well. In Siraha 14 female headed households reported that they have land in their name.

At first instance, it was explained that the reason behind land entitlement in the name of female was migration of male members. The provision of tax discount also featured as another motive to have new land registered in women's name. However, land entitlement was specifically seen as financial security that could be used for collateral to take loans and support family livelihoods. Moreover, in the context of agrarian stress and out-migration, agriculture has emerged as a domain of women. Hence, not having land in women's name put women in a disadvantaged position when it comes to accessing public services and subsidies for irrigation.

At another instance, in Fulkahakatti, Sheela, a female farmer suggested that having land in her name gave her an opportunity whereby she could put land as a collateral and invested money in getting a pump set to irrigate her vegetable farm.

Women take loan from MF banks, and have the responsibility to pay it – this is easier if the land is in their name. Thus MF bank's loan to women has contributed to their economic empowerment whether be it initiating small enterprise or investing in farming. Moreover, if loans are in women's name, they put pressure on men to pay the money back that increases their bargaining power in the family. This also gives women a feeling of sense of ownership that eventually empowers women economically as well as encourage in decision making capacity.

### **6.3 Agriculture is a Source of Income Generation**

It is important to note that in spite of the significant increase in workload for women and greater hardship faced, women's access to economic resources has risen considerably when compared to the past. These opportunities are transforming livelihood options as well as gender relations at a time of agrarian stress.

Faced with a crippling work burden, the way out to achieve equality as many women perceives, was through education and financial security. Women often compared themselves as backward in relation to urban women who supposedly were educated and financially independent. It appeared that women performed well if they were pushed in such a situation whereby they had no option

other than to earn and contribute to family resources given the persisting demand of a global consumeristic economy.

But women whose husband were alcoholic, for them it was more family responsibilities and increased work burden because of their husbands being irresponsible towards the needs of the family, thus forcing their wives to be the household head. In either situation, women were the one who contributed more to the family livelihood means.

Most of the women, in both the districts, were found engaged in micro credit and saving programmes. In Amaduwa, some female respondents were engaged in three or four micro credit programs. The major benefit they received was easy access to loan and secure saving. One of the female respondent reported how her house situation had changed after being a member in a micro credit and saving program. She said: *'her husband was an alcoholic previously, but micro credit loan has compelled him to work and save. Now he spends more time in work because we have to pay loan in-time. We used to have many quarrels earlier but now both of us are engaged in economic activities and have changed our behavior that is towards progress.'*

Moreover, in both districts, at least the researched sites exhibited an empowered position of women. One reason for this was increasing number of women being engaged in productive areas. Women were engaged in trading activities, tea shops and even worked as a wage laborer and selling of vegetables. In Ekamba women actively interacted with their customers and performed simple cash calculations that allowed them to run their shop independently. Women gave an impression that they were moving towards becoming self-reliant in earning and handling their livelihood needs. It was also impressive to note that costumers who visited tea shops were mostly male and these women were able to handle the situation and do business smoothly. *Hatiya*, was another place in villages where local products were sold. 90% of the vendors in *Hatiya* were women.

This suggests of a new culture emerging within gendered role division. Given the complex intersectionality between space, normative gender beliefs, and individual practices within the culture and society, it is yet not clear how access to markets generally and access to credit specifically helps in guaranteeing social opportunity transforming to empowerment, although, in certain circumstances they may be a crucial ingredient for it. Study from *Sunsari* and *Siraha*

clearly indicated that cultural ideologies, and various ways in which women articulate the process of macroeconomic change, particularly play an important role in restructuring opportunities for women. Cultural ideology in many sense appeared in flux. The focus was on economic wellbeing and quality livelihood. This was being practiced through micro enterprises and macro credit mechanisms that were available to women in the community. To compete with the demands of these micro saving and credit institutions, women continuously put more labour and effort to generate income. It was this reason that women went extra miles in terms of putting labour effort, whether be it farming or other income generating activities.

As pointed out in previous sections, quality of life through improvement in livelihood means can be seen as a compulsion of global market economy and the growing consumeristic values that it brings with it. Sita of Amaduwa was an active lady in her women's group called Chandra Mukhi Samuha. Chandra Mukhi Samuha is a micro finance initiative where rural women are encouraged to do saving in monthly installments. Sita talked about empowerment that was taking place in women. She suggested that empowerment was infused by the desire to have money, educate their children in the private boarding schools and earn land as a resource for long term livelihoods.

