

## Mainstreaming Women in the Decision Making Process of Rural Development

Malati Kaini

*Ph.D. Scholar Central Department of Rural Development Tribhuvan University Kathmandu, Nepal*

*\*Corresponding Author: Malati Kaini*

**ABSTRACT:-** Not only in Nepal but also in most developing countries, women undertake a large part of the development work in rural areas. Yet women's roles in rural development remain largely unrecognized. One reason is that there are not enough women in leadership positions in rural producers' organizations. Nepal has taken many initiatives to empower women. Nepal has adopted 12 critical areas of concern in the national plan of action addressing global commitment to the empowerment of women. The Local, Provincial and Federal Elections 2017 introduced mandatory representation of women in all levels of governments. In Ward Committees and Municipalities it is mandatory that 50 per cent of the members should be women. The inclusion of women in one-third of the total committee positions of local organizations has been a rule in recent years. This rule, however, has been breached by majority of FGs, FUGs and WUGs all over the country. Capacity building is critical to promote greater leadership of women within farmers' and rural producers' organizations. Women need access to the latest technological information regarding rural development.

**Key Words:-** capacity, committees, development, empowerment, government, leadership, women

### I. INTRODUCTION

According to the census of 2011, 51.44 per cent of the total population is women. Even then a patriarchal culture dominates in Nepal, which from birth to old age gives preference to men. Women's work is given little status while the ability of men to earn money brings respect and their traditional role of provider gives them higher economic and social status. Women's decision-making role and control over resources is negligible in most rural households. Not only in Nepal but also in most developing countries, women undertake a large part of the development work in rural areas. Yet women's role in rural development remains largely unrecognized. Their voices and concerns as development workers are scarcely heard at the national and global levels. One reason is that there are not enough women in leadership positions in rural producers' organizations. As one moves from the grassroots to national levels, the trend becomes even more pronounced. The result is a disproportionate mismatch between rural women's voices and decision-making roles and their enormous contribution to rural development and rural livelihoods. The lower economic and social status of women reduces their ability to influence community dialogues and decisions.

### II. NEPAL'S INITIATIVES FOR EMPOWERING THE WOMEN

As a signatory of the Beijing of Action, the Government of Nepal has adopted 12 critical areas of concern in the national plan of action addressing global commitment to the empowerment of women. The government has also rectified the convention on the elimination of all forms of discriminations against women (CEDAW) without any reservation. The Beijing plus five review meetings held in 2000 also emphasize the need for promoting gender balance and recommend women' equal access to and control over economic resources including land, property rights, right to inheritance, credit and traditional saving schemes, such as women' banks and cooperatives. It also emphasized on full participation on equal terms with men at all levels of public life, especially in decision making positions. This clearly calls for changes in policies and acts as well as reflecting them in plan, programs and activities that would enhance the participation of women in the economic process of rural development.

The Local, Provincial and Federal Elections in 2017 introduced mandatory representation of women in local government. Local elections were held after almost two decades. They became a key vessel for acting upon the Constitutional obligation towards gender and social inclusion in the government and ending the political impasse that beset the country for many years. Record number of women representatives were elected to office, and this has presented the representatives with both opportunities and challenges. In the local government representing Ward Committees and Municipalities it is mandatory that 50 percent of the members should be women. After the 2017 local election, women members only constituted around 40.96 percent in the ward committees and municipalities bodies (AF, 2017). These elected bodies have, however, being functional for developing their local elected areas. Local bodies are therefore being somewhat functional with ways of entry of elected women.

Regarding program and budget for 'Women Development at the District level' program is divided equally between the 77 districts. But budget is allocated in different way. Some districts may receive more budget than the others. Furthermore, the Fifteenth Five-year Plan is not specific on who is responsible for carrying out the women and gender programs, on what exactly the programs will comprise of, or on where and when the programs will be carried out. For instance, it is not described to which sub-agencies the above budget will be allocated and who will implement the women development activities.

### **III. WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN FOREST USERS' GROUPS (FUGS)**

Equality in roles of men and women in FUGs and WUGs is primarily determined by their representation in the committee and their role in the decision making process. The inclusion of women in one-third of the total committee positions has been a rule in recent years. This rule, however, has been breached by majority of FUGs and WUGs all over the country. In fact, women are holding less than one-third of the positions in the committees. Furthermore, the positions filled by women are mostly in the category of ordinary members that carried less responsibility. All important positions such as that of chairperson, secretary, treasurer, etc. are filled by men. The participation of women in the Community Forestry (CF) is also low with regard to the national average, which is 21 percent. However, in training and awareness creation programs the women's involvement in Community Forestry (CF) is in increasing trends.

### **IV. WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN WATER USERS' GROUPS (WUGS)**

Women's representation in WUG committees is no better than in the FUGs. Only in few subcommittees they have a one-third representation. In spite of the existing rules to have one-third of women in the committees of the WUGs, women are underrepresented. Women's participation in meetings, in general, is also reported to be negligible in many cases. This trend of only men attending meetings is evident everywhere in the country. And even where women are present; they did not speak until questions are specifically put to them.