Sita said, *'she is an active member in the group. Everybody in the group work competitively. Whatever work they can do, they are engaged in it, including, making liquor, keeping rooster, rearing animal including buffalo, goat etc. or if there is daily wage work in the village they do that work as well'*. *"Sab Jidda – Jiddi main kambe chai – It is about earning in competition with one another. But from this village tharu ladies hardly go to Biratnagar for work.'*

Similarly, in Fulkahakatti of Siraha, a majority of women were found engaged in vegetable farming which had increased women's mobility and access to commercial market. Pramila Singh Danuwar, whose husband was a migrant, shared, *"I go to market by myself to sell vegetables. I often use bicycle to carry vegetables or even carry it on my head to market. When I have heavy load of vegetable products, I take tampo to transport vegetables to the market. I take them to Mirchaiya, Choharwa, Golbazaar, Zeromile, Chainpur. Usually, vegetables can be sold with good prices in Mirchaiya so I prefer going there than other places."*

It was a desire to get engaged in income generating activities had imposed on Pramila to participate in the public sphere. Earning from vegetable products were seen as a better option. At first instance, it was a situational demand that created space for women to engage in several decision making processes. However rather than viewing it as an extended burden, in both the districts women saw it as a challenge as well as an opportunity to contribute in livelihood means of the family. As situation is changing rapidly, the women who used to be confined within household chores have now started to go outside, whether be it working in agriculture, deal with people and manage the responsibilities as a guardian. That is seen as a prospect for women to be empowered.

Ladubati Devi Saday, a dalit woman from Bhagwanpur presented herself with confidence when asked about lease farming and the functioning of Dalit Mahila Krisak Samuha which was initiated by an NGO. Since Ladudevi was also the president of the group, she had the opportunity to participate in various capacity building trainings that was designed for the group members. She explained how after being engaged in lease farming group had encouraged her to stand in front of people. She said, *“previously, if men would have come to talk to us we would not face them. Rather we would turn our face and feel embarrassed. But now I can face them and talk to them regarding lease farming, challenges and opportunity that it has brought to us.”* While Ladu devi was talking another lady called Ramlatiya Devi buzzed in, *“see how close I am sitting to you. This is the change really. Previously if I would have seen you, and even if you would have called me to talk, I would have rather run away. She repeated, this is the change apart from all other benefits that we are getting from vegetable farming. It is a lot for us.”*

This gives a glimpse in which it might be in a very shuttle way but there is change that is taking place in the Madheshi society. When these ladies were talking about ‘standing in front of men or people’ they were indicating of how they were becoming equal to each other. In deep sense, they were talking about how a culture of silence that was there in the society was broken. In this sense, it was confidence, and a feeling of equality that might relate to empowerment. This is of course more than women’s access to economy and decision making what they see a byproduct of it. Hence empowerment relates to various notions. For instance, for the women in Amaduwa, it is about ownership of resources and contribution in income generation, while for women in

Bhagwanpur it is about self-confidence. However, in many ways these various factors are complementary to each other in which we may be able to understand what empowerment is.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### EFFECT OF INCREASING WOMEN'S ROLE IN AGRICULTURE

Women do not have the same access to agricultural services and resources (such as agricultural subsidies, input suppliers, irrigation facilities, and product market) as men. Women face constraints as effective producers in the rural economy. As more women become the principal supporters of their households, these constraints not only prejudice women's physical and emotional health, they also have impact on household welfare.

#### 7.1 Decision Making Power and Economic Empowerment

In both the districts, it was observed that women's decision making power had increased respectively along with their economic empowerment. The survey of female headed household indicates that within migrant families, women are able to manage their household by themselves. The decisions are taken more in a combined way including both husband and wife. However, the absence of a male member is pushing women to take initiation and make decisions; otherwise they would have left it to their male partner. In all 48 households that was surveyed in two districts of Siraha and Sunsari exhibit that more number of women are engaged in decision making processes. In several cases, even if male members were present in the family, women acted as a de facto household head. It seems that to a large extent, women's engagement in income generating activities have given an edge over men to play this role at a time of male out-migration.

If women earn more cash than men, they are the one who take decisions. Women are taking decisions more and more in both the districts. However, it is more visible in Sunsari compared to Siraha. Pressure to earn more and increase income is encouraging women to get engaged in business. This has an impact on increased decision making. Even at times farming related issues are decided by female. Decisions related to other economic activities such as setting up a business are also made by women. Aspirations for higher standard of living, education etc. are the thing that is motivating women to get engaged in economic activities. In this instance, marginal farmers had also shown same capacity to enhance their wealth through enterprise and

livelihood diversification which was earlier limited to feudal class and to large land holding farmers.

How female were engaged in income generating activities was visible in one of the cases in Sunsari. Kanchi, Sibendra's wife is an independent lady. On demand, she collects grain from the village and sells it in the nearby Itahari market. She has a business of buying and selling agricultural produce. When there is a season of vegetables, Kanchi takes vegetable to the market, and when it is of rice grain, she does trading of rice. The date (3/11/2015) while researcher was talking to her, she explained *"this morning itself I earned Rs.800 in a morning shift. In fact, I collected 300 kg of rice from village and transported it to Itahari market on demand and earned Rs.800 in one go. It is about money. If you have money, you can do what you like at least in terms of material needs. This gives assurance and confidence that you can take care of your needs. Especially in this Tharu community there is not much difference in terms of men and women. While joking, she exclaimed, these days women are capable enough to even beat up men if they require doing so. Female are equal enough to protect themselves if it is needed."*

*"Sain beta kamai me hisab letau, Apan kamai me jena mon tena" – If you are dependent and your husband and son earn money and give you, they would always ask for balance sheet. But, if you earn by yourselves, you can decide where to spend. There comes individual freedom. You can spend on your choice."*

A similar case was presented in Bhagawanpur, Siraha, where the vice president of a Dalit Mahila Krisak Samuha, Champa Devi Sadaya shared, *"since I am involved in lease farming, I am able to earn money. Previously, I had to go to others field as wage laborer. But now I work on the land that I have taken on lease. I grow vegetables in all seasons and sell it in local market. This has contributed in continuous income. Now I will always have some money that I can spend on what I would like to spend for. Practically this changed situation has allowed me to think how to spend money and think freely. This is empowering, I can take decision now."*

From the narratives discussed above, it is clear that the very concept of being free and to decide upon family and individual matter are based on choice and dependent on income generation. This gives an experience of freedom to women and is translated as a feeling of an empowered

being. Economic activities are featured as a triggering factor that contributes to increased decision making power of women in the family.

## **7.2 Women Empowerment and Access to Subsidies**

Members of Dalit Mahila Krishak Samuha of Bhagawanpur and Maa Tulaja Bhawani Women's Group and Maa Laxmi Farmer's Group in Fulkahakatti of Siraha showed how while being in a group has permitted them to have access to outside knowledge and social networks. Members of these groups explained that they have learned much on government subsidies, improved means of doing agriculture and other politics and issues that occur in the institutions while to put applications for getting benefits or to participate in a training programme.

Sona Devi Kamat who was the secretary of Maa Laxmi Farmers Group Fulakhakatti said that one of the major reasons for less participation of women in decision making level in any group is illiteracy. She explained, *"as a secretary of the group, my main responsibility is to inform all members about the meetings regularly. I also have to keepe records but I don't know how to read, write or calculate. Therefore even if I participate in all the activities of the group, I lack confidence to go out and perform"*. She pointed out that the lack of education is a hindrance for women to be successful in the public sphere and institutions. Nevertheless, Sona devi viewed herself to be socially empowered by being a member of women's group. Empowerment was the reason she argued behind her group receiving the benefits like seeds, fertilizers, agricultural tools and provisions of subsidies for agriculture from different institutions including GWDRB.

However, this is not the case across the board. Especially, women those who were in the leading positions in the group showed an interest to interact with others, outside their circle of comfort. In the beginning however, it was a compulsion. They had to perform their duties as an executive member of the group. It required interacting with people outside their group including officials at district office. This also indicates that there are multiple factors at play which is contributing directly or indirectly to increased decision making power of women, ultimately leading to a sense of empowerment that contributes to access to irrigation subsidies.

### **7.3 Gender and Access to Water**

It is clear that remittance and access to credit and markets have in many contexts transformed gender relations in Siraha and Sunsari. However, aside from the few success stories such as the women vegetable farmer groups in Siraha, gender empowerment in agriculture appears to lag behind, in spite of the fact that women are increasingly in-charge of agricultural production. It is crucial to note that regardless of various economic opportunities, households still depend on agriculture to fulfill a large portion of their minimum subsistence needs – in particular, to ensure food security. Furthermore, as noted above, not all women had same access to economic opportunities as others, with structural constraints to accessing credit or even remittances.

On top, one of the most critical challenges for livelihood security through agriculture is access to water. This is reflected repeatedly by informants. Irrigation related works are seen as masculine entity therefore women hardly get engaged in irrigating fields, except to perform a job of a subordinate. Women from migrant families suggest that when it comes to irrigation they are largely dependent on their close kin such as farther-in-law, or brother-in-laws. To some extent this affects farming for women headed households. At times these households hire men laborers to meet irrigation needs. This makes farming expensive for them. On several occasions, these female headed households get support from close male relatives at the end of a harvesting season, because those who provide support would harvest their field in the beginning. This often leads to late farming resulting in less produce. It is reported that at times, especially women headed households keep part of their land barren due to various reasons explained above. This has also affected tenant farming. Most of these female headed migrant households are compelled to abandon tenant farming. In a situation where it is difficult for women to spare time for farming, they do not see an advantage in working hard in others land which would not give them appropriate return.

The constraints for women to have easy access to irrigation in the case of groundwater dependent communities are furthermore complex. A primary challenge is seen in terms of accessing a pump set and tube-well, particularly for poorer farmers who do not own their own land or pumping equipment. Traditionally men would be responsible for negotiating with a richer neighbour to rent

a pump. But for households with no adult male members, the task of finding a pump set for irrigation is increasingly falling into the domain of women.

In the case of Amaduwa for example, an alternative to surface water, a few farmers had invested in pump set and tube-wells to irrigate their field. A lady, head of household shared her experience to irrigate her paddy field. *“This year (paddy plantation time) it was drought for three months. Government did nothing to help farmers. I faced a lot of hurdles for paddy plantation. Finally, I decided to buy pump set in Rs.20000 and for motor I spent Rs. 6,000. It is costly to do farming just in 2 bigha of land and if I add fuel cost, it becomes very expensive. I could do it only because my father-in-law took responsibility to get pump equipment from India and helped me to find out skilled worker to fix pump set. Finally I could irrigate my paddy field.”*