### **V. WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN FARMERS' GROUPS (FGS)**

Women play a significant if not a predominant role in agriculture production. One participatory research project found that women do more work in agriculture than men in the high mountain areas, equal to or more than men in the middle hills and slightly less than men in the terai (Sontheimer, Basnyat, & Maharjan, 1997). Women, both as participants and decision makers, share the responsibility of planting, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, carrying grains to the mill for grinding, including collecting wood, water and fodder.

Women's involvement is very significant in care and management of livestock and poultry, and kitchen gardening. However, they participate differently in hills and terai (Southern plain). In the complex social systems of the hills, women's participation in agriculture further varies tremendously across the social groups. Despite women's important role in agriculture, traditional social norms and customary laws which generally are biased in favor of men is a barrier to women's equitable access to productive resources.

In Nepal, women are actively involved in livestock production. Fodder collection, grazing and milking are generally performed by both women and men, whereas activities like feed preparation, feeding, cleaning sheds and preparing milk products are women's domain. Women have a crucial role in detecting illness of the animal because of their close and frequent contact with them. Marketing of livestock is mainly done by men, but in consultation with women. Women have the right to own livestock in Nepal. Girl children also share the responsibility for herding goats. It is quite encouraging that women's participation in the groups was 37 percent (42 percent in high hill, 49 percent in mid hill and 22 percent in terai). However, the participation should be further promoted focusing participation in terai districts.

### **VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In Nepal, women perform a large part of the development work and produce the bulk of the food crops. However, the productivity of women is constrained by gender-specific factors. These include lack of time and limited mobility due to multiple domestic and productive responsibilities, women's more limited access to assets

and services (including extension), illiteracy, low participation and limited decision-making in producers' organizations, and sociocultural factors affecting their mobility and participation in public decision-making. On the other hand, women have a unique base of experience and knowledge that can be used to increase the productivity in the broadest sense. Without a significant investment in improving the livelihoods, assets and decision-making power of rural women, the Sustainable Development Goals of no poverty and zero hunger are unlikely to be achieved. Women's role in agriculture remains largely unrecognized in policy and resource allocation. The voices and concerns of rural women are little heard at all levels. This is largely the result of their weak presence in leadership positions in rural organizations and, in some cases, the limited ability of the few women leaders at the national level to effectively represent the interests of women working at the grassroots. Women's groups tend to remain confined to the local level. In mixed organizations, while women may be well-represented as members, few occupy leadership positions and, as one moves from local to regional and national levels, the trend becomes even more pronounced. Capacity building is critical to promote greater leadership of women within farmers' and rural producers' organizations. Women need access to the latest technological information regarding rural development. Organizations must be flexible and take into account women's time constraints, especially those of mothers of small children, and in general the household dynamics that affect their participation. Capacity building should include exchange visits, farmer-to-farmer exchanges, and visits to research intuitions and high schools. Women are to be empowered and motivated by providing formal and informal education through training and visit. Inclusive policy has to be implemented strictly. Each rural development organisation should have a gender strategy.

### REFERENCES

- [1]. CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics). (2018). Brief results of the National Census 2017 (Summary-Nepali). Kathmandu: Central Bureau of Statistics.
- [2]. Adhikari, S. K. (2006). Mainstreaming gender in agricultural extension services: Review of policy and implementation in Nepal. *Agricultural Development Journal*, 3 (3), 121-1140.
- [3]. Asia Foundation (2017). Nepal's Locally Elected Women Representatives Exploratory Study of Needs and Capacity, Australian Aid, the Asia Foundation. Kathmandu: Asia Foundation.
- [4]. ECN (Election Commission, Nepal). (2017). Local, Provincial and Federal Elections in Nepal. Kathmandu: Election Commission.
- [5]. NPC (National Planning Commission). (2018). 15th Plan Approach Paper. Kathmandu: National Planning Commission.
- [6]. IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development). (2010). Promoting women's leadership in farmers' and rural producers' organizations. Rome: International Fund for Agricultural Development Headquarters.
- [7]. Sontheimer, S., Basnyat, B. B., & Maharjan, K. (1997). Gender and Participation in Agricultural Development Planning: Lessons from Nepal. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization.
- [8]. MOALD (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development). (2018). National Agriculture Policy. Kathmandu: Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development.
- [9]. Pant, K. P. (2002). Gender perspective on characteristics processes and performance of Farmers Group, organized by District Agriculture Development Office. Chitwan: District Agriculture Development Office.
- [10]. MOALD (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development). (2018). Statistical Information on Nepalese Agriculture. Kathmandu: Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development.
- [11]. NPC (National Planning Commission). (2015). Sustainable Development Goals 2016 – 2030, National (Preliminary) Report. Kathmandu, Nepal: National Planning Commission.

*\*Corresponding Author: Malati Kaini*

*Ph.D. Scholar Central Department of Rural Development Tribhuvan University Kathmandu, Nepal*