The process of installing as well as managing a pump set is time consuming. As expressed above, traditionally male would be responsible for this job. But for the families where there was no male support due to labour migration, female member had to take initiation. One women informant from Amaduwa, who received limited water from the canal, complained, *“for agriculture, there is no irrigation. We have to depend on boring water which I hire from others. I have to pay Rs. 70/hour and the fuel is also costly. Before migration, my husband used to oversee irrigation and the arrangement of rental pump. But now I have to spend extra time for managing irrigation in the field. My husband used to do ploughing and sowing also. But now I need to hire laborers and tractors for these. Sometimes, I ask help from my father in law for sowing the field. But it is not easy as it seems. Sometimes, I have to call for four or five times. If they don’t come, I have to do it myself.”*

Similarly, another woman of Bhgawanpur, Siraha, complained. *“We use ‘machine’ - electric water pump. Two women (her friends present at the time) have their own pump sets and others take on rent. Usually it is difficult to find a vacant pump set for hiring at pick season. Normally my husband would go to find out a pump set for irrigation. But he is not around, so I have to go to find out a pump set. We have to provide fuel and give cash to pump owner based on an hourly rate that is Rs.150... What to do? It is difficult; it hampers my other work in the house.”*

In Bhagwanpur, a majority of farmers worked as tenants in landlord’s farm. These farmers belonged to dalit communities like *Ram, Mushahar, Chamar*. On top, most of these farmers were

landless. Since these farmers worked as a sharecropper, they did not have full control over agricultural production. The facility of irrigation was also out of their reach. Bujarbarati Ram from Bhagwanpur reported, *"for money, we depend on agriculture. We work on tenancy in the local landlord's land. We (all chamar) are like the refugees. I only have one small home in 5 dhur of land. There is no boring pump set in our land. We manage to irrigate from landlord's boring. Landlord has got a boring next to the land that I harvest. I hire motor and pipes to bring water to our field. Framers like us have many problems related to irrigation. No one does anything for poor farmers. Even the landlord, whose farm we cultivate charge Rs 60 per hour for pump set and extra for fuel. This is the reality."* Another informant, Pawandevi Ram, also head of the household shared similar experience. She said, *"I am a tenant farmer and for irrigation I hire pump set on rent. However I have managed to buy one motor. Since my husband is not here, I often find many obstacles to irrigate land. I call my neighbors to help me manage to irrigate field but others are always not available at the time I need."*

Above explored narratives are reflective of how and what is at place in terms of irrigation and whether women farmers are having access to water. Drawing from various narratives, it can be argued that purchasing water from water market appear complex. For women to get water from water market requires maintaining social relationships even though a rent is paid for irrigation. On top, maintaining social relationship becomes difficult due to cultural reasons when water market is owned by a male. It turns problematic in the sense that negotiation to purchase water especially takes place in public sphere (tea shops/male gathering place etc.) which is not welcoming for women. It was this reason that women who had to purchase water from others felt difficulty to do so.

Although, there are provisions for subsidy and discount by the government , targeting a socially disadvantaged minority group including women in terms of installing irrigation facilities and to support farmers with appropriate technical input. But most of these available services are either confined to district headquarters or limited to a few influential individuals especially those who have appropriate network with powerful district level political groups; or those who can influence in the process otherwise. Of course, in this process of accessing services, it appears as if women feel much isolated to compete given the household livelihood management responsibility added to them.

#### 7.4 Are Opportunities for Economic Empowerment Equally Distributed?

While it is clear that many households have benefitted considerably both from new market opportunities spurred on by new enterprises or from remittances, not everyone has benefitted to the same degree and achieved the same levels of economic ‘empowerment’. Economic opportunity is often rooted in one’s pre-existing class position or other family specific contexts.

There are some women from Dalit community both in Siraha and Sunsari, for example in Bhagwanpur, women from ‘ram’ community and in Amaduwa from ‘Rishidev’ community who felt that little had changed in their lives in recent years. These women were not involved in any groups and institutions. These women noted that they perform all the household chores and are only engaged in labour work as a tenant farmer. For instance, Rita Ram from Bhagwanpur expressed, *"we don't know anything. How can I say that what is needed for us. We say one thing but men say some other thing. .... We don't know what trainings are required for us. The educated people like you may know what should be done for us."*

There arise question that why is it that some women cannot benefit when it comes to getting engaged into micro enterprise. There are examples, especially within low income strata groups such as Rishidev and Ram women who are not able to benefit from off farm enterprise to the same degree as others in the community do. The reason they put forward is of limited access to microcredit institutions as they are not having collateral to keep in the finance institutions to take loan. Hence, most of the time these women rely on labour work in the agriculture farm. For instance, Magani Devi Rishidev from Amaduwa reflected, *‘It is very difficult to take loan from micro credit institutions as they require collateral of some or other kind. At times, people from these institutions come and advise us on getting loan from their institution. But when it comes to actually getting loan, it becomes next to impossible. The problem is that even our houses are not registered in land revenue office. We are having our huts in a public land. See I got 50 thousand from microcredit for my daughter's marriage while keeping buffalo as collateral. Now I have to pay Rs. 7000 as installment per month. If I am not able to pay on time, they would come and abuse us in front of public. We have no other option than to get harassed from them if we take loan. I am the only one from this tole to take loan from micro credit. People feel feared to take*

*loan as it can call trouble if they are not able to pay installments. This limits the opportunity to think beyond daily survival.*

Of total 8 households in Rishidev tole, only Magani was the one who had taken loan that was also not for any income generating activities but for marriage. This is the reality to which these institutions are accessible to marginal farmers. Moreover, Urmila Pandit, a worker at Shree Bala Sundari Sana Kishan Krishi Sahakari Sanstha Limited also agreed that without collateral they cannot give loan to any individual. She agreed that due to institutional procedure of providing loan to women in groups only, at times it is possible that the marginalized one become excluded, if they are not able to put collateral. She agreed that they have not been able to reach out to the marginal households in the community. This suggests that not getting financial help on easy terms adversely affects the opportunities for more marginal farmers.

Whereas on the other hand, women who are active in groups and public institutions are aware that participation in public institutions can actually build the capacity of women. To some extent, they are able to engage in micro credit initiatives and able to reflect what they really think of what is empowerment. Thus it is clear that although economic empowerment of many women has risen considerably as they find new enterprise based opportunities, and manage finances while their husbands are abroad. However, not all households are able to benefit from off farm enterprise to the same degree.

Access to financial resources is also grounded in one's family arrangement, and the distribution of cash and decision making within the household. This is most notable when it comes to control over remittances. It is learned that migrant send money mostly in the name of their wives if they are married and also if wife is the household head. However, if they are living in an extended family, remittance goes in the name of father-in-law who leads the family. Data also suggest that out of 18 households, in 8, females took decision over the remittance money. However, in other families, husbands and other members were also consulted.

Various stories from female headed households also substantiate the fact that emerged from household survey. For instance, the story of Lila gives a glimpse of how remittance money is spent. Lila's husband is a migrant in Saudi Arabia. Lila said that this was her husband's second trip to Saudi. Earlier her husband had spent 5years in Saudi and this time it was only three



months ago that he had left. In the afternoon, during leisure time, Lalita was found playing cards. She looked happy and well decorated. When researcher asked, what are the areas where they spend remittance money? Before Lalita could respond, her elder aunt claimed pointing towards Lalita, *'You do not see? Where will she spend money? Of course on fashion!'* Other lady participants of the card playing game started laughing. But later Lalita replied that a high amount is being spent on the education of her son. Among all other participants, Lalita looked quite fashioned up with dark red lipstick, eye brows painted, and a layer of cream on her face. In fact, she looked quite happy and her face looked cheerful and bright. This is indicative of how remittance money is contributing to the happiness of the family members.

In another instance, Kumari of Ekamba stated that since a month she started cooking food separately from her-in-laws. Now she is the lone guardian for her small son. She recalled, *"about a month ago, I told my in-laws about we getting separated. I have a separate room where I prepare food. I myself made this decision and my husband supported me. Due to the family matters, I had to take this decision. My in-laws wanted to have all the remittance money of my husband and they did not discuss with me about the use and expenditure of the money. But I have to think for my son's future as well. My husband sends remittance in my name. In this way I can use money wisely and save some for our future. My husband has always accompanied me in my decisions."*

However, the response of other family members regarding her being separated from joint family was not welcoming. Kumari explained, *"When I told my parents in-laws about separating, they could not speak anything directly to me. But I could understand that my father-in-law was feeling bad. My parents were also very angry on my decision. My big brother shouted at me and even warned that he would never visit me. I shared everything with my husband. He was very positive and convinced me that others would understand and be nice with me eventually."* The noticeable difference is that now Kumari has more control over her husband's remittance money and she feels self-empowered. However, in her opinion, for a woman to be fully empowered require some skillful job. In this case, her husband is sending remittance every month and hence remittance has become the major source of economy.

In contrary however, there were cases where migration had brought agony than happiness. Sarita of Amaduwa is one of them who had to face several challenges. For Sarita, migration has not

only increased her workload but has ruined the happiness of her family since her husband is having extra marital affair in India. Now Sarita has to work hard to sustain her family and educate her children. Sarita shared her story, *“we bought land, a thresher machine and a generator from loan. My husband went to India to earn and pay loans. But he married another woman in India. Earlier, he used to send us money in every ten or fifteen days. But now he does not. I have to manage everything by myself. I do wage labour, I also sell milk. I use my cycle and go anywhere I need. My earning is all spent in the household, food, clothes and education of children. Previous year, I sold one cow and goat to pay loan. This year too, I am planning to sell some out of 5 cows.”*

Indeed, Sarita is living independently and has determination that she will educate her children even her husband is not with her. This has brought her pain and agony. However, case like this is not widespread in the villages where study was carried out. Nevertheless, these different expressions explain the risks, challenges, opportunities as well as hope that people adhere to in terms of migration.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### SUMMARY AND COCLUSION

#### 8.1 Summary

In the absence of male agricultural worker, farming in the rural villages is becoming a realm of women. Furthermore, at a time of agrarian stress and out-migration a new set of challenge is faced by women farmers. Women are seen to be exceeding the number of agricultural laborers compared to men. This has led to the feminization of agriculture that is not only limited to woman contributing more labour, or a large number of women are being engaged in agriculture, but it is transforming the agency of women. Increasingly, a woman being the household head has left them with no option other than to earn and contribute to family resources given the persisting demand of a global consumeristic economy. Thus women are seen being caught between the contradictions of alternatives and livelihood pressure to which they require to respond. A quest for contributing to livelihood means has led women to explore new income generating opportunities.

As a result, economic empowerment of women has risen considerably. Women find new enterprise based opportunities, and manage finances while their husbands are abroad. Particularly, for women, access to saving and credit through microfinance is seen encouraging which facilitate them to get engaged in small enterprise. These opportunities are transforming livelihood options as well as gender relations at a time of agrarian stress and out-migration.

#### 8.2 Conclusion

To conclude, in the light of agrarian stress, Tarai/Madhesh of Nepal in general, and Siraha and Sunsari in particular, are having a continuous fall in agricultural production. There are various factors that have further added to agrarian stress in the district. Unpredictable climate with frequent dry spells has created a drought like situation, adversely contributing to sustainable agricultural development in the region. Striking climatic demands have brought changes in agricultural practices. Increasing dependence on fertilizers and use of modern technology in farming, including lifting ground water for irrigation have substantially amplified the production costs in farming. This is resulted in a decreased interest of young male farmers to do farming. As

a result, a majority of farmers are compelled to keep a larger volume of land fallow, further adding to low agricultural production in the area. This rising insufficiency in agricultural production due to agrarian stress has raised concern for food security. It has compelled locals to adopt other means of sustainable livelihood. Among many, one of the best alternatives that labour intensive youth find is temporary migration.

This is important, as not all female headed households are able to benefit from off farm enterprise to the same degree. Moreover, for agriculture, access to water for irrigation remains a critical constraint which has imposed a threat to livelihood security, particularly to maintain yields at a time of ecological decline and unpredictable rainfall. There is a significant difference exist in agricultural outcomes between villages with access to canal water and those dependent upon groundwater.

Access to water for irrigation is further aggravated by gendered barriers, which limit women's participation, despite the critical role that they play in agricultural production. For women farmer, irrigating field is a complex matter given the difficulty that they face to buy water from water market. In addition, gender role division is different for male and female where irrigating field is solely the work of men. Since women's roles are defined and constructed within socio-cultural expectations and experiences, female accept societal norms, even though they being uncomfortable with the practices. Thus phenomenon of gender identity is ultimately contextualised within a unit of family since the centrality of gender relations are dependent on the way in which the word 'gender' is defined and discussed within a socio-culturally constructed framework.

On the other hand, women's empowerment is infused by the desire to have money, educate their children in the private boarding schools, and earn land as a resource for long term livelihoods. Empowerment of women thus relates to various notions that vary from ownership of resources and contribution in income generation to self-confidence. However, in many ways these various factors are complementary to each other in which we may be able to understand what empowerment is.

In contrary however, at a time when women are playing a greater role in decision making, they still face significant constraints in accessing public resources such as subsidies. That is also due

to the lack of participation of women in WUAs and the dynamics that is at play to compete within a range of issues including household management, farm workload, micro credit engagement and livelihood issues.

However, the most apparent is the existing challenges pertaining to groundwater interventions that are not rooted only in gendered constraints, but in broader political economic processes and institutional weaknesses in the implementation and design of programmes. Besides that, poor spread of groundwater interventions, and elite capture on subsidized resources imposes further constraints that are particularly high for women. Nevertheless, it is important to note, that gender is not always a barrier in itself, but the condition of women who are already in a vulnerable situation, can be aggravated by external factors, and these are preventing women from realizing their full potential in agriculture, despite changes in ideologies for the better.

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## **Annex A**

### **Guiding questions/checklist for key informants interview**

- Personal and family profile
- Livelihood of villagers: sources (agriculture and remittance)
- State of irrigation and water management in the community and infrastructure development that has taken place in the past
- People's concerns regarding farming and its dependency on irrigation facilities
- Major responsibility and achievements in terms of water and irrigation issues in the community
- People's complain to local authorities regarding agricultural matters
- Major problems and needs of village for agricultural activity
- What is needed to be done to strengthen agricultural outcomes
- Major economic activities related to farming activities
- Accountability of agricultural public post holders
- Social/cultural and reformation and change
- People's engagement in user committees and other government programs
- Women's participation/decision in irrigation process
- Women's representation and participation in formal and informal process of irrigation related matters
- State of women empowerment – what empowerment mean for them and how it is reflected in their view

- Inter-group relations in the village (discrimination and deprivation)
- Participation in village governance (both formal and informal)
- Gender division in household and other agricultural activity
- Involvement in use of public resources (who make decision and how)
- Political influence and intervention

## **Annex B**

### **Interview schedule for household**

#### **Introduction of researcher and consent taking**

Namaste! My name is **Krishna Kumar Sah**, I am here from **MPhil Programme, Central Department of Sociology**, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Kathmandu. I am conducting a research on “**Women in Agriculture in Tarai/Madhesh**” for my MPhil in Sociology. I am trying to better understand the lives around agriculture of rural people in Fulkahakatti and Bhagwanpur in Siraha and Ekamba and Amaduwa in Sunsari. The information will be used to inform future programmes on agriculture/irrigation/migration in certain communities of Nepal. Your household has been chosen by a random selection process. You are one of over 12 households that I will meet to discuss in depth with you about issues and opportunities for men and women. I will also be interviewing a few key people as key informants for the purpose of this study.

During this study, I will ask you questions related to gender inequality and women’s empowerment in agriculture. I am inviting you to be a participant in this study. I would value your opinion and there are no wrong answers to the questions we will be asking in the interview. I will use approximately 1 hour of your time to collect all the information. There will be no risk as a result of your participating in the study. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You are free to stop answering our questions at any time.

The information given by you will be strictly treated as confidential and will be used only for the study. Your participation will be highly appreciated.

Are you willing to participate in the study?            1. Yes            2. No

Signature of the interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/2073

**Location:**

|                   |  |          |  |
|-------------------|--|----------|--|
| Name of village   |  | Ward No. |  |
| Municipality name |  | District |  |

**Demographic profile:**

**Note on instructions:** Read the definition of the household aloud and make sure the respondent understands that only household members as defined for this survey are included. Complete the list of names first, and then complete section for each person before asking for the next person. Probe at the end by repeating this survey’s definition of household to make sure all have been included and no one extra.

For combined income, please ensure it is not double counted. For example if more than one person works on the farm and it is not possible to get income for each individual by that activity, please enter the income from farming under the person who works primarily on the farm and do not include this amount again for any other person who worked on the farm to help make this income. The primary occupation is the activity on which the household member spends most of his/her time. The secondary source is an additional activity/occupation. For example, if a person spends most of the time on salary wage employment that would be primary. But if s/he also looks after the farm or manages the farm or looks after some business, in addition to his/her salaried employment, that would be his/her secondary activity. It could be possible that someone earns more from his/her secondary occupation than his/her primary occupation.

1. Start with the household head

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Relations</u>                                 | <u>Age</u> | <u>Sex</u> | <u>Marital</u>                                         | <u>School</u>                |                                         |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
|             | What is the relationship of ___ to the household |            |            | <u>Status</u><br>What is ___'s present marital status? | (Only for members >=3 years) | (Only for members >= 6 years and above) |

|  | head? |  |  |  | Is _____ currently attending school? | What is the highest grade/level _____ has completed? | What is _____'s main type of occupation? | Could you rank the importance of this occupation for the household income? (high/medium/low) | What is the secondary type of occupation? |
|--|-------|--|--|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
|  |       |  |  |  |                                      |                                                      |                                          |                                                                                              |                                           |
|  |       |  |  |  |                                      |                                                      |                                          |                                                                                              |                                           |
|  |       |  |  |  |                                      |                                                      |                                          |                                                                                              |                                           |
|  |       |  |  |  |                                      |                                                      |                                          |                                                                                              |                                           |

**Note on definitions:**

**Household:** A group of people who live together under the same roof and take food from the “same pot.”

**Household member:** someone who has a) lived in the household for at least 6 months, b) shares food from the same pot as others under the roof, and c) resided there regularly at least half of the time during the 6 months (3-4 days of each week for 6 months, 3 full months of the 6 months, etc.). Even persons who are not blood relatives (such as servants, lodgers, or agricultural laborers) are included if they meet these three requirements.

Exceptions include (Consider as household member):

- A newborn child less than 6 months old
- Someone who has joined the household through marriage less than 6 months ago
- Servants, lodgers, and agricultural laborers currently in the household and will be staying in the household for a longer period but arrived less than 6 months ago

**Non-household member:** Someone who stays in the same household but does not bear any costs for food or does not take food from the same pot. For example, if two brothers stay in the same house with their families but they do not share food costs and they cook separately, then they are considered two separate households. Generally, if one person stays more than 3 months out of the last 6 months outside the household, they are not considered household members even if other household members consider them as household members.

Exceptions include (Do not consider as household member):

- A person who died very recently
  - Someone who has left the household through marriage
  - Servants, lodgers, and agricultural laborers who have left the household
2. Religion:
- A). Hindu    b). Muslim    c.) Buddhist    c). Christian    e). Others –specify

**Agricultural realities**

3. What is your land ownership status?

| Owned land area (bigha) |                      | Rented land area (bigha) |            |              | Who is landlord (tick $\surd$ )     |              |               |
|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Owned and cultivated    | Owned and rented out | Share-cropped            | Fixed rent | Other tenure | Absentee (where does he/she reside) | Local farmer | Family member |
|                         |                      |                          |            |              |                                     |              |               |

4. 6. Do you own any of the following agro based instruments for farming?

| SN | Instrument | Yes | No |
|----|------------|-----|----|
|    |            |     |    |



|    |                           |  |  |
|----|---------------------------|--|--|
| a. | Pump set/generator/boring |  |  |
| b. | Tractor (4 wheel/2 wheel) |  |  |
| c. | Thresher (family owned)   |  |  |
| d. | Plough (halo)             |  |  |
| e. | Tyre (Gada/kath/tyre)     |  |  |
| f. | Others                    |  |  |

5. Do you employ labour from outside the household? 1. Yes 2. No

If yes, how many labour days did you employ for each of the following seasons? (Also note - Male/ Female and wage discrimination)

Monsoon \_\_\_\_\_ Winter \_\_\_\_\_ Summer \_\_\_\_\_

**General agriculture questions**

6. What Kind of problems do you face in continuing agricultural activities in the village?

(Labour/seed/irrigation/fertilizer/market/price/loan/ other hazards)

7. For how long have you faced these problems?

8. Do other households face similar problems?

9. What have you done to address them?

**What facilitate empowerment?**

**Migration:**

10. Information on migration

| <u>Labour migration</u> | <u>Type of migration</u> | <u>Age</u> | <u>Sex</u> | <u>Marital Status</u>        | <u>Remittance sent in the name of</u> | <u>Remittance money invested in.....specify areas</u> | <u>Who decides on spendings?</u> |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------|------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Yes/ No                 | Seasonal / Permanent     |            |            | (Married / Unmarried/ Other) | ../if not specify                     |                                                       |                                  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|----------------------|--|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |                      |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | 1.<br>2.<br>3.<br>4. |  |

11. How has migration altered your family's economic status?

12. What are the other impacts of migration?

13. Who managed the following agricultural activities before/after migration? Can include husband, in-law or labourer-

For each activity where a change has taken place, note any difficulties which have been faced.

| <b>Activity</b>                        | <b>Before migration</b> | <b>After migration</b> | <b>Difficulties</b> |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Ploughing                              |                         |                        |                     |
| Sowing                                 |                         |                        |                     |
| Arranging rental of pump set/tube-well |                         |                        |                     |

|                                               |  |  |  |
|-----------------------------------------------|--|--|--|
|                                               |  |  |  |
| Overseeing irrigation from pump set/tube-well |  |  |  |
| Overseeing irrigation from canal              |  |  |  |
| Managing labourers                            |  |  |  |
| Marketing                                     |  |  |  |

14. Who takes decision regarding water and irrigation related matters? How do you share (female/male members) the stress of workload pertaining to the demands of water and irrigation in agriculture in the family?
15. How was it before your family member (husband or others) migrated?
16. How have other decision making responsibilities in the household changed following the migration of your family member?
17. How do you manage to influence the decisions of others in your family regarding agricultural needs and livelihood issues (overtly or covertly)

**Financial resources**

18. How are financial decisions made? How has this changed since migration?
19. Have you taken a loan? Amount and purpose, to whom, did you face any difficulty?
20. Is managing finance easier or more difficult since the migration of your family member?
21. Did you have to ask someone in your household to get loan (for female only)?
22. If you have an urgent demand for cash, where do you go?
23. Do you think that women are financially and personally secure in our family and society?

**Access to state resources pertaining to agricultural activities**

24. What are the supports you getting from government for agriculture related matters? If not then go to q.29.

25. How did you find these supports?

26. Did you utilize any outside support to get governmental services (eg. Network, political influence, knowledge power etc.)?

27. In your opinion, who gets benefits of government supports (caste /class/educated/ political affiliation)?

28. How do they get these government supports?

29. In your opinion, how social network works to have access to public services?

**Participation**

30. Are you or your family engaged in any of these organization or institutions that functions in your village?

|   | Institutions              | Male members (tick) | Female members (tick) | Name of organization | Role in organization |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| A | Club                      |                     |                       |                      |                      |
| B | CBO                       |                     |                       |                      |                      |
| C | NGO                       |                     |                       |                      |                      |
| D | WUA/ farmers organization |                     |                       |                      |                      |
| E | Religious institutions    |                     |                       |                      |                      |
| F | Ethnic/ Caste based       |                     |                       |                      |                      |

|   |                        |  |  |  |  |
|---|------------------------|--|--|--|--|
|   | institutions           |  |  |  |  |
| G | Women's Organization   |  |  |  |  |
| H | Financial Organization |  |  |  |  |
| I | Political Organization |  |  |  |  |

31. Why did you/they decide to become a member?

(If another family member is involved): Would you like personally to be part of this organization? If yes/no, why?

If nobody from your family is a member of this organization, why?

32. What benefits have membership of this organization brought?

33. Do you go outside the household? How often? Where and for what purpose?

**Land ownership**

34. Do any women in the household have ownership of land?

35. Are more women owning land in the village when compared to before? Why?

36. How did you acquire the land (e.g. inheritance or purchase) and why?

37. What do you perceive are the primary advantages for women of owning land?

**Perception of empowerment**

38. Could you tell us about your life in terms of how do you feel as a woman and view yourself (position & role) in your family?

39. How women are viewed in your community?

40. What do you think of differences in terms of being a women or man?
41. Do you think that women have an unequal position in the society? If so, in your opinion, what do you mean of women's equality?
42. In your opinion, how women's equality issues can be raised in the family and society?
43. How do you view yourself in contrast to men?
44. Whether this comparison between men and women by you disturb you or support you?
45. What are the cultural norms and values that are important to you? And why